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# Mardi Gras marchers raise aged care concerns for LGBTI community

By Thuy Ong

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**As Mardi Gras winds down following Saturday night's parade in Sydney, some of those who marched are raising the issue of aged care for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) community.**

With Australia's ageing population and the baby boomer generation entering retirement, the demand for aged care will dramatically increase, and with this comes concerns about how elderly members of the LGBTI community will be cared for.

The UnitingCare Aged Unit marched with their own float, spreading the message that the needs of people from the LGBTI community need to be considered when it comes to specialist aged care.

UnitingCare has trained 500 of its staff in dealing with specific needs related to the LGBTI community.

A resident of UnitingCare, 57-year-old Warren Talbot identifies himself as a gay man and said this could lead to discrimination in some aged care homes.

"They would hide or cover up photos or some people might have had a rainbow fridge magnet, they'd take it off the fridge," said Mr Talbot, who is also a former executive director of the LGBTI Health Alliance.

"We certainly picked up a lot of stories of discrimination and just non-understanding of the issues.

"So it may not be overt prejudice but it's just a lack of awareness if someone is LGBTI or if someone has a same-sex partner - aged care just aren't used to dealing with that.



**PHOTO:** UnitingCare marched at the Mardi Gras parade with their own float to raise awareness of the LGBTI community. (Supplied: UnitingCare )

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"They're just not used to dealing with sexuality in general."

Ron Austin, one of the original protesters who marched in the first Mardi Gras in 1978, is now 86 and lives on his own with his cat named Cheeky.

"I sometimes think lately, I'm due for an old person's home, but it doesn't appeal to me at all," Mr Austin said.

"I think it's possibly to do with the long-standing attitude to gay people.

"[In the 70s] we were outside the law. I'm old, I probably should be in an aged care home but I think we ought to do something about it."

Another group called MAGs, or Mature Aged Gays, also marched on Saturday and its president David Bowron agreed that specialised aged care was needed for the LGBTI community.

"Once you're over 40 you're sort of on this downward slide so people don't really want to know you," he said.

"A lot of our members are of an elderly age group and go back to when homosexuality was illegal."

MAGs is a social group that meets twice a month in Sydney and is focussed on the needs of men, although though some gay women have attended too.

"When they start to decline in age, friendship is important, socialising, being helpful and productive and helping other people as well as yourself," Mr Bowron said.

"MAGs gives the guys a sense of belonging to a group that will look out for you."

## Aged care concerns becoming increasingly important

Mr Bowron said the group was also looking at retirement homes and how to create an environment where elderly LGBTI could have a "safe" space.

"Retirement villages are one thing we were looking at, so if our guys did go to retirement villages, they're not put in a corner, that they are a productive and accepted group in a retirement village complex," said Mr Bowron.

Paul Ostrowski, the CEO of CareConnect, an aged care provider that works closely with the LGBTI community, said church facilities make up around half of the aged care sector in Australia.

"There's a perception that aged care is primarily delivered by faith-based organisations," Mr Ostrowski said.

“Once you're over 40 you're sort of on this downward slide so people don't really want to know you.”

David Bowron, president of Mature Aged Gays

"While there is no evidence of discrimination by faith organisations, there is the perception that people may be discriminated against," he said.

"Seniors in LGBTI communities have grown up with 60-70 years of quite profound discrimination and many of them have not come out."

He said ageing with HIV was another issue that aged care homes had to consider, as modern medicine had enabled patients to live longer.

"Back in the 1980s only 2 to 3 per cent of people living with HIV would make it beyond 50," Mr Ostrowski said.

"Now almost half of the population living with HIV is reaching the 50-year-old mark or older. So you've got the dual issue of living with HIV and ageing."

**Topics:** [aged-care](#), [gays-and-lesbians](#), [community-and-society](#), [sydney-2000](#), [nsw](#)

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