

LGBT SENIORS HAVE A NEEDED RESOURCE IN EMERALD ELITE SENIOR HOME CARE



The thought of aging scares a lot of people, but of course there's no alternative. More than 39 million Americans are age 65 or older, including 1.5 million who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender, according to the American Psychological Association.

For many LGBT seniors, though, aging brings a whole range of issues that straight people don't have to think about. LGBT older adults "are less likely to be partnered or married than heterosexuals, which may result in less social support and financial security as they age," according to "The Aging and Health Report," a study of gay older Americans conducted by a coalition of LGBT senior groups including SAGE and the Los Angeles LGBT Center, among others, and sponsored by the National Institutes of Health and the National Institute on Aging. "Older adults who live alone are at serious risk of social isolation, which...is linked to poor mental and physical health, cognitive impairment, and premature chronic disease and death," the report states.

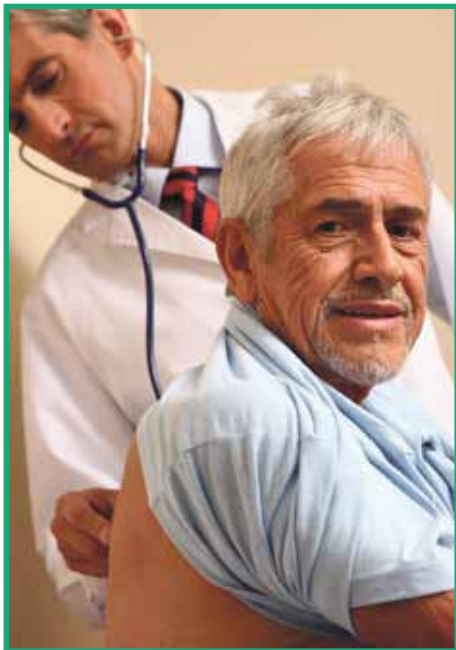
Additionally, senior gays may be more vulnerable to neglect and mistreatment in aging care facilities.

The picture isn't all bleak, however. As the GLBT population continues to be more visible — at all ages — LGBT senior care is coming in to the mainstream. The Obama administration even held a conference on LGBT aging issues in Miami in 2012.

Given Broward County's large LGBT population, it was only a matter of time before there was a need for LGBT-centered senior care. Enter Emerald Elite Senior Home Care, a Wilton Manors-based business providing home health aides, nurses, certified nursing assistants (CNAs), and companions to Broward's LGBT community.

"There's a definite demand for caregivers who know, understand and are a part of the LGBT community," said Ernest Olivas, president of Emerald Elite. "We're licensed caregivers first and foremost, but because we're active in the LGBT community in South Florida we know our clients and their needs."

Emerald Elite serves a growing client base of Broward's gay seniors, providing a range of services from companionship, transportation and light housekeeping to all the activities of daily living that often are troublesome for seniors — grooming, toileting, bathing, dressing, ambulating and providing assistance with medications. Whether working on an



hourly basis or around the clock as live-in assistance, Emerald Elite's certified and licensed staff follows a proscribed work plan to ensure their clients' health needs are met, whether that need is a ride to Publix or confronting Alzheimer's or dementia.

Emerald Elite accepts long-term care insurance and most of their clients pay nothing out-of-pocket.

"Our clients are our best advocates," says Olivas, "because they won't hesitate to tell us if something's not working for them. We listen and adjust our activities, but our goal is always to ensure they're getting the care they need. Family members from out of town will often check in with us for a status report."

On the Emerald Elite team are familiar faces at senior LGBT events around Broward. Olivas is a board member at The Pride Center of South Florida, and as a sponsor of the Center's Senior Health Expo, he's a visible and vocal presence.

"My background is in politics and government, so I've always been focused on the best way to get people the tools they need to thrive," Olivas says. "That's the ethos at Emerald Elite — let's help our LGBT seniors to be in a position to live their lives to the fullest for as long as they can. They have so much to give, and they deserve a healthy, active and welcoming community."

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