

SPECIAL
LEGISLATIVE
COMMISSION ON
LESBIAN, GAY,
BISexual AND
TRANSGENDER
AGING



This is a report of the Massachusetts Commission on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Aging (MA LGBT) as required by M.G.L. Chapter 3, Section 71.

Commission Activities: Calendar Year 2023

In 2023, the Commission focused on community engagement and feedback in addition to advocating for statewide policies.

Listening Session

In September 2023, in lieu of a commission meeting, the Commission held a listening session for LGBTQ+ older adults and allies in New Bedford. The Commission cosponsored the listening session with South Coast LGBTQ+ Network and brought together LGBTQ+ older adults, caregivers, aging service providers with Commission members to address the strengths, needs, and challenges of community members. This session also served to introduce the community to the Commission to foster future trust and collaboration.

Takeaways from New Bedford Session:

- Participants named several ways that they get involved in the community but say that some older adults may not be aware of events that are only posted on social media.
- Safety was noted as a concern in the community as well as housing.
- Some participants mentioned wanting more access to LGBTQ+ friendly healthcare.

Policy Advocacy

The Commission gave continued attention to LGBTQ+ and aging related policies and legislation in the Commonwealth and across the country including:

- An Act to improve quality and oversight of long-term care (MA)
 - Members of the Commission testified at the Joint Committee on Elder Affairs hearing in May 2023 to support the inclusion of LGBTQ+ Long Term Care Bill of Rights in this legislation.
- FDA policy for blood donation for low-risk gay and bisexual men (National)

Logo and Name Change Proposition

The Commission began the process of changing the language used by the Commission from “LGBT” to “LGBTQ” to be inclusive of individuals who identify as “Queer” or “Questioning.” This process will involve changing the name of the Commission as well as the logo.

Funding

In the summer of 2023, the Commission received its first year of funding from a Senate amendment sponsored by Senator Jehlen. The amount was \$50,000 for FY2024. This funding was allocated to the LGBTQIA+ Aging Project to support the work and activities of the Commission.

New Membership

In 2023, the Commission welcomed several new members.

- *House Co-Chair:* Representative Kate Lipper-Garabedian
- *New Commission Members:* Julie Watt Faqir (Home Care Aide Council), Barry Callis (Department of Public Health), Alejandro Marcel (Transgender Older Adult; appointed by Gov. Healey)

Commission Activities: Calendar Year 2024

The year 2024 marked the 10-year anniversary of the Commission. To honor the work that the Commission has done and look forward to the future, the Commission began the process of strategic planning.

Strategic Planning

In April 2024, the Massachusetts Commission on LGBTQ+ Aging began the process of strategic planning to improve the quality of life for older LGBTQ+ individuals over the next five years. This strategy emphasizes the development of impactful state policies and programs, building inclusive partnerships with diverse stakeholders, participating in robust advocacy efforts, guaranteeing equitable access to comprehensive services, and nurturing a strong sense of community and belonging. This strategic plan will be released in calendar year 2025.

The Commission established a new mission statement and vision statement to guide work in the years ahead.

- *Mission:* The Massachusetts Commission on LGBTQ+ Aging enhances the quality of life for LGBTQ+ older adults in Massachusetts through state policy and program recommendations, collaborations, partnerships, and advocacy.

- *Vision:* Massachusetts' LGBTQ+ older adults and caregivers will have equitable access to programs, services, benefits, social support, and community that maximize their quality of life and enable them to thrive as they age.

Through the process of strategic planning, the Commission has identified nine priority areas with goals and key objectives. Three of these priority areas relate to the operations and advancement of the Commission, while the remaining six are specific to the community the Commission serves.

1. Infrastructure for Massachusetts Commission on LGBTQ+ Aging
2. Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) Lens for Commission work
3. Public Visibility and Advancement of Massachusetts Commission on LGBTQ+ Aging
4. Statewide Needs Assessment of LGBTQ+ Older Adults
5. Social Support and Community Engagement for LGBTQ+ Older Adults
6. Affirming and Accessible Healthcare for LGBTQ+ Older Adults
7. Safe and Affordable Housing for LGBTQ+ Older Adults
8. Policy and Advocacy for LGBTQ+ Older Adults
9. LGBTQ+ Cultural Competency Training

Policy Advocacy

The Commission gave continued attention to LGBTQ+ and aging related policies and legislation in the Commonwealth and across the country including:

- An Act Relative to LGBT and HIV-Positive Seniors in the Commonwealth
- An Act Relative to Massachusetts Home Care Eligibility
- LGBTQ+ Long Term Care Bill of Rights
 - On September 26, 2024, Gov. Maura Healy signed *An Act to improve quality and oversight of long-term care* into law to improve inclusivity and quality of care at assisted living and Long-Term Care (LTC) facilities. This piece of legislation contains language of the LGBTQ+ Long Term Care Bill of Rights which specifically names protections for LGBTQ+ older adults when seeking care at these facilities. Staff will now be required to take trainings on the care of LGBTQ+ older adults and older adults living with HIV. R LTC facilities are prohibited from discriminating based on a person's gender identity, sexual orientation, or HIV status. Furthermore, LGBTQ+ older adults and older adults living with HIV will have enhanced protections related to admission, restroom use, room assignments, medical care, and record-keeping.
 - The Commission was instrumental in advocating for the inclusion of this provision. Massachusetts now joins four other states and the District of Columbia in including a LGBTQ+ bill of rights specific to long-term care.

Listening Sessions

In June, July, and August 2024, the Commission continued to hold community listening sessions in Worcester and Boston as well as virtually. Listening sessions serve as a foundation for the work that has been done by the Commission. Incorporating community voices into priorities and actions has been crucial to the success of this commission.

Takeaways from Worcester Session:

- Concerns were voiced about attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community in the Central Massachusetts region.
- Most participants are living alone and had concerns about aging alone without a partner or support network.
- Housing was named as a major concern for participants.

Takeaways from Boston Session:

- Loneliness is a major concern for LGBTQ+ older adults.
- Resources and allocations can be confusing in the Boston area. There is potential to use LGBTQ+ friendly community meal sites as a location to distribute information more systematically.
- Participants suggested creating a physical safe space for gay and transgender older adults as well as prioritizing funding for transgender health.
- With the success of the Pryde, Boston's first LGBTQ+ friendly housing for older adults, participants voiced wanting to continue prioritizing additional LGBTQ+ friendly housing for older adults.

Takeaways from Virtual Session:

- Transportation is inaccessible in parts of the Commonwealth, especially the Cape region for older adults.
- Concerns were voiced about aging alone without a partner or family. Ideas were shared about fun and engaging social activities.
- Participants named affordable housing as a major concern.

Collaboration

The Commission had the opportunity to collaborate with several community partners:

- The Commission provided feedback on the Department of Public Health's (DPH) campaign "Care That Fits You." This campaign seeks to educate and connect gay, bisexual, and MSM to resources and information related to sexual health. The Commission provided feedback on imagery, language, and logistical considerations, with specific consideration of LGBTQ+ older adults, to MORE Advertising, the firm

managing the campaign. This collaboration aligns with the Commission's priority of increasing visibility of older adults in DPH's educational materials.

- The Pryde, Boston's first LGBTQ+ friendly senior housing complex, opened in June 2024. The Commission, particularly the housing workgroup, kept up to date on the progress of this new community and distributed information and updates related to residency availability. This collaboration aligns with the Commission's priority of increasing access to LGBTQ+ friendly housing for older adults.
- Dr. Luis Alvarez-Hernandez *Assistant Professor*, School of Social Work, Clinical Practice Department, *Core Faculty*, Center on Emerging Infectious Diseases, at Boston University presented to the Commission regarding considerations for LGBTQ+ older adult immigrants in the state of Massachusetts and nationally. This presentation advanced the knowledge of Commission members related to this specific population as well as contributed to the Commission's commitment to increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Funding

In the summer of 2024, the LGBTQIA+ Aging Project received \$75,000 in state funding for FY2025 to support the work and activities of the Commission.

New Membership

In 2024, the Commission welcomed new members.

- *New Commission Members:* Josie Dutil (Massachusetts Association of Councils on Aging), Jordina Shanks (Fenway Health)

Workgroup Recommendations and Accomplishments

2024 Strategic Planning Workgroup

In 2024-2025, the Massachusetts Commission on LGBTQ+ Aging developed a 5-year strategic plan to serve LGBTQ+ older adults, their families, and caregivers. To achieve this, the Commission formed a strategic planning subcommittee that convened from April 2024 to early 2025 to thoroughly explore current research, demographic trends, and emerging concerns. Commissioners performed a comprehensive strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis. Additionally, the Commission hosted listening sessions in New Bedford, Worcester, Boston, and virtually where LGBTQ+ older adults, caregivers, and family members as well as aging service providers from Massachusetts actively participated and shared their insights on the essential services and programs needed as they age. As a result of this process, Commissioners produced an updated mission statement, vision statement, goals, key objectives, and identified nine priority areas with goals and key objectives. Strategic planning updates were provided to the full Commission during quarterly meetings.

Workgroup Activity

The Commission contains several established workgroups each with specific topic areas: Housing, Legal /Policy Issues, Long Term Supports and Services, Public Health, and Senior Centers/Community Engagement. In this year, the workgroup meetings focused on goals for the strategic plan specific to the workgroup's specific topic and goals. Each workgroup engaged in the SWOT analysis and met to determine priority areas of importance to the Commission.

Massachusetts Commission on LGBTQ Aging: 2024 Membership

Co-Chairs

- Senate Chair of Joint Committee on Elder Affairs, Senator Patricia Jehlen
- House Vice Chair of Joint Committee on Elder Affairs, Representative Kate Lipper-Garabedian

Members

- Executive Office of Elder Affairs (EOEA): Lynn Vidler, Senior Director, Operations & Policy, Home Care, EOEA
- Massachusetts Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC): Margaux LeClair, Fair Housing Council
- Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH): Barry Callis, Director of Behavioral Health and Infectious Disease Prevention, DPH
- LGBTQIA+ Aging Project: Lisa Krinsky, LICSW, Director
- Fenway Health: Jordina Shanks, CEO
- GLBTQ Legal Advocates and Defenders (GLAD): Chris Erchull, Esq., Staff Attorney
- New England Association of HIV Over Fifty, Inc.: Lenny Alberts, M.D.
- MassEquality: Tanya Neslusan, Executive Director
- Mass Aging Access (previously: MA Home Care): **Unfilled**
- AARP of Massachusetts: Barrie Atkin, Executive Council
- Massachusetts Association of Councils on Aging: Josie Dutil, Executive Director Bellingham Council on Aging
- Massachusetts Senior Care Association: William Bogdanovich, CNHA, President & CEO, Broad Reach Healthcare
- Home Care Aide Council: Julie Watt Faqir, Executive Director

Gubernatorial Appointments

- LGBTQ Public Policy Expert: Sean Cahill, PhD, Director of Health Policy Research, The Fenway Institute
- LGBTQ Elder Law Expert: Michelle LaPointe, Esq., LaPointe & Day
- Transgender Older Adult: Alejandro Marcel
- LGBTQ Older Adult/Cape: Paul Glass
- LGBTQ Older Adult/WMA: **Unfilled**