

**PROJECT
REPORT
2024**

Rainbow Care Cards



Acknowledgement

Celebrate Ageing Ltd acknowledges
the Traditional Custodians of
Country throughout Australia.

We recognise their continued connection
to the land and waters and acknowledge
that sovereignty was never ceded.

We pay our respect to
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures;
and to Elders past and present.



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Acknowledgements

Thankyou to the older LGBTIQ+ Victorians who shared their experiences of services in the hope of encouraging the development of more LGBTIQ+ inclusive services.

The Rainbow Care Card Project was funded by Victorian State Government's Department of Families, Fairness and Housing – Equality Branch.

Photo credit: David Morrison by Julian Meehan.

More information

Check out the project webpage at: celebrateageing.com/rainbowcarecards

Contact us

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Background

Older LGBTIQ+ people who don't feel safe in health, community and aged care services may avoid using the services or hide their LGBTIQ+ness. The subsequent invisibility of older LGBTIQ+ people fuels a myth that LGBTIQ+ inclusivity isn't a priority for older people. We need strategies to break this cycle of invisibility and show service providers the importance LGBTIQ+ inclusion is.

Older LGBTIQ+ people have lived through a lifetime of discrimination. Disclosure of their bodies, relationship or identities could result in incarceration, enforced 'cures' and the loss of family, work and liberty. As a consequence, they have poorer [health and wellbeing](#) than the broader community, poorer [mental health](#), and are more likely to [live alone](#), have a [disability](#), and be a [carer](#). They are also more vulnerable to [elder abuse, family violence](#) and [homelessness](#).

These disparities, and dislocation from their families of origin, can make older LGBTIQ+ people more likely reliant on services. However, they may delay accessing services they need because of the fear of [fear of discrimination](#) in services. Indeed, The [Royal Commission into Quality and Safety in Aged Care](#) found older



LGBTIQ+ people have problems accessing aged care services that meet their needs because the aged care system is not well equipped to provide care that is appropriate or non-discriminatory.

These gaps have their roots in Queerphobia and the ageist belief that all older people are straight or cisgendered - Queerness is synonymous with youth.

Consequently, there is a **cycle of invisibility** for older LGBTIQ+ people. Some service providers don't prioritise LGBTIQ+ inclusion because they don't believe they have older LGBTIQ+ clients; or they believe LGBTIQ+ inclusion equates to treating everyone the same. Additionally, some older LGBTIQ+ people don't access the services they need to remain at home and age in place, because they don't see messages of LGBTIQ+ welcome and inclusion. Others access services by hide their Queerness because they don't feel safe.

While older LGBTIQ+ people don't feel safe to disclose – service providers don't see their older LGBTIQ+ clients nor the need to prioritise LGBTIQ+ inclusion. There are growing calls to break this cycle of invisibility – but a lack of consensus about how best to achieve this.

Some suggest older LGBTIQ+ people should 'come out' to educate service providers about the need for LGBTIQ+ inclusion. This unreasonable expectation fails to take into account historical power imbalances which required older LGBTIQ+ people to **straighten up** their bodies, relationships and sexuality to avoid potential incarceration, enforced 'cures' and upsetting to the status quo.

After a lifetime of oppression, the onus of responsibility should not be placed on older LGBTIQ+ people to bring service providers up to speed. Service providers have a responsibility to deliver accessible and equitable services.

There is a need to find safer ways to increase the visibility of older LGBTIQ+ people in services, to build a better understanding of how LGBTIQ+ inclusivity matters and to encourage service providers to apply frameworks for LGBTIQ+ inclusion, such as **Rainbow Ready** or **Rainbow Tick** processes. LGBTIQ+ inclusive services are critical to ageing in place - or - to older LGBTIQ+ people feeling safe to disclose all their needs to service providers.



We need safer ways to increase the visibility of older LGBTIQ+ people in services and to ensure service providers understand the importance of LGBTIQ+ inclusion for older people.





The project

The Rainbow Care Card project was developed to help break the cycle of invisibility in services. The aims of the project are to promote the development of LGBTIQ+ inclusive services (health, community and aged care) that support ageing in place for older LGBTIQ+ Victorians by:

- Engaging LGBTIQ+ community members as independent third parties to document older LGBTIQ+ people's positive experiences of LGBTIQ+ inclusion in services
- Documenting the strategies for LGBTIQ+ inclusion that were meaningful to older LGBTIQ+ people – and the meaning attributed
- Providing deidentified feedback from older LGBTIQ+ people to the services they access i.e.: through the Rainbow Care Cards
- Inviting service providers to respond to the Rainbow Care Cards
- Sharing the Rainbow Care Cards to promote learning and LGBTIQ+ inclusivity in all services.

The decision to focus on constructive feedback was guided by older LGBTI+ people. Many want to encourage service providers to be more LGBTIQ+ inclusive and greatly value even the smallest signs of inclusion. It was anticipated that the modified [Appreciative Inquiry](#) approach taken would encourage service providers to consolidate or expand strategies for LGBTIQ+ inclusion.

The project was conducted over the 2023-2024 period and was supported by the Victorian Government's Department of Families, Fairness and Housing – Equality Branch.

We are not aware of any projects nationally or internationally offering a safe and confidential mechanism for LGBTIQ+ community members to work with older LGBTIQ+ on providing feedback to service providers on LGBTIQ+ inclusion.

This report outlines the Rainbow Care Card project to encourage consideration of similar processes. We outline the project activities, the evaluation, participant characteristics and the results.

The report concludes with discussion of the key findings, suggested next steps and examples of the Rainbow Care Cards.



Activities

An invitation to participate in the Rainbow Care Card project was circulated through LGBTIQ+ community networks in Victoria. The invitation was also disseminated through social media, the project [webpage](#) and presentations to groups of older LGBTIQ+ Victorians.

Participants were invited to take part in a 30-minute phone consultation with an LGBTIQ+ community member. During the consultation, participants were invited to describe the experience of LGBTIQ+ inclusion in a service they had accessed in the previous 12 months. Participants were also asked to describe the strategy for LGBTIQ+ and what it meant to them.

Notes were taken during the consultation, and then emailed to the participant to edit, verify and deidentify. Verified notes were then included in a letter posted to the service provider – with an invitation to reply, as follows.

I am writing to share positive feedback from an older LGBTIQ+ Victorian who recently accessed your service ... The Rainbow Care Cards offer a safe way for older LGBTIQ+ Victorians to provide constructive feedback to services. We hope this will encourage the development of LGBTIQ+ inclusive services – so that older LGBTIQ+ people feel safe accessing the services they need to age in place and feel safe disclosing all their care needs.

Your feedback on this Rainbow Care Card would be valued, you can use the contact details provided below. You are also welcome to reply to the older LGBTIQ+ person who provided you with feedback, we will pass this on. Please also check out the Rainbow Care Card [webpage](#) for more information about the project and the [Rainbow Ready](#) and [Rainbow Tick](#) resources.

A summary of older LGBTIQ+ person's experience was also included on a postcard and posted to the Rainbow Care Card webpage, to create learning opportunities for other service providers.

An invitation was also extended to younger LGBTIQ+ community members to work with an older LGBTIQ+ person they knew to document a Rainbow Care Card. This process explored the potential for intergenerational support within LGBTIQ+ communities to break the cycle of invisibility.

The project was presented in a plenary session at the 6th National LGBTIQ+ Ageing and Aged Care Conference in 2024 to encourage more LGBTIQ+ community members and service providers to work with older LGBTIQ+ people on breaking the cycle of invisibility.





Participants

Fourteen Rainbow Care Cards were sent to a broad range of services, including dentists, general practitioners, residential aged care homes, home based services, local council, aged care assessment services, funeral directors, ambulance services, and hospital emergency departments. Four service providers replied.

Older LGBTIQ+ Victorian participants (65 years+) included gay and bisexual men, lesbians and trans and gender diverse people.

Evaluation

Thematic analysis of the Rainbow Care Cards was undertaken using an adaptation of **Framework**, or coding and interpretation approach. The aims of this **process evaluation** were to identify the strategies for LGBTIQ+ inclusion that were meaningful to older LGBTIQ+ people – and what meaning was made.

Additionally, a **summative evaluation** focused on reviewing the learning opportunities created for service providers through the cards. This involved a 360-degree feedback process or inviting service providers to give feedback on the cards.

Results

The Rainbow Care Cards powerful opportunities for service providers to learn about the strategies for LGBTIQ+ inclusion matter to older LGBTIQ+ people and why. The following five themes emerged from the analysis – the inequalities experienced by older LGBTIQ+ people, potential vulnerability in services, strategies for LGBTIQ+ inclusion and the impacts of LGBTIQ+ inclusion and older LGBTIQ+ people's expectations of services.

In the following section we outline these themes, beginning with a summary statement presented in italics. Then a series of dot points are provided, paraphrasing the responses of older LGBTIQ participants.



Same is not equal

Older LGBTIQ+ people are not 'the same' as other older people. Equality requires acknowledgement of their unique historical experiences and how these shape health and wellbeing, and the expectations of older LGBTIQ+ people. Examples shared include:

- Her life was so tough
- She had a horror story of a life
- I can't hide who I am
- I get tired of explaining myself
- It takes energy to correct staff
- The staff member did a double take
- I could tell she didn't expect that
- The service provider was uncomfortable, then so I was
- I need to know services are not homophobic
- I need to know I will be safe
- I need my history to be recognised.

Vulnerability

There are times when older LGBTIQ+ people are more vulnerable to 'Queerphobia' because they are unable to make themselves safe. Examples of vulnerability that were shared include:

- When services know everything about me because they have my health records
- At home, in my safe and sacred space
- After dementia diagnosis – when I have more difficulty protecting myself from Queerphobia
- In palliative care – when I don't want to waste time having to protect myself from Queerphobia
- At her funeral – when she can't advocate for herself.

Strategies for inclusion

Simple strategies such as rainbow symbols and LGBTIQ+ inclusive language send powerful messages of safety and LGBTIQ+ inclusion.

Examples shared include:

- Rainbow badge worn by a person
- Rainbow posters in a building
- Rainbow flags on a website
- LGBTIQ+ staff
- Pronouns being used
- Using my name
- Acknowledging same sex partners.

Impacts of LGBTIQ+ inclusion

Messages of LGBTIQ+ inclusion can promote health and wellbeing – and - service access and efficacy. Examples shared include:

- I feel affirmed as a person
- I feel welcome
- I feel human
- I feel safe, respected, loved, comfortable, relaxed
- I feel like I can be me
- I am able to be myself and to be honest
- It feels like a safety net – she is on my side
- I burst into tears of relief
- My confidence in the service is boosted
- My physiological wellbeing improved
- My high blood pressure decreased
- Healing happened because I could feel safe
- You understand I have breasts and a prostate
- I trust the service so I will give them more information.



You've got a Rainbow Care Card

A message from an older LGBTIQ+ Victorian who accessed your service.



Expectations of services

Low expectations of services were evident in many of the Rainbow Care Cards, reflecting older LGBTIQ+ participant's historical experiences of discrimination and a lifetime of oppression. Service providers need to understand that older LGBTIQ+ people low expectations do not represent the benchmark. Older LGBTIQ+ have the right to equality. Examples of low expectations include:

- It was a relief knowing I was not going to be put upon or chucked out
- When they did that I knew she wasn't going to be laughed at
- You know who I am, and you respect me
- Most staff used my pronouns
- It's like we were any other relationship
- I didn't have to think about our sexuality
- Staff responses helped me to feel human
- It didn't feel strained
- I can be me in this service.

Four service providers emailed feedback, noting how much they appreciated the Card and reiterating their commitment to LGBTIQ+ inclusive services. A reply from the Chief Executive of Ambulance Victoria (published with permission on page 13) highlighted how the project created learning opportunities for service providers.



Discussion

Providing safe and confidential ways for older LGBTIQ+ people to give feedback to services about strategies for LGBTIQ+ inclusion is a powerful tool to break the cycle of LGBTIQ+ invisibility in services for older people.

The strategies for LGBTIQ+ inclusion valued by older LGBTIQ+ Victorians included inclusive language, rainbow symbols (flags, posters and badges) and support for LGBTIQ+ staff. These relatively simple strategies highlight the accessibility of LGBTIQ+ inclusion.

It is interesting to note that many participants found it difficult to articulate what service providers had done to be LGBTIQ+ inclusive – the felt sense of LGBTIQ+ inclusion was more prominent in their minds than the actual strategies.

The meaning attributed to strategies for LGBTIQ+ inclusion was powerful. Older LGBTIQ+ people described feeling valued, respected, human and equal. They also described bursting into tears of relief and a reduction in health issues.

The gratitude expressed by older LGBTIQ+ people for being treated with respect is particularly telling. After a lifetime of inequality participants didn't expect services to be welcoming or safe and even the smallest gestures of LGBTIQ+ inclusion was welcomed. The low benchmark set by older LGBTIQ+ inclusion should not be

confused with accessible and equitable services. The benchmark for LGBTIQ+ inclusion is clearly outlined in the [Rainbow Ready](#) and [Rainbow Tick](#) resources.

LGBTIQ+ inclusion was described as necessary for older LGBTIQ+ people to disclose all of their care needs. This challenges commonly held myths that disclosure of LGBTIQ+ness is unnecessary and not the business of service providers. By way of example, a TGD participant described feeling safe to disclose to their GP that they had breasts and a prostate and a gay man described the importance of conversations about sexual partners and safer sex.

The Rainbow Care Cards provided significant opportunities for organisational learning, and this was valued by the organisations who responded to the cards. Feedback provided by the CEO of Ambulance Victoria identified the card had been shared with executive team, the region and the board. The CEO noted: *“It is comforting to know that such a simple rainbow badge had such a significant effect on this person’s experience. The*

vulnerability of the writer showed through the feedback and reiterated to me the importance of inclusivity for all Victorians, not just in terms of health care but also for the impact this has on their wellbeing.”

This feedback had a powerful positive impact on the older LGBTIQ+ person who shared their story with Ambulance Victoria. It represents the very reasons why older LGBTIQ+ people elected to participate – they want services to understand their historical and contemporary experiences and what LGBTIQ+ inclusion means to them.

The Appreciative Inquiry approach was useful in highlighting positive examples of strategies for LGBTIQ+ inclusion. However, it was interesting to note that many of the older LGBTIQ+ had mixed experiences in services. This emphasises the point of Appreciative Inquiry, which is to identify what went well and then consolidate it. A Rainbow Care Card is not a sign that the journey to LGBTIQ+ inclusion has ended – rather, it is a positive milestone on the journey.

Research on implementation of

LGBTIQ+ inclusivity shows that [Beyond a Rainbow Sticker](#), badge or poster there is a need for systemic change that is being offered by processes such as [Rainbow Ready](#) certification or [Rainbow Tick](#) accreditation.

In efforts to build more LGBTIQ+ inclusive services for older LGBTIQ+ people is room for a process like the Rainbow Care Cards to illustrate strategies for LGBTIQ+ inclusion and document their meanings for older LGBTI people.

This was a small sample of older LGBTIQ+ people but it is interesting to note the opportunity to provide feedback to services in a confidential and safe way was greatly valued by participants.

We encourage other services and LGBTIQ+ communities to explore opportunities to do this through a range of means, including Rainbow Care Cards. The onus of responsibility is not on older LGBTIQ+ to educate services on inclusion. Services must reach out and LGBTIQ+ communities have a role to play in that.



Next steps

If you are a service provider or an LGBTIQ+ community member interested learning from older LGBTIQ+ people about what LGBTIQ+ inclusion means to them – please review the templates and examples on the webpage as inspiration.

POSTCARD

Dear Ms Miller

Recently I knew something was seriously wrong, so I had to call an Ambulance and one came from [REDACTED]. One of the Ambos had a rainbow badge on her shirt. Seeing it made me feel safe, respected and loved; like I was in good hands. Because I was feeling unwell and vulnerable, the badge was an affirmation of me as a person. It helped me knowing that she was really there for me. It felt like a safety net knowing she was on my side.

Your service must deal with a lot of older LGBTIQ+ people who are not as out as me. If they saw someone with a rainbow badge it would mean all of a sudden, they would feel a little better inside. It would boost their confidence. The badge could be a turning point for them knowing they don't have to worry about hiding their LGBTIQ+ identity. It could help them to know they are not going to be judged, they are valued and loved. It could help them to relax knowing they are not going to be put upon or chucked out of the ambulance if someone finds out they are LGBTIQ+. They could be more at ease with themselves - relax a bit, which is so important when you are sick. When you are going through all that stress that leads you call an Ambulance, its good if you can relax, your symptoms might improve. Your blood pressure might drop. I want to send a hug to the Ambo who wore the pin. She helped me to feel at ease and less vulnerable – and improved my mental health and wellbeing. Thankyou

celebrateageing.com/rainbowcarecards



Address

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REPLY CARD

Dear Catherine

Please accept my apology for the delayed response to your letter dated 23 July 2023 which included a Rainbow Care Card and feedback from an older LGBTIQ+ Victorian who accessed our service.

It is comforting to know that a simple rainbow badge had such a significant effect on this person's experience. The vulnerability of the writer showed through the feedback and reiterated to me the importance of inclusivity for all Victorians, not just in terms of health care but also for the impact this has on their wellbeing.

It was gratifying to read this feedback and I immediately shared it with the executive team and the region, and they shared this feedback with the Board. I also understand our Quality and Patient Experience Team was in touch with you in relation to the person submitting feedback via our channels to help us identify the paramedic involved. While this offer was not taken up, I do hope this Victorian, and indeed all Victorians, continue to have positive and inclusive experiences not just in their health care journeys but in all facets of life.

Regards, Jane
Jane Miller (she/her)
Chief Executive, Ambulance Victoria

celebrateageing.com/rainbowcarecards



To

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Find out more about Rainbow Care Cards

celebrateageing.com/rainbowcarecards



The Rainbow Care Card Project was funded by Victorian State Government's Department of Families, Fairness and Housing – Equality Branch.

More information

Check out the project webpage at:
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Contact us

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