

# LGBTI fact sheet 4c - Disclosure & identity

## LGBTI disclosure and identity in dementia

Throughout their lifetime, the decisions around if, when and how to disclose their sexual orientation, gender identity, transgender status and/or intersex status can be difficult for LGBTI peoples.

- Older LGBTI peoples may have made stressful decisions around disclosure daily, weekly or more frequently for many years (1, 2).
- While some older LGBTI peoples may have preferred not to disclose or do not feel safe disclosing their sexual orientation, gender identity, transgender status and/or intersex status throughout much of their life, their increasing reliance on services may mean that they can no longer avoid disclosure. This may be happening at a time in their lives when the LGBTI person is most vulnerable (3).

**\*Note:** Family members or service providers who do not acknowledge the sexual orientation, gender identity, transgender status and/or intersex status of LGBTI peoples accessing care, may prevent them from publicly disclosing where they wish to do so.

- This situation may reinforce feelings of shame and marginalisation and will likely become further complicated where the person with dementia loses their ability to censor how they present to others.

## Inadvertent disclosure

- As cognitive changes occur with the progress of dementia LGBTI peoples may inadvertently reveal their sexual orientation, gender identity or intersex status (4, 5). Disclosure can occur with the use of a pronoun or when people with dementia refer to their 'partner' (6).
- Where dementia causes a reduced ability to conceal and self-censor information and behaviours they have previously guarded closely, LGBTI peoples may suffer discrimination and further isolation (6).
- Matters which were once considered private can become subject to public scrutiny (7).
- The risk of inadvertent disclosure can be a source of anxiety and stress for the person with dementia, their partner and their friends (4, 8). This may be particularly stressful for those who identify as bisexual as they are less likely to be 'out' than those who are lesbian or gay.
- LGBTI peoples moving into residential care may break their connections with the LGBTI community because they are concerned that their visitors could unintentionally 'out' them to the other residents living in the facility (9).

## Identity experiences

- LGBTI peoples with dementia do not lose their sexuality, gender identity or intersex status. However, dementia may change the way their identities are expressed, e.g. they may become more closeted or more openly affectionate (10, 11).

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**\*Note:** LGBTI peoples with dementia may fluctuate in their expression of their identity in that they might be 'out' some of the time and 'not out' at other times.

- Care providers need to be flexible and take their cues from the person at that point in time.
- Transgender people with dementia can have varied responses in relation to their gender identity, e.g. re-living their previous gender identity, uncertainty about their gender and/or sliding between gender identities over time.
- Intersex people with dementia can have varied responses in relation to their sex, e.g. re-living their previous sex, uncertainty about their sex and/or 'sliding' between sexes over time.
- While some LGBTI peoples may prefer not to disclose their sexual orientation, intersex status or gender identity to aged care providers, others may wish to have their identity recognised and embraced (12).

## References

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See *Fact sheet 1 – Overview* for details.