

Out & About Community Visitor Scheme Information Pack



Community Visitors Scheme



Switchboard (Victoria) Incorporated
2017



Switchboard

Since 1991, Switchboard Victoria has provided peer based telephone counselling service to Victoria & Tasmania's lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) community. This service was founded, run & staffed by volunteers.

Twenty-six years on, Switchboard remains a volunteer organisation providing a range of services for the LGBTI communities, the family and friends of LGBTI individuals as well as health and welfare professionals with LGBTI clients.

Out & About

Out & About is part of the national Community Visitor Scheme (CVS) program. funded by the Federal Government. . The program provides companionship to socially or culturally isolated people living in Government-subsidised aged care homes or receiving a home care package in their own home. The service is provided by several community organisations or 'auspices', each receiving government funding.

In 2014 Switchboard Victoria secured funding to provide an LGBTI specific CVS program. Switchboard is the only program in Victoria which provides CVS visitors specifically for LGBTI people. Throughout Australia, similar LGBTI programs are provided by ACON (NSW), QuAC (QLD) and Umbrella (WA).

Why LGBTI?

LGBTI people are one of nine special needs groups identified by the federal government¹. They are considered special needs due to historic and ongoing discrimination, poorer health and wellbeing outcomes, and invisibility within the aged care system.

Stigma and Discrimination

Many older LGBTI Australians have lived through a time in the nation's history when they suffered stigma, discrimination, criminalisation, family rejection and social isolation. As a consequence of these negative views, many went to extraordinary lengths to hide their sexual orientation or gender identity to feel safe.

The ongoing impact of this discrimination includes²:

- not feeling safe disclosing their sexuality or gender identity
- current discrimination becomes a reminder of historical discrimination
- learning to be assertive to prevent discrimination
- feeling the need to straighten up or risk experiencing discrimination or a diminished standard of care

¹ *Aged Care Act 1997 s 11-3*

² Barrett, C (2008). *My people: A project exploring the experiences of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex seniors in aged-care services*. Matrix Guild Victoria Incorporated.

Poorer health, wellbeing

A comparison of older LGB & heterosexual people in the UK³ found that LGB people were; more likely to be single, more likely to live alone, less likely to have children, and less likely to see biological family than their heterosexual peers. LGB people also drink alcohol more often, were more likely to take drugs and more likely to have a history of mental ill health or concerns about future mental health. This combination of increased isolation & more health risk factors means that older LGBTI people are very likely to need access to aged care services.

Invisibility

A study of attitudes and current practices of retirement accommodation organisations found that 86% of facilities were unaware of any LGBTI residents⁴. When you consider that the LGBTI population make up 11% of the Australian population⁵, and aged care providers frequently have over 50 residential beds, it's not plausible that so many providers would not have any LGBTI residents.

In the same study, 28% of providers believe their facility promotes a welcoming and accepting atmosphere for LGBTI people, however only 5% said they used any means to indicate an inclusive environment to their residents. This means that older LGBTI people may choose to remain invisible because they are unaware they would be accepted, and do not wish to risk discrimination.

Further information on this can be found here:

Further Research: <http://valsigbti.org.au/index.php/resources/resource-articles/research>

Videos of older LGBTI people's experiences: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jyuAJPYk4w>

Who is out there?

The National LGBTI Health Alliance states "The estimated number of older LGBTI Australians over the age of 65 is expected to rise to approximately 500,000 people by the year 2051."⁶ However, it is currently unknown how many LGBTI people are accessing Aged care in Victoria. This is because many people choose not to come out to their aged care provider.

³ Guasp, A. (2010). *Lesbian, gay & bisexual people in later life*. Stonewall.

⁴ GRAI (GLBTI Retirement Association Inc) and Curtin Health Innovation Research Institute, Curtin University. 2010. We Don't Have Any of Those People Here: Retirement accommodation and aged care issues for non-heterosexual populations. Perth, Western Australia.

⁵ Department of Health, Australian Government, National Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) Ageing and Aged Care Strategy (2012), p 4.

⁶ National LGBTI Health Alliance. LGBTI Health 2013: people, profiles and perspectives (2013), p4. Retrieved from . <http://www.lgbtihealth.org.au/sites/default/files/LGBTIHealthUpdate-OCTOBER2013f.pdf>



What a visit might look like?

Your visits are what you make them. The primary aim is to build community connections and reduce isolation through social activities that are mutually enjoyable. You might like to sit and chat about current affairs, walk to the local café, watch a movie together, tell each other stories from your life, or participate in a hobby, game or other activity.

Volunteer visitors are there for social activities only and should not engage in any other care activities such as shopping, cleaning or personal care. If the visit recipient needs additional assistance, they should speak to their aged care provider.

Benefits for Visit Recipients

- Regular social engagement
- Developing friendships with younger people
- Building or maintaining connection with the LGBTI community
- Passing on you story and experience as an LGBTI person
- Reduction in isolation & loneliness

Benefits of volunteering

- Developing friendships with older people
- Giving back to and supporting LGBTI community
- Enhancing a person's quality of life
- Gaining experience working with older people & aged care services
- Building connections with other volunteers
- Learning about LGBTI ageing through professional development & support sessions



Why is there a need for a LGBTI specific Community Visitor Scheme?

Older LGBTI individuals may have limited supportive family networks, significant fear of discrimination while accessing aged care and may not be able to access their community. Our volunteers can help to make older LGBTI people feel accepted, less isolated and safe in their environment.

Who may receive a visit from an Out & About Volunteer?

To be eligible to receive an Out & About volunteer visitor, a person must identify as LGBTI and **be receiving a Home Care Package or be a living in government funded residential aged care**

Eligibility for Home Care Packages and residential care is by the Aged Care Assessment Service. This can be arranged by calling My Age Care 1800 200 422. If you are unsure whether you're eligible for a volunteer visitor, please call our Out & About Coordinator.

My aged care provider doesn't know that I'm LGBTI, can I receive a visitor?

Please contact our Out & About Coordinator to discuss your privacy concerns. In many cases you may still be able to receive a visitor.

I am in residential care, but I'm under 65, can I receive a visitor?

Yes! Although the program is aimed at older LGBTI people, our volunteers are happy to visit younger people who meet our eligibility criteria

I am receiving council HACC services, can I receive a visitor?

Unfortunately no. At this stage we're not funded to provide visitors for those on HACC services. However, you're welcome to contact our Out & About Coordinator who may be able to refer you to other programs for older LGBTI people.

How do I request a visitor?

Eligible people can be referred to our program via their Home Care Package or residential aged care provider. Alternatively we can accept self-referrals, or referrals from family members. If you would like to make a referral, please contact our Out & About Coordinator.

What happens after a visitor request (referral) is made?

Our Out & About coordinator will contact the referring party as well as the aged care provider for further information. Next, the Coordinator will organise a time to meet the older person and discuss the program and their needs. A suitable volunteer will be selected from our volunteer pool based on location, any preferences expressed by the person, and common interests. The Out & About coordinator will arrange and attend

the first meeting and if all parties are happy with the match visits will continue on a regular basis.

How often are the visits?

Our Out & About volunteers usually visit weekly for an hour, or fortnightly for two hours. Volunteers are asked to commit for a period of at least one year.

Can visitors help me with my household chores?

No. Our volunteers are there for social activities and friendship only. If you need additional help at home, please contact your aged care provider.

What about Privacy & Confidentiality?

Our volunteer visitors must respect the rights of the person they visit including privacy, confidentiality and dignity. As well, those receiving visits will also be required to respect the rights of the volunteer visitors. Contact the Coordinator if you wish to discuss further or for a copy of Switchboard's Privacy Policy.

Is this a free Service?

Yes! There are no fees for this service and all of our Out & About community visitors are volunteers. However, if the visit includes a movie or lunch at a cafe, both parties will need to pay their own costs.

I live in rural or regional Victoria, can I receive a visitor?

Yes! We're funded to provide volunteers Victoria wide.

Who are your volunteers?

We have a dedicated group of volunteers who are 18 to 80 years old and have a variety of backgrounds and interests. They receive training on their role, responsibilities and issues that may affect older people. We're a peer based service, so most of our volunteers identify as LGBTI. If no appropriate LGBTI volunteer can be found, we may occasionally accept volunteers who do not identify as LGBTI but have a good knowledge and understanding of LGBTI people.

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What are the benefits of volunteering?

Some of the benefits of volunteering are: Developing friendships with older people; giving back to and supporting LGBTI community; enhancing a person's quality of life; gaining experience working with older people & aged care services; building connections with other volunteers; learning about LGBTI ageing through professional development & support sessions.

What are the challenges of volunteering?

Some of the challenges of volunteering are: Learning to communicate with someone who may have a different communication style; finding activities that are enjoyable for you both; Managing boundaries – being able to say no when the visit recipient asks you to undertake activities that are outside your role; Making time for regular visits

What skills are required?

As you will be working with vulnerable people, volunteers are expected to demonstrate the highest level of ethical conduct. Some of the skills required in this position are: A commitment to building and sustaining a friendship with an elder LGBTI person over an extended period of time; strong communication skills, including listening skills; empathy; respect for the person's beliefs, background and culture; willing to seek advice, as appropriate

What training do volunteers receive?

Our Out & About Volunteers receive training in LGBTI ageing issues, their role and responsibilities as a visitor, the rights of visitors and care recipients, loss and grief, managing boundaries, administration requirements, code of conduct and occupational health and safety issues. We also run regular professional development sessions on topics relevant to LGBTI ageing.

How much time do I volunteer for?

Volunteers are expected to visit weekly for 1 hour or fortnightly for 2 hours, with a minimum of 20 Visits in a year. Volunteers are expected to commit for 12 months.

I'm over 65, am I too old to volunteer?

Never! We're very happy to take older volunteers.

I live in rural or regional Victoria can I volunteer?

Yes! We're always happy to hear from people in rural or regional Victoria who would like to volunteer. You will be matched up with someone in your area, so you don't need to worry about travelling too far.

How are the volunteers matched with people requesting visitors?

Volunteers are matched based on location, common interests and any preferences expressed during the visit request process.

How do i become a volunteer?

If you would like to volunteer with us, please call or email Switchboard's Out & About Coordinator Maeve McNelis:

Phone: 0466 218 921

Email: outandabout@switchboard.org.au