

# Best practice principles on developing LGBT cultural competence in health and social care education



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union

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### Introduction

The BEING ME project aims to support the social inclusion of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) older people who use care and wellbeing services. As the population of Europe is ageing, more and more older people are in need of care and support. This will include older LGBT people, who often need more professional care and support as many may not have children or the traditional support networks of the general population. Research has demonstrated that older LGBT people experience social exclusion while interacting with care providers and that their life stories and relationships are overlooked and undervalued. In some cases, they experience direct discrimination within health and social care environments. Research also indicates an absence of focus on older LGBT people's health care needs within curricular content and academic textbooks, which results in health and social care providers being constrained in their ability to provide a culturally-sensitive and acceptable service to LGBT older people. There's also evidence that many educators lack the knowledge and skills to develop curricular that addresses, in an inclusive and affirmative manner, the health and social care needs of older LGBT people.

The BEING ME project endeavours to achieve this aim through positive interaction with educational institutions that prepare professionals to work with older people. By exchanging good practices, including good practice in teaching and learning and by developing tailored educational resources and pedagogies, the BEING ME team aim to improve the knowledge and competencies of future care professionals in the area of LGBT affirmative practices for older people. By enhancing skills, knowledge and competencies, practitioners will be in a position to develop a culture of support, openness and respect for LGBT identities, which is essential to older LGBT people's inclusiveness in care environments.

This document sets out 15 best practice principles on developing LGBT cultural competence in health and social care education. The purpose of the best practice principles is to support and empower educators working in health and social care to foster and develop strategies that promote older LGBT inclusion within health and social care curricular. The principles present some steps that educators can take to ensure that their teaching practice is reflective of the needs of older LGBT people. In addition, they present some guidance and specific strategies to ensure that students are aware of older LGBT people's needs when working and caring for older people generally. The best practice principles are informed by the LGBT literature, feedback from the LGBT community and the experiences of the people involved in the BEING ME project.M

## **Acknowledge the importance of including LGBT issues within the curriculum**

Health and social care practitioners need to be aware of the importance of inclusivity in their practice. Educators need to be able to set the context for learning about sexual and gender minority groups, and help learners to understand the issues that affect older LGBT people and the factors that increase their vulnerability to negative experiences in health care.

## **Integrate LGBT issues into the curriculum across all subjects/modules and assessment strategies, where possible**

While stand-alone modules or content on LGBT issues will increase knowledge, stand-alone modules may reinforce the idea of LGBT people as a homogenous group. In addition, stand-alone content may perpetuate the 'otherness' that older LGBT are vulnerable to by seeing them as separate to the general population. LGBT issues need to be integrated into the curriculum in a meaningful way, and issues and concerns discussed in the context of all older people's experiences and needs rather than separate to them. In addition, integration allows students to be continually reminded of LGBT issues throughout their entire course of study, increasing the likelihood of learning being assimilated into practice.

## **Address the needs of all LGBT identities within the curriculum**

Educators need to recognise that LGBT identities do not represent one homogenous group. LGBT people have diverse histories, experiences, needs and fears. Hence, the need for educators to ensure that teaching content and discussions take a life span approach, which not only takes account of each individual's experiences, but also addresses the unique needs and vulnerabilities of each subgroup. In addition, educators need to acknowledge the historical, legal, socio-political, and economic context of LGBT people's lives and address how the intersectionality of race, ethnicity, religion and other minority statuses (e.g. migrant, traveller) may impact further on the experience of older LGBT people.

## **Use evidence on LGBT issues from reputable sources**

As with any teaching and learning, educators need to be aware of the evidence. They should also be aware that evidence related to LGBT ageing and other LGBT issues has been the subject of debate, misinterpretation and misrepresentation, and that information needs to be obtained from reputable sources.

## Develop curriculum content in collaboration with LGBT communities

Educators need to collaborate with, and involve older LGBT adults in the design, planning and delivery of education for many reasons. This includes, increasing the visibility and empowerment of older LGBT adults, building trust between the community and the people they support, facilitating experiential knowledge to be shared, and ensuring that education is appropriate and responsive to the community.

## Be mindful that education on LGBT issues extends beyond the classroom into practice environments

Many health and social care programmes include practice-based elements. These learning environments also need to be inclusive and respect diversity. Staff working in practice need to be aware of the needs of older LGBT people and be able to augment and role model the LGBT affirmative practices that students learn in the classroom.

## Create an inclusive learning environment from the beginning

From the outset, educators need to create an inclusive learning environment that respects diversity within the group, including gender diversity. Educators might commence by introducing themselves and stating their preferred name and pronoun. This could then be followed by inviting students to express their preferred name and pronoun. Educators need to think about how they may unconsciously reinforce binary views of gender in the learning space, by making statements about all men or all women, or by breaking groups into male and female groups. Teaching resources and assessment strategies also need to be proofed to ensure that they do not perpetuate and reinforce heteronormativity or binary approaches towards gender.

Health and social care learners are microcosms of wider society, thus they may have been socialised to hold heteronormative, heterosexist and homophobic/biphobic/transphobic

Developing learners' cultural competence in LGBT issues needs to move beyond knowledge and focus on personal beliefs and attitudes. While there's general agreement that didactic teaching methods are appropriate for imparting some factual information, in order to effect attitudinal change and increase learners' comfort and confidence, educators need to include a range of enquiry-based, interactive, pedagogical approaches that involve learners in their own learning. Thus, a variety of experiential learning methods, including



## Appendix 5

