VICTORY!
Pride Parade claims a victory over ageism.

TAKING OFF!
Perth Meet n’ Muse groups grow.

SEXUAL RIGHTS
Who retains the rights in Ageing?

#LOVE WINS
Letter from the Chair

We had an exciting year in 2016, with several events for members and training in the aged care sector giving us a packed calendar. Highlights included our own-screened film nights with ‘GRAI at the Movies’, a night out with the irrepressible Carlotta, and a fresh look at ageing in a ‘Tea Cosy’ workshop with Dr Catherine Barrett. During PrideFest 2016 we hosted a fascinating ‘Talking Generations’ event, and displayed our creative talents in the Parade! (See page 4). On the more serious side, our work with the aged care sector is very rewarding - the reactions from participants are so enthusiastic - and we celebrated the conclusion of the first funded round of training with a seminar (9 June), ‘Making LGBTI Inclusion Happen’ which showcased the advances of WA services in striving to provide welcoming environments for LGBTI elders.

This year is shaping up to be just as busy - off to a flying start with two events in February: ‘End of the Rainbow’ with Dr Kathryn Almack from the UK, and a panel of LGBTI elders fronting the aged care sector in ‘Conversations’. (See page 3 for details). On the training front, we were fortunate to receive a second round of federal funding for our ‘Right To Belong’ training (See page 3 for details). On the training front, we were fortunate to get a second round of federal funding for our ‘Right To Belong’ training project, and give a great introduction to the need for LGBTI inclusive care.

For organisations who are interested in more in-depth expertise in how to apply LGBTI inclusivity across their business, we will be running a series of 5 workshops, starting in June 2017. See page 9 for more details.

Please remember, GRAI is your organisation, and we always welcome suggestions of topics or activities you would like us to cover. It’s extra-good if you also have the skills and where-with-all to help organise it! Contact me on 9436 3422 if you would like to discuss your ideas.

I hope you enjoy this issue, catching up with what we have been doing, and what we plan next – and we certainly look forward to seeing many of you at forthcoming events.

June Lowe
Chair, GRAI

Your contributions welcomed!
GRAI would love to hear from you about your ideas, whether creative, practical, even fanciful. We welcome your suggestions of projects to explore, connections to make, ways to influence and support care providers… indeed, any ways to make our world a better place to be for LGBTI elders.
We look forward to hearing from you!

Events

‘END OF THE RAINBOW’ WITH DR KATHRYN ALMACK
Thur 9 February 2017, 2-4pm. 54 Bickley Crescent (c/n Pether) Manning
Dr Kathryn Almack (Nottingham Uni) presents the latest UK research into the end-of-life experiences and care needs of LGBT elders. Her research, ‘THE LAST OUTING’ highlights issues of concern and provides recommendations both for aged care providers and for LGBTI people planning later life or end of life care. This forum will interest care providers, LGBTI community, and researchers, with opportunity for general discussion.
Bookings:
end-of-the-rainbow.eventbrite.com.au
FREE for GRAI members and Prime Timers.
Thanks to Curtin Uni for their kind sponsorship.

‘CONVERSATIONS’ WITH A PANEL OF LGBTI ELDERS
Fri 24 February 2017, 9.30am-11am. 54 Bickley Crescent (c/n Pether) Manning
This forum is a ‘first’: LGBTI elders relating their concerns and expectations of aged care to an audience of care providers. This is an essential ‘master class’ for any care provider wishing to provide LGBTI inclusive care, and important too, for any LGBTI elders who wish to contribute to the discussion.
Bookings:
graconversations.eventbrite.com
FREE for GRAI members and Prime Timers.

‘CYBER SAFETY FOR LGBTI ELDERS’
Sat 18 March 2017, 2-4pm, 54 Bickley Crescent (c/n Pether) Manning
Older Australians are a favourite target for a range of computer scammers. Find out how to recognise on-line deception and how to protect yourself. This workshop is being held especially for the LGBTI community, although all are welcome.
Bookings:
grai_cybersafety.eventbrite.com
FREE for GRAI members and Prime Timers.
Thanks to Chartered Accountants for their kind sponsorship.

2016 AGM - Meetings can be cool

The prospect of AGMs often leaves us underwhelmed, but GRAIs AGM (23 October 2016) certainly broke the stereotype – the stunning views from the 30th floor of 108 St Georges Terrace drew much admiration and set the scene for a great event. Our sincere thanks to Norton Rose Fulbright for generously hosting us on their impressive premises.

It was satisfying to report on all our activities in the 2015-16 financial year, and reflect on the rapidly improving social acceptance of our LGBTI community and the role GRAI is playing to support and to raise the visibility of our elders. For a full breakdown of our activities, we recommend our Annual Report (grai.org.au/grai-201516-annual-report).

But oh, you should have been there - treated to a wonderful performance by Ivan King - excerpts from his historic Males Tales, transporting us so close to a bygone era, you could almost touch it!
Talking Generations
Combining support for both PrideFest and Seniors’ Week, GRAI organised this heart-warming event to promote intergenerational connections within the LGBTI community. ‘Talking Generations’ (13 November 2016) was a cafe style forum held at the Court Hotel. Each table sat a mix of three generations - LGBTI people under 30; 30-60; and over 60. The overall age range in the room was 17 years to 83 years, making it a truly unique event!

Topics were suggested such as, ‘growing up gay’, ‘growing old gay’, and ‘what would facilitate intergenerational connections?’ People were relaxed and open to sharing their life stories, everyone clearly aware of the special nature of this rare opportunity to learn from and appreciate each other.

Older members described the distressing effects of growing up in a complete information vacuum about gender or sexuality, simply, ‘you never heard of it’. People in the middle generations described conversations in their growing up time as being ‘more coded’; while the younger generation described coming to terms with their gender/sexual identities with the help of media information.

We gained a tangible sense of the continuum of the social movement to reduce the stigma faced by the LGBTI community, and the roles that members present in the room had played in this progress.

The group voiced great enthusiasm at the prospect of more events to strengthen LGBTI multigenerational connectivity - and calls for Talking Generations to happen more frequently! We would love to oblige, but are limited by resources and the capacity to organise. However, we certainly wish to repeat Talking Gens in the near future and welcome any expressions of support to make it happen.

Thanks to COTA, Seniors Week and the Court Hotel for sponsoring Talking Generations 2016.

Pride Parade
#LOVE WINS was the splendid theme for Pride Parade (November 2016), which we interpreted with racecourse panache, this year re-inventing the image of mobility scooters, transforming them into a field of funky racehorses with dashing jockeys and elegant racegoers! Brandishing our home-made LOVE WINS trophy (thanks Susanne Hadlow), GRAI claimed victory over ageism, once again wowing the crowd and clearly asserting that age and love are a winning combination!

Thanks to everyone who took part in the GRAI float - you were magnificent. Also many thanks to Steve Putt, from Daily Living Products, Bayswater, for kindly lending us the mobility scooters. Thanks, we had fun!
The idea for MnM originated from similar groups in Melbourne and Sydney, meeting under the name ‘Open House’ (in Melbourne from 1981 to 2015, and in Sydney since 2000 till the present). Having enjoyed past participation in these groups, Pam was keen to offer something similar here in the West. ‘They were a great way for women to meet new people without having to head for a bar’, she said. A topic is chosen and discussed for an hour, opening the way for women to get to know something about each other. Afterwards, the group progresses to a nearby venue for a coffee.

JL: What have been the most interesting topics and why?

PM: ‘What is the very first lesbian book that you read and first lesbian movie that you saw?’ was a great topic. The Well of Loneliness was the standout book that women had in common – that tells us something about our age! - and The Children’s Hour topped the list of ‘first movie’, with Desert Hearts coming in second.

We discussed the fact that The Children’s Hour was the first of a long line of movies in which the lesbian characters had to die, which is common even today. Desert Hearts was the first one, and one of the few, that had a happy ending. The Children’s Hour was very significant to me, seeing it then as an eleven year-old, I knew I identified (as a lesbian) and also knew that I should keep it to myself. I didn’t feel there was anything wrong in myself, but I was afraid of other people’s opinions - that they would be cruel and make it ugly. I felt that I was not wrong, but that the world was unfair and cruel.

Another interesting topic we covered was ‘Tales from the Wardrobe’. About 80% of the group had rejected feminine clothing and makeup from an early age, without reference to feminism or lesbianism, it just felt natural to them. But the smaller percentage had no issues with, or enjoyed wearing feminine clothes. We talked about past struggles at work – not being allowed to wear pants at the office. We also discussed ‘Have you ever had wardrobe issues with a partner?’ and how pressure to conform to lesbian clothing ideals changed habits that now feel comfortable. Some women said, ‘Now I would feel like I was in drag if I put a dress on’.

Another good topic was, ‘How many straight friends have you got and what do you NOT talk to them about?’ This raised many thought-provoking subjects.

JL: What do you think women get out of MnM?

PM: Many stories are quite humorous - we have such a good time and are enjoying getting to know each other. The topics bring up our own memories and we are often are surprised and get understandings about ourselves too. I think we are learning a lot about the various ways of experiencing life as a lesbian... hearing about women’s different ways of coming out and coming to terms with their own lesbianism and different ways of living it – or not living it as the case may be for quite a long period of time. There are quite a few examples of women living with completely different sets of reference points for being a lesbian. There is no uniformity, but all experiences are valid. It is a supportive group. The purpose is to have conversations and this format works well, sitting in a circle and talking in turns. Also the set topic helps people slide into a conversation easily.”

Mn’M meets:
Cityplace (Perth Station overpass) from 130 to 2.30pm on the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays of the month.
Mandurah at 7.00pm at the Seniors and Community Centre, 41 Ormsby Terrace, Mandurah on the 1st and 3rd Wednesdays.

Note, visitors from interstate and overseas are welcome - there is no ‘membership’.
For further info about Mn’M, contact Pam on: graipamm@gmail.com or 0420 929 583.

Lesbians Who Lunch
Lesbians Who Lunch is now in its third year – with a simple formula of monthly lunches at different venues around the metro area, it has become a regular fixture for older lesbians in Perth. Our friendship networks often tend to contract as we age: LWL is an easy way to keep in the social loop.
LWL usually meets on the third Thursday of the month, although in February it will be moved to Friday 17th, with a picnic planned in Upper Swan! We will travel by small bus and car-pooling.
Contact June for more information chair@grai.org.au
**COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE, MAKING LGBTI INCLUSION HAPPEN!**

By Jacqui Tibbits, GRAI Board member and Director Consultivation

For many years, GRAI has been instrumental in progressing LGBTI inclusive aged care practices in Western Australia and further afield.

In June 2016, GRAI organised a landmark breakfast seminar called Making LGBTI Inclusion Happen to celebrate the progress and engagement of the WA aged care sector in the area of social inclusion. The event saw approximately 50 attendees come together and from this event the Making LGBTI Inclusion Happen Community of Practice has been formed.

The first of its kind in Australia, the Community of Practice has high hopes and a broad base, and plans to work towards the promotion of sustainable and inclusive practices in home, residential and palliative care by:

- examining strategies to overcome challenging areas
- collecting and exchanging resources
- identifying and sharing research
- creating a peer support network.

Membership of the Community of Practice comprises representatives from aged care services who are already committed to LGBTI inclusivity and would like to promote this journey within the aged care sector. Meeting bi-monthly, the Community of Practice has now met three times, with the group’s membership presently capped for the next 12 months to build consistency in developing our research and working relationships.

The first project of the group is the ‘Conversations’ open forum on 24 February (see page 3 for details). June and I will also be presenting to the aged care sector at the ACSWA conference in March 2017 on the Community of Practice.

Note, if you are a LGBTI person or carer of a LGBTI person with lived experience in the aged care sector and you would like to share your journey or experiences with the Community of Practice group please contact June Lowe, on chair@grai.org.au or 9436 3422.

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**Training**

**RIGHT TO BELONG TRAINING**

GRAI has unique expertise in the areas of LGBTI ageing and aged care. Our highly skilled trainers deliver workshops in two ‘open’ programs (multi-organisation participation) and also offer specially tailored in-house options if required.

This training will increase awareness and understanding of LGBTI clients, and will assist care providers comply with legal requirements for LGBTI inclusive aged care.

Commonwealth funded LGBTI Inclusivity Training

The second round of funding from the Commonwealth government is now underway for the National LGBTI Ageing and Aged Care Training Project. This enables GRAI to offer a further seven training sessions which are free of charge to aged care providers and a special session for assessors from RAS and ACAT.

The first round of training, in which we delivered 44 sessions in 2015-2016 received extremely positive feedback, so it is little wonder that places for the new sessions are filling fast, with the first four already fully subscribed.

For details of the dates and venues, and to reserve places, please go to: grairighttobelong.eventbrite.com

Note, for equity of access there is a maximum of three people per organisation per session.

**NEW OPPORTUNITY**

Five-part program: Creating an LGBTI inclusive aged care service.

In June 2017 GRAI will present the first in a series of five workshops, in a program designed to achieve sustainable, organisational change for LGBTI inclusivity. The program is based on the highly successful model developed by Val’s Cafe in Melbourne, and will support organisations wishing to implement the six National Standards for LGBTI inclusive practice.

Last year we delivered this program to organisations within the mental health sector, with very positive results.

To ensure effectiveness of the five-part Right To Belong program, a minimum of two members will be registered from each organisation, and participants should have the capacity to effect changes in their organisation.

Expressions of Interest: https://grairighttobelong5part.eventbrite.com

**INDIVIDUALISED TRAINING FOR YOUR ORGANISATION**

In-house training for both a full and half day, and shorter presentations are also available.

For enquiries and quotes, contact: training@grai.org.au

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**Same-sex ballroom dance classes in Hilton**

**Thursdays 7.45pm**

Fremantle PCYC

34 Paget St, Hilton


**Ballroom and latin styles**

Casual classes - no contracts

All levels and ages welcome

Contact Elisa: 0403 019 156
elisa_anelli@hotmail.com

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**FOR MANY YEARS, GRAI HAS BEEN INSTRUMENTAL IN PROGRESSING LGBTI INCLUSIVE AGED CARE PRACTICES IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA AND FURTHER AFIELD.**

Below: The first Community of Practice meeting, July 2016. Since then, our numbers have swelled to 18 members, representing 15 organisations.

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**INCLUSIVITY IN AGED CARE**

By Jacqui Tibbits, GRAI Board member and Director Consultivation

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**PAM MULHOLLAND**
ADVOCACY FOR LGBTI ELDERS’ RIGHTS

Behind the scenes: submissions

The pen may be mightier than the sword, and hopefully the computer has similar super-powers. Achieving social and legal change often requires shipping away in the background, a vital adjunct to the more visible advocacy in training rooms and media. GRAI tries to take every opportunity to advocate for the rights of LGBTI elders to fair and good treatment, and to increase understanding of their needs and concerns. Occasional submission to appropriate government inquiries are an important part of this process, giving us an opportunity to input into policy-making decisions, or at least raise awareness of LGBTI elders in the mind of decision-makers.

Elder Abuse, submission.

At the end of last year we contributed a submission to the Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC) inquiry into elder abuse, arguing that systemic hetero-normativity stymies sensitivity to LGBTI people which has the effect of causing service avoidance by LGBTI elders. In addition to presenting evidence of elder abuse in the form of homophobic or transphobic experiences, we also raised concerns about posthumous abuse, where someone’s gender/sexual identity is denied by relatives hostile or in denial about their identity. This can be heartbreaking for friends and partner of the deceased.

Equality before the Law, Benchbook Review.

Last year GRAI was invited to provide comment to the five-year review of the WA Supreme Court’s Bench Book. Last year GRAI was invited to provide comment to the five-year review of the WA Supreme Court’s Bench Book. Participating in an appropriate government inquiry is an important part of this process, giving us an opportunity to input into policy-making decisions, or at least raise awareness of LGBTI elders in the mind of decision-makers.

National LGBTI Ageing and Aged Care Strategy Working Group

Following the landmark Federal law reform in 2012 which established the rights of LGBTI elders to inclusive care, the National LGBTI Ageing and Aged Care Strategy was developed to outline ways in which the government would support this legislation become a reality on the ground. GRAI was involved as a community representative in the development phase of the Strategy and has, since the outset, been a member of the Working Group, working with the Commonwealth Department of Health (and the DSS when it had the Ageing portfolio) having input into the implementation of the Strategy, together with the National LGBTI Health Alliance and other community reps from around the country. The role of the Working Group is to advise and guide the Department of Health on the implementation of specific goals, actions and future priorities within the Strategy. The Working Group also provides opportunities for members to discuss issues and concerns within the sector as well positively promoting good new stories.

GRAI Board Member, Jacqui Tabbitts has attended the past two meetings in September and December 2016 on behalf of GRAI, providing suggestions to the office of the Aged Care Complaints Commissioner on improving safe engagement with LGBTI community feedback and concerns on the disclosure of personal information on My Health Record and contributing to discussions on the streamlining of the Quality Framework and Aged Care Standards.

Much attention has been focused on the development of the MyAgedCare website ensuring that it is LGBTI inclusive. Two particular concerns to GRAI are, 1) the use of appropriate language reflecting the LGBTI community, and 2) that the ‘LGBTI Friendly’ Daniel’s Tick Box’ on the website is presently unsubstantiated. We are concerned that this box may be ticked by service providers who do not yet have the proper structures, systems or trained personnel in place to appropriately support individual needs of LGBTI people. We would like to see the ticking of this box being validated by more than a self-assessment by the service provider. Negotiations on this important issue are on-going with GRAI representatives striving for the best possible outcomes for the LGBTI community.

It is important to us that we represent the LGBTI community and the people of WA. If you would like to provide your thoughts or opinions on using MyAgedCare please email your GRAI representatives at info@grai.com.au or phone 9436 3422 or 9382 7753 to discuss.

New ‘Diversity Framework’ on the GO

Ken Wyatt, the newly appointed Minister for Aged Care and Indigenous Health, recently spoke to Australian Ageing Agenda about the federal government’s work to create a new ‘Diversity Framework’, a document aimed at improving the standards of aged care for LGBTQI as well as culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) and Aboriginal seniors. The Framework will be developed with input from these communities and aims to ensure diversity is respected within the aged care sector. The National LGBTI Health Alliance (of which GRAI is a member) is representing LGBTI community in this process.

“I just had a round-table with representatives of the LGBTI community and I’ve agreed to meet them with quarterly [to work] on the framework,” Minister Wyatt told the magazine. Other groups will be similarly consulted, and the Framework may be extended to include homelessness and disabilities within its remit.

The new Diversity Framework will outline principles of good practice and also include specific action plans on how to address the needs of different groups of people.


ACT NOW TO HELP PREVENT LGBT OLDER ADULTS FROM AGING BACK INTO THE CLOSET

By Claire Pomeroy, Huffington Post 2.2.2016

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender older adults are pioneers who bravely pushed open the doors to coming out. It is unconscionable that many of these leaders of social justice are forced to retreat into the closet as they age. The troubling reality is that the U.S. lacks a complete understanding of the LGBT senior community and is particularly unprepared for the needs of LGBT older adults at the intersection of multiple disadvantaged populations, such as LGBT seniors who are people of colour, disabled, living with HIV/ AIDS, undocumented immigrants or socioeconomically marginalized. Many LGBT seniors fear that the health-care system is judgmental and have experienced discriminatory care or lack access to culturally competent aging services. To address this crisis, the U.S. must adopt a new perspective that emphasizes health, rather than just health care. All sectors of society must come together with a renewed sense of social responsibility that focuses on social determinants of health - a holistic view of everyday factors that impact the health, economic and social well-being of LGBT seniors.

Ending “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”

Health-Care Environment

Eliminating LGBT health disparities and providing more personal and equitable care to LGBT populations depends on overcoming a primary obstacle: Many LGBT patients are uncomfortable discussing sexual orientation or gender identity with health-care providers, and many providers need training on these discussions. Consequently, LGBT patients often forgo preventive medical care or seek care late in their illnesses or diseases, and clinicians lack information that helps in making a diagnosis and recommending treatments.

Research has found that more than one fifth of LGBT older adults have not disclosed sexual orientation or gender identity to their primary physician. Almost 20 percent of LGBT seniors and more than 50 percent of transgender seniors fear that they will be treated differently or less respectfully because of their demographics. Almost 20 percent of LGBT seniors and more than 50 percent of transgender seniors have encountered a health-care provider who did not take their health needs seriously. These factors contribute to LGBT adults (24 percent) being more likely than heterosexuals (18 percent) to report not seeking services in emergency rooms.

The Institute of Medicine’s landmark report ‘The Health of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender People: Building a Foundation for Better Understanding’, found that incorporating LGBT data into electronic health records and federally funded surveys is essential to addressing health disparities.

The report also calls for more research in LGBT demographics, health-care inequities, interventions, transgender needs and social determinants.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/claire-pomeroy-lgbt-older-adults-close-b_345556.html
Research

AGEING FEARS AND CONCERNS OF GAY MEN AGED 60 AND OVER

Older gay men’s concerns regarding ageing and aged-care settings are driven by their class and sexuality, according to new research from Swinburne University of Technology.

Swinburne University sociology and history lecturer, Dr Peter Robinson, was interested to know what aspects of ageing and old age are of concern to the ‘baby boomer’ generation as they move into early old age. He interviewed gay men over 60 years old, living in Auckland, London, Manchester, Melbourne and New York, giving this study an interesting international sample.

Analysis of extracts from their life stories showed the men interviewed drew on two principal narratives when discussing their apprehensions about growing old. The first related to general fears or concerns about old age that would be fairly common among members of the general population. The second narrative related to gay-specific fears or concerns.

Significantly, the study found that class affects gay men’s experience of old age just as it does for everyone else; and that fears of being ostracised because of their sexuality were strongest amongst gay men who were considering entering aged-care settings.

“The fear of homophobia is not necessarily from the staff, the greater fear can be from other residents and their families,” Dr Robinson said.

There’s both resilience and vulnerability because of the era in which these men came out,” Dr Robinson explains. This is a generation of men facing the prospect of aged-care living after embracing their sexuality in a time of oppression.

Men involved in the study spoke of their concerns regarding care workers and the possible effect of the heterosexist culture, where opposite-sex relationships are seen as the norm. Some men expected to find homophobic residents, care workers or management in aged-care facilities. Other fears shared by older gay men were similar to their heterosexual counterparts, including more universal concerns regarding supported care, aged accommodation and social isolation.

Dr Robinson says that while anti-discrimination legislation is in place and has an important role, he would like to see training continue for staff at all levels in diversity appreciation and knowledge.

“We would like to see this more in aged care facilities at all levels, not just at the higher socio-economic end. ‘I think this is happening, especially in suburbs of capital cities in Australia where there are active gay and lesbian elder community networks.”

LGBTI patient care

Dr Robinson is currently working with Alfred Health to make patient care more LGBTI+ inclusive and says this is a changing area for healthcare and aged-care in Australia.

“It was seen as the most pressing issue in the gay community for a long time and now it seems there is more space to talk about other health issues for gays and lesbians.”

The study concluded that more research is needed on gay men’s experience of in-home supported care and residential care to see if the reality of the heterosexism and/or homophobia matches the fears of some interviewees in this sample.

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INTIMACY IN AGED CARE NEEDS POLICY PROTECTION

By: Dallas Bastian in News, Practical Living, Top Stories, June 29, 2016

Staff enter residents’ rooms without knocking. Couples receive single beds. Workers gossip about residents.

These are some of the ways PhD candidate Alison Rahn, from the University of New England’s School of Behavioural, Cognitive and Social Sciences, said some aged-care facilities prevent couples from being intimate.

Rahn co-authored the paper Conflict Agendas: The politics of sex in aged care, and said many staff members did not accept that couples may seek intimacy.

She added many aged-care facilities still segregate sexes, including couples, and many ignore the needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex residents. “The majority of facilities lack formal policies or guidelines stating their position on residents expressing themselves sexually,” Rahn said.

Rahn explained that there are no government policies to address the sexual needs of aged-care residents and added it’s unlikely the issue will be addressed unless there are legislated measures in place.

For her study, Rahn searched parliamentary documents and newspapers for proposed legislation that might have affected the experience of couples in aged care.

“We analysed 200 documents and found that parliamentary debates revealed a cycle of conflicting agendas and partial solutions to systemic problems experienced by couples in care,” she said. “Debates around residents’ sexual needs have been heated and sensationalist. There are examples of religious institutions aggressively lobbying to override residents’ needs.”

The paper recommends specific human rights legislation for older Australians and that consideration of their wellbeing be the guiding principle in political decision-making on behalf of aged-care residents.

RESEARCHING THE IMPACTS OF INCLUSIVE HEALTH AND COMMUNITY CARE

New research is exploring the impact of LGBTI-affirming health and community care on older gender and sexually diverse women’s wellbeing and sense of belonging.

Researchers at Western Sydney University are interviewing same-sex attracted and/or gender diverse women aged 55 and above in order to gain insights into women’s thoughts and experiences with NSW health, social and aged care services.

This information will help promote an understanding of the impact of these services on women’s wellbeing and sense of community.

The research is funded by NSW Family and Community Services.

If you are interested in finding out more about this study, please contact Dr Tinashe Dune: Ph (02)4620 3655 or email t.dune@westernsydney.edu.au
RETAINING SEXUAL RIGHTS IN AGING
By June Lowe

GRAI HAS BEEN ASKED BY PEOPLE IN THE AGED CARE SECTOR FOR ADVICE IN HANDLING SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN RESIDENTS, PARTICULARLY IF ONE OR BOTH HAVE A GUARDIAN, OR IF A FAMILY MEMBER HAS ENDURING POWER OF ATTORNEY.

Frequently, the first reaction of the care provider is to ‘seek permission’ from some authority to ‘allow’ the relationship. Frequently the views of the family gain priority: a situation which would be considered intolerable by a younger person. Dr Jones notes there are sadly numerous examples of forced separations, causing deep unhappiness in the residents concerned, and even examples where people died, seemingly of a broken heart.

The lack of clarity regarding residents rights and pathways to assess risk, leaves carers and Guardians vulnerable to acting on their ‘gut reactions’, a most unsatisfactory situation in a culture where ‘agistes erotophobia’ is endemic and homophobia still holds sway.

Many industry professionals agree that this is a neglected area. Dr Cindy Jones question the judgment of facilities that bar all residents with cognitive impairment from maintaining relationships. The lack of legislation to protect the sexual and intimate rights of aged care residents leaves residents subject to knee-jerk reactions of care staff, many of whom lack training in this area. Indeed, a 2016 paper co-authored by Dr Michael Bauer (La Trobe University) revealed that 40% of the aged care facilities surveyed had never received any training about sexuality or sexual health. But training cannot happen in a policy vacuum. To help address this lack, Dr Catherine Barrett, who last year launched the OPAL Institute in Victoria to promote the sexual rights of older people, has formulated policies that aged care residences can adopt, like a charter of residents’ rights and responsibilities that refers specifically to sexuality.

Undoubtedly, the sexual rights of older Australians with impaired cognition is a complex area, but ethically sound and happier outcomes could be achieved by specialised training of care staff, and clear legal guidelines for care providers, families and Guardians alike.

Unfortunately there are few or no guidelines to assist care staff or Guardians to assess whether the relationship poses a risk to the individual’s concerned and whether or not it is ‘consensual’, or if the parties have the right to pursue activities which may provide pleasure and connection. Frequently the views of the family gain priority: a situation which would be considered intolerable by a younger person. Dr Jones notes there are sadly numerous examples of forced separations, causing deep unhappiness in the residents concerned, and even examples where people died, seemingly of a broken heart.

The lack of clarity regarding residents rights and pathways to assess risk, leaves carers and Guardians vulnerable to acting on their ‘gut reactions’, a most unsatisfactory situation in a culture where ‘agistes erotophobia’ is endemic and homophobia still holds sway.

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Undoubtedly, the sexual rights of older Australians with impaired cognition is a complex area, but ethically sound and happier outcomes could be achieved by specialised training of care staff, and clear legal guidelines for care providers, families and Guardians alike.

Recently provided advocacy on behalf of a GRAI member who was distressed by several experiences with health services which she found deeply hurtful. Joanna (not her real name) is a transwoman in her 60’s and, like many trans people has learned to be resilient and seek humour in the face of the outrageous slings and arrows that fly regularly in her direction.

However, the accumulated daily humiliations did take their emotional toll, especially when coming from professionals who should know better. Joanna emailed me with news of her latest misadventures with medical bureaucracy: the National Diabetes Services Scheme (NDSS) had sent her a letter addressed to ‘Person Joanna Smith’, while RPH had sent her an appointment addressed to ‘IND Joanna Smith’. She phoned to find out the meaning of IND - and was shocked to learn she was being addressed as ‘Indeterminate’.

Any thinking person can realise that being addressed as ‘Person’ or ‘Indeterminate’ is offensive in the extreme. Both organisations knew her gender identity, but even if they did not, leaving the title field blank would have been a far preferable alternative.

From a health perspective this is not a trivial matter. Reassuring clients that they are valued and respected has significant ramifications: the nocebo effect is well documented, ie low rapport with one’s treatment/diagnostic system leads to poorer health outcomes.

GRAI corresponded with a sympathetic senior social worker at RPH, and we believe the matter is being looked into. However, it is galling that so much pain could be so simply avoided. If you are unsure how to address someone: ask them. If the computer says no” - call in the technician.

As the social worker said, ‘We can, and should do better’.

TRAINS, RESPECT, PLEASE
By June Lowe

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Comment

Linking Together LGBTIG Carers

Are you an LGBTIQ carer or care for a family member or friend from the LGBTIQ community with a disability, mental illness, chronic condition, terminal illness, an alcohol or other drug issue or who is frail aged?

If yes, then Carers WA would like to invite you to take a break from your caring role and attend our Linking Together carer support group for LGBTIQ carers. Carer support groups allow carers to take a break from their caring role in a relaxed, supportive and nurturing environment where you can learn and share information to support you in your caring role.

This group meets on the third Wednesday of every month at the Perth Cultural Centre for free morning tea. The cafe venue is confirmed on RSVP.

For information or to RSVP, contact the Carers WA Events Team on 1300 CARERS (1300 227 377) or events@carerswa.asn.au

New LGBTI Carer Support Group - Mental Illness Fellowship WA (MIFWA)

Are you LGBTI and providing ongoing support to a friend, partner or family member who lives with mental illness?

Well Ways Building a Future is a 12-session education program designed to assist carers in maintaining their own wellness and support recovery of their family member or friend with mental illness.

MIFWA is seeking expressions of interest from those in the LGBTI communities who take a caring or support role for someone with mental illness, to participate in Well Ways Building a Future commencing in 2017.

To express your interest or for more information in this program please contact Trudy or Sam at MIFWA on 9237 8900 trudy.young@mifwa.org.au or samantha.scott@mifwa.org.au


* Keep calm and respect trans people.

* Please respect, keep calm and respect trans people.
About GRAI
GRAI was established in 2005 in response to fears within the LGBTI community that, as they grew older, they would have to ‘return to the closet’ if they required services from mainstream care providers.

GRAI works to improve the quality of life for older LGBTI people, focusing on both social inclusion within the community, and also the provision of care services. We aim to create a safe and inclusive mature-age environment for all people of diverse sexualities and gender identities.

GRAI works with government agencies, with the aged care sector and in the community to provide visibility and a voice for LGBTI elders.

Through research and advocacy we have already achieved law reform to outlaw discrimination of older LGBTI people.

We deliver training to the aged care sector to achieve responsive and welcoming aged care services.

We hold community events to build better community supports and friendships within the LGBTI community.

We network nationally and internationally with groups and individuals interested in issues of LGBTI ageing, and welcome collaborative partnerships and new members.

GRAI thanks