

Exploring the concerns of **LGBTQ2+ Seniors** living on the Sunshine Coast



Sunshine Coast
**Resource
Centre**

Funded by the
Government
of Canada

Canada 

About this Project

In 2019, the Sunshine Coast Resource Centre obtained a grant from the *New Horizons for Seniors* program of the Government of Canada to explore the concerns of seniors who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or 2Spirit, and others marginalized due to their sexual orientation or gender identity (LGBTQ2+).

From the fall of 2019 through the spring of 2020, our team met with members of this population, and with community organizations, to determine services the LGBTQ2+ community may need, and to identify gaps in services currently available.

What we Learned

On the whole, LGBTQ2+ seniors find the Sunshine Coast to be a safe and welcoming region.

Like many seniors in the larger population, their concerns are most profound in the areas of:

- secure housing
- financial security as they age
- health care

However, LGBTQ2+ individuals face the added burden of trying to secure stable housing free from discrimination, and accessing health care services that accept them for who they are, without constantly having to come out and correct assumptions of heterosexuality by each provider.

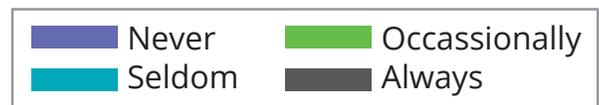
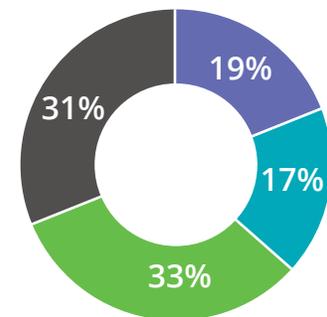
Participating organizations were open to learning about concerns of LGBTQ2+ seniors and believed they had the capacity to address many of the recommendations. These organizations were willing to take further steps to clarify language and check assumptions to ensure members of the LGBTQ2+ community are well served and feel welcome.

Organizations vary in capacity, but future steps must include regular training on awareness, respectful language, and continued dialog with the community to ensure services are inclusive and without bias.

When organizations reach out to include all seniors then everyone benefits.

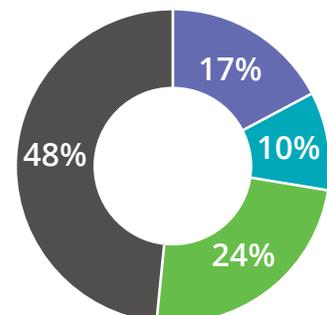
Financial Security

Do you feel that you have enough money for your basic needs in your elder years?



Housing

Do you believe your housing is stable for you to age in place until you choose to move to a supported environment?



Access the full report at www.resourcecentre.ca/lgbtq2-seniors

Printed in Sechelt BC on March 27, 2020

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Project Overview

The Sunshine Coast Resource Centre obtained a grant from the New Horizons for Seniors program of the Government of Canada. The grant period was October 1, 2019 to March 27, 2020. The purpose of the grant was to explore the concerns of seniors who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and 2Spirit or others marginalized due to their sexual orientation or gender identity (LGBTQ2+). The project aimed to determine services this community may need and identify gaps in services currently available.

The project activities were divided into two phases:

1. Outreach in the fall of 2019 where over 70 LGBTQ2+ seniors identified concerns regarding housing, safety, financial security, health care and the sense of belonging within the larger community
2. Organizational collaboration in the spring of 2020 which explored how local organizations are serving this population and offered education and support, where needed, to bridge identified service gaps.

Outreach

The outreach phase included these activities:

- creation of a rainbow advisory committee to inform and review project activities. This committee included three members of the LGBTQ2+ seniors community, two LGBTQ2+ outreach workers from local non-profits, two knowledge philanthropists from the Sunshine Coast Resource Centre and two project staff members.
- an outreach survey announcing the project and inviting members of the LGBTQ2+ seniors community to participate. Some chose a personal interview, some registered for small group discussions and some participated in an anonymous online survey. Several took part in both discussions and the online survey
- a contact list of over 50 people was created from the outreach survey, known social network groups and informal contacts (e.g. Pride gatherings). The project was announced on two social networks: an active email group (Sappho's Circle with 70 self-identified lesbian members) and the Sunshine Coast Gay and Lesbian Association (SCGALA), an older email list with an unknown number of members.
- The project was announced in local newspapers and on the Sunshine Coast Resource Centre's website

These activities generated the following responses:

- outreach survey: 42 responses. Most of these are represented in the tallies below.
- online confidential survey: 58 responses
- four small group discussions: 23 participants
- private interviews: two participants

The online survey was anonymous but many voluntarily joined our mailing list. There was duplication in the discussion groups and survey participants, but between 70 and 80 people took part. Eligible age was not defined, but surveys and discussion group registration indicated 71 people between 50 – 70 years old, four under 50. There were no participants over 80 years of age.

The following areas of concern were identified:

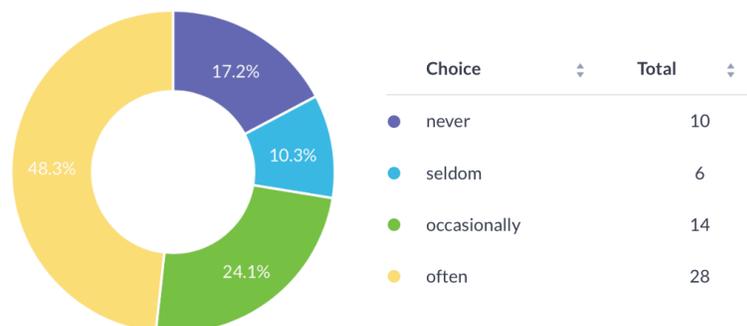
- Housing
- Safety
- Health Care
- Financial Security
- Belonging

Housing

Housing emerged as a concern in every session and in the online survey. With 27.5% of participants indicating they would not have stable housing as they aged. See Chart Q18 below. People raised these challenges:

- fear of discrimination in access to housing
- downsizing from single family home to town house complex where neighbours were not openly supportive
- lack of affordable housing alternatives
- lack of financial capacity to stay in own home
- inconsistent municipal bylaws for suites or guest houses for live-in caregivers
- fear of rental increases
- lack of built-in support within family structure when couples are childless and/or extended family is not supportive of relationship
- increasing isolation, especially for those over 70 years of age, with mobility, health or financial security challenges for those who long to age in a supportive community
- lack of capacity to build and maintain personal networks of support

Q18 Housing and Financial Security: Do you believe your housing is stable for you to age in place until you choose to move to a supported environment?
Multiple Choice



Several examples were described:

- a lesbian with mobility challenges lives in a modified (i.e. multiple ramps) rental home and is concerned if forced to move because of limited accessible housing
- if a 60 day eviction notice is given to a renter there are very few housing options
- members of the discussion groups raised examples of derogatory language used by other residents in care homes on the Coast and fear of disrespect if one partner needs assisted living
- small suites with inadequate cooking facilities make it hard to eat well on low budget

Safety

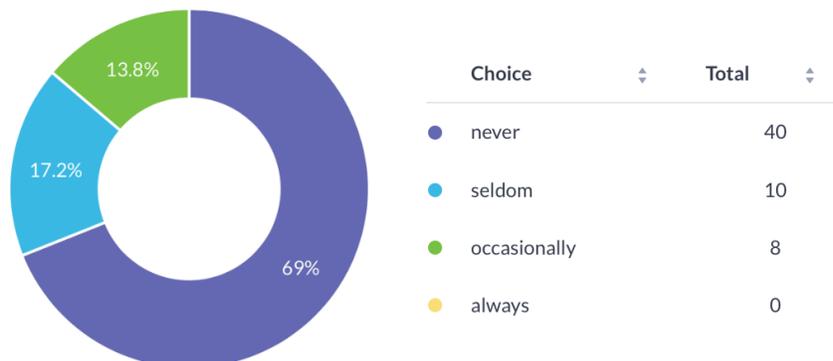
Participants felt the Sunshine Coast was a safe place to live with a strong sense of community. Some stated it was by far the most supportive community they had lived in. Some were concerned when the rainbow sidewalks in Gibsons were defaced in 2019 but the community response to this event reassured them that the community cared about inclusion.

An example of how subtle behaviours can affect safety in our community arose when a trans woman talked about rating the stares in retail stores. When a child commented on seeing her as a tall woman, she felt secure and accepted in her chosen identity. If adults stared with hostility, she was uncertain, but also said some women looked with a stare that said, “good for you” and she felt completely accepted.

Although two participants related stories of open threats or homophobic comments, the incidents were from several years ago and both people felt the climate was better now and they were able to be open about their identity in public.

Chart Q12 indicates the expressions of participants in the online survey regarding safety:

Q12 Safety: Has anyone ever drawn attention to your gender identity or sexual orientation in a way that has made you feel unsafe on the Sunshine Coast?
Multiple Choice

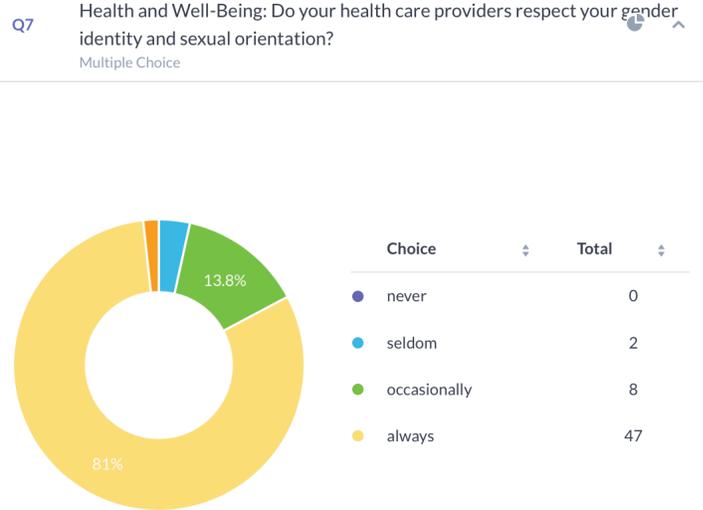


Health Care

Most participants felt that healthcare workers on the Coast were welcoming to them. The issues raised were more system-based and symptomatic of living in a world that assumes heterosexuality and binary gender identity. In particular, LGBTQ2+ seniors who may have experienced trauma due to lack of respectful treatment in the past may feel anxious and unsafe when healthcare workers come into their home. The issues and concerns raised were:

- anxiety before healthcare appointments. One trans man spoke of his fear of going to physiotherapy after top surgery
- the need to come out at every medical appointment. A trans woman described having to come out over and over again to explain her high estrogen levels because healthcare workers often assume she is a man
- fear and anxiety should LGBTQ2+ friendly doctors retire or move. Will the next one be supportive?
- some participants continued to use specialty clinics in Vancouver for complex care where service providers on the Coast may have little experience or expertise. For example, travelling to Spectrum Health in Vancouver for issues related to anti-retroviral drugs and multiple diagnoses
- the need to combat heteronormative and binary assumptions. It is uncertain if a caregiver will accept your chosen pronoun, or ask about your partner or spouse rather than assuming a heterosexual marriage
- concerns about care homes challenged to be “gay friendly” if staff believe that homosexuality is sinful or run counter to their religious beliefs
- the need to come out with every home care visit. When a different staff member attends each time, an LGBTQ2+ person may be uncertain of acceptance at every treatment

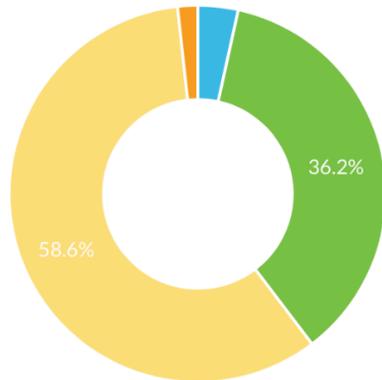
Although many fears were expressed Chart Q7, Q9 and Q10 show the actual experiences of LGBTQ2+ were mostly positive.



Q9

Health and Well-Being: In a health crisis, do you believe that you will be treated with knowledge and respect at local emergency facilities?

Multiple Choice

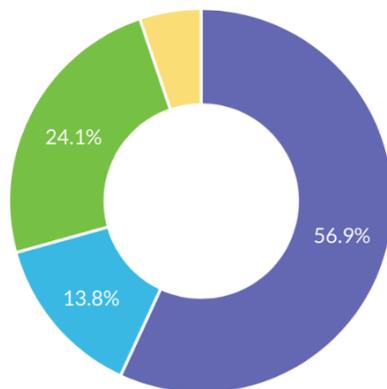


Choice	Total
never	0
seldom	2
occasionally	21
always	34

Q10

Health and Well-Being: Do you ever feel reluctant to access healthcare services based on how you believe you will be treated?

Multiple Choice



Choice	Total
never	33
seldom	8
occasionally	14
always	3

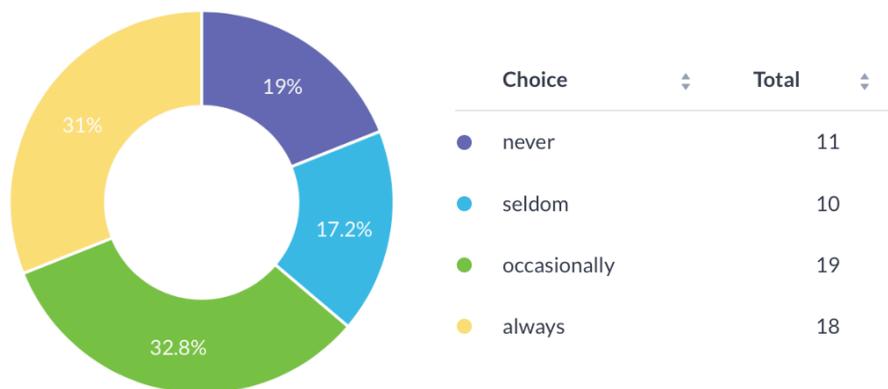
Financial Security

We did not collect personal income data for all respondents but of the 13 people who gave us information about their income, seven earned less than \$30,000 per year, and only one person earned more than \$50,000. In the survey, there were voluntary comments on living on less than \$30,000 and several felt they would not have enough money for basic needs in the future.

Five people disclosed that they lost jobs or careers during their peak earning years due to their sexual orientation. This interruption of income in mid-working life affected both their income at the time and their economic capacity to prepare for retirement,

As shown in the Chart Q17 below, 36.2% of survey respondents felt they would not have enough money for basic needs in their elder years.

Q17 Housing and Financial Security: Do you feel that you have enough money for your basic needs in your elder years?
Multiple Choice



Belonging

There are several definitions for belonging:

“to have an affinity or connection to a place”

“to have the right personal or social qualities to be a member of a particular group”

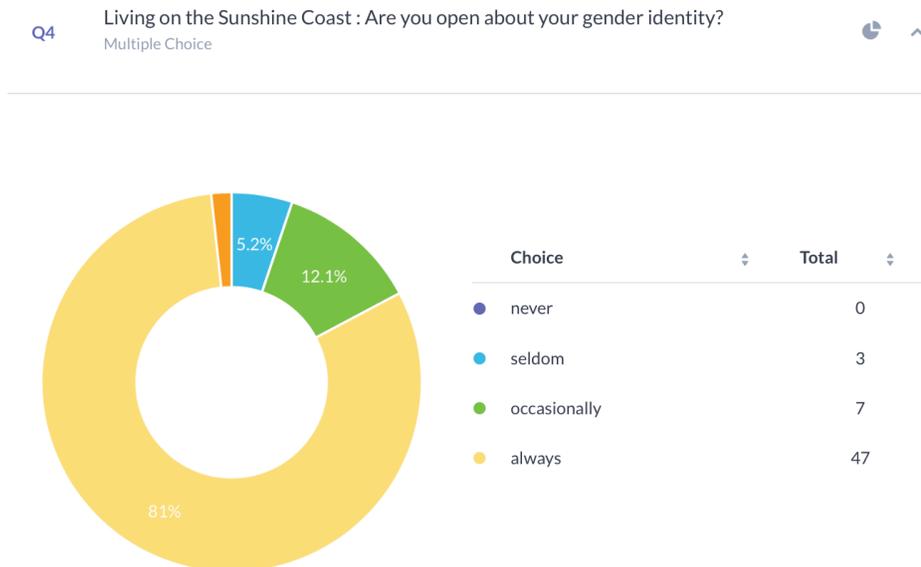
In recent years many social service organizations use the term belonging to assess the sense of connection felt in a chosen geographic or social community, and believe efforts to enhance belonging will help to address loneliness and isolation in our communities.

As an example of the impact of low income, a lesbian over 70 said her social peer group was made up of poor heterosexual women because she could not afford to socialize with lesbian social groups who had more money.

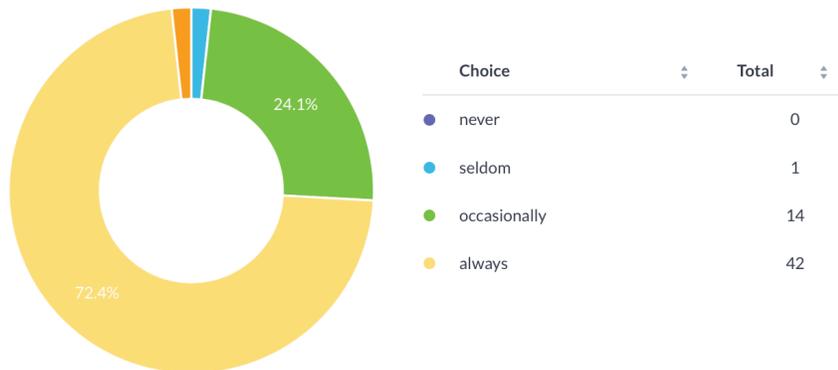
In discussion groups, interviews, and the online survey, people commented on the supportive and friendly environment of the Sunshine Coast. The majority lived openly regarding their sexual orientation and gender identity. See Charts Q3, and Q4 below.

There is, however, a lack of LGBTQ2+ dedicated social spaces on the Coast. This community must use public spaces or private homes for socializing. When one man shared that the Sechelt Seniors Activity Centre had warmly welcomed him and his partner to all events, others in the group were surprised. The Centre had even held a drag show as a successful fundraiser. One member of the discussion group commented: “I never imagined going to the Seniors Centre. Now maybe I will try it.”

Many raised concerns as to whether organizations would be open to their membership and participation. An overt welcome is necessary for a generation who has experienced trauma from loss of jobs and denial of services. Rainbow signs in windows and other visual representation of a welcoming environment may help, however, do staff and customers know what the rainbow flag symbolizes when posted outside retail outlets? If they don't, are LGBTQ2+ people truly welcome? Is it just a sticker without awareness? Is there interest in the broader community to learn about the fear and stigma and help to change the impact of past discrimination?



Q3

Living on the Sunshine Coast: Are you open about your sexual orientation?
Multiple Choice

Recommendations

The following recommendations from Phase 1 Outreach were discussed with leaders of the organizations in Phase 2, Organizational Collaboration. They are in no particular order.

- support the creation of communities with small homes for seniors with communal support services available . Planning and communication for these communities should be clear about the inclusion of LGBTQ2+ seniors
- modify municipal bylaws where required so homes or garages can be renovated for live-in support
- explore co-op housing or co-housing models to intentionally foster communities of support
- ensure more staff and reduced turnover for home care services with people trained on LGBTQ2+ issues
- present short modules on inclusive language
- require medical staff and community service organizations to be consistent in their interactions and provision of care by providing training on how to welcome and support LGBTQ2+ seniors
- provide training modules on inclusive communication especially as to why pronouns are important
- develop strategies on how to make organizations' welcome to the LGBTQ2+ community known and understood
- encourage increased funding for the provision of complex care in the region so seniors don't have to travel to Vancouver for services

Organizational Collaboration

Seven organizations that provide support for seniors on the Sunshine Coast participated in the organizational collaboration phase. These organizations were either actively pursuing ways to be more inclusive in their programming or were looking to add education and training to their planning to meet more inclusive goals. Although the organizations were delivering different programs they were all undertaking inclusion training, specifically on LGBTQ2+ concerns, such as celebratory events or training on the use of inclusive pronouns. Some had received training during the past year, others participated in a training session in this project and still others planned to have a presence at Pride events in June 2020 as a way of increasing awareness.

The following organizations took part:

- Sechelt Public Library
- Sunshine Coast Community Services Society, management team level
 - Better at Home program
- Sunshine Coast Regional District (SCRD), Recreation Services
- Sechelt Seniors Activity Centre
- Sunshine Coast Resource Centre
- Sunshine Coast Seniors Planning Table, information reports only
- Vancouver Coastal Health (withdrew due to Covid-19 crisis)

Organizations engaged in several types of activities:

Sechelt Public Library

- staff training session (nine attended) on February 5, 2020
 - focus group on February 19, 2020 with LGBTQ2+ communities to brainstorm how the Library could create safe and welcoming spaces
- Ideas generated were:
- feature of LGBTQ2+ authors all through the year, not just in Pride Month
 - identify books by LGBTQ2+ authors or with LGBTQ2+ content with stickers to help patrons find the subject area
 - explore establishing an ongoing advisory committee and solicit LGBTQ2+ citizens to serve on library board
 - use rainbow stickers on books and public entries and train staff what the rainbow symbol means



(staff training at Sechelt Public Library)

Recreational Services of the SCRD

- project outcomes and issues raised by the LGBTQ2+ seniors shared with staff by acting manager at February 26, 2020 staff meeting
- informed new management of the project in early March
- explore greater scope of inclusion training for all staff
- shared links to TransCare BC training modules with SCRD acting manager of Recreation Services on Feb 25: <https://rise.articulate.com/share/9XFuAqbV1rdLa2RaM18h31fK1q6gBk37#/>

Sechelt Seniors Activity Centre

- on March 4, 2020, the recreational programmer from the Sechelt Seniors Activity Centre discussed use of the Trans Care 30-minute online module and other resources to assist volunteers to become more comfortable with accepting language and welcoming LGBTQ2+ community members. Clarity on the meaning of the alphabet of letters used to describe the community is the first of several steps
- explore a short educational session regarding pronouns
- explore activities focussed on inclusion all year round
- inquire about a Sechelt Seniors Activity Centre outreach and information table at the Sunday in the Park with Pride celebration in June.

Sunshine Coast Community Services Society (SCCSS)

- met with the Director of Program and Staff Development to discuss the project outcomes on February 28, 2020. She shared recent and pending activities by SCCSS. These include:

- Cultural Diversity and Inclusion committee (CDIC) has two priorities: reconciliation with indigenous communities and inclusion for all in planning for new building and for programming
- training done with PeerNet (Vancouver-based) last year for committee regarding language, sexual orientation and gender identity and other issues to address inclusion
- training scheduled for late March 2020 with Ending Violence BC regarding Safe Choices. Content includes language and support concerning violence in LGBTQ2+ relationships. All staff and Board of Directors are invited to attend and the goal is for at least one person from each team to complete this training.
- values-based decisions regarding the design of the new facility to reflect Diversity of Community, Respect, Safety, and Accessibility

Better at Home (a program of the SCCSS)

- 30-minute module on introduction to care of Trans clients in health care provided to leadership team January 2020
- LGBTQ2+ issues awareness training at volunteer orientation (scheduled spring 2020)
- explore on-going ways to keep volunteers and staff aware of LGBTQ2+ issues

Sunshine Coast Resource Centre

- Board of Directors piloted the 30-minute online module from TransCare BC “Introduction to Transgender clients” in January 2020. Three directors gave very positive feedback and the module was sent to leaders of all participating organizations.
- hosted project and complete report on website: <http://resourcecentre.ca/lgbtq2-seniors>

Summary

On the whole, the LGBTQ2+ community found the Sunshine Coast to be a safe and welcoming region. Their concerns were most profound, like many seniors in the larger population, in the areas of secure housing, financial security as they age and health care. However, LGBTQ2+ individuals face the added burden of trying to secure stable housing free from discrimination, and accessing health care services that accept them for who they are without constantly having to come out and correct assumptions of heterosexuality by each provider.

The organizations that took part were very open to hearing the community’s concerns and believed they had capacity to address many of the recommendations. They were all willing to take further steps to clarify language and check assumptions to ensure members of the LGBTQ2+ community are well served and feel welcome.

Each organization will have a different capacity but further steps must include regular training on respectful language and continued dialog with the community to ensure their services are inclusive without bias. When organisations reach out to include all seniors then everyone benefits.

The impact of acceptance in marginalized communities is well expressed in the words of Ivan Coyote:

“My day to day struggles are not so much between me and my body. I am trapped in a world that makes very little space for bodies like mine.”

Ivan Coyote, Tomboy Survival Guide

Appendix - Demographics

Definitions:

- *LGBTQ2*: refers to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and 2Spirit, or others who are marginalized due to their sexual orientation or gender identity.
- *Cis*: those participants who identify with their gender as identified at birth.
- *Trans*: those who have chosen a gender identity that is different from that given at birth.
- *Non-binary or gender-fluid*: those who identify their gender as neither male nor female.

Discussion groups (mixed) – sexual orientation and gender identity

October 26 - 2 cis lesbians, 3 cis gay men

November 4 and 18 – 11 cis lesbians and 1 gay man

Individual interviews – 1 cis lesbian, one trans lesbian

Survey participants:

Age

Under 50 = 1

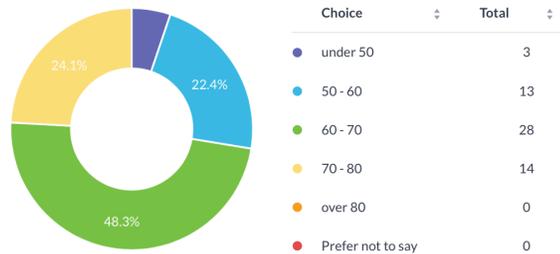
50 – 60 = 13

60 – 70 = 8

70 – 80 = 8

Survey participants

Q28 Information about you: What is your age?
Multiple Choice



Living situation

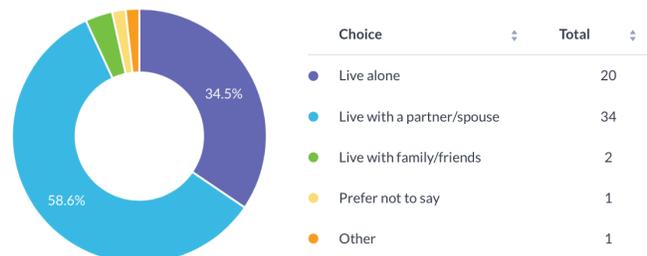
Live alone = 2

With spouse or partner = 14

With friend or family = 1

Survey participants

Q25 Information about you: What is your living situation?
Multiple Choice



Income

Under \$30,000 = 7

\$30,000 – 40,000 = 2

\$40,000 – 50,000 = 2

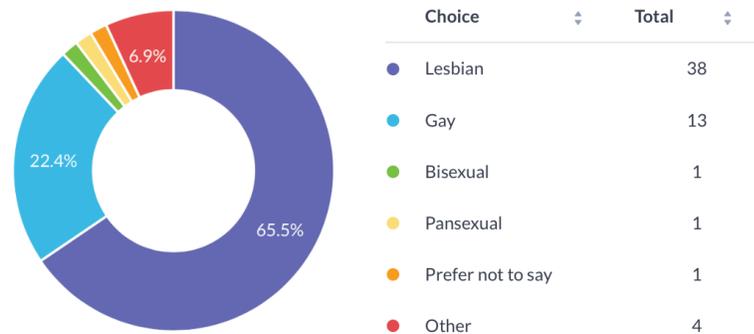
\$50,000 – 60,000 = 1

Discussion group (Trans) – no sign in sheet but data from introductions.

10 attended including facilitator. Age and gender identity breakdown was:

- 3 youth, identity not disclosed
- 1 M to F, 30's or 40's surgery within past year
- 7 were 60 or over one lesbian cis female, one non-binary, one F to M trans (recent surgery) one M to F over 70 (surgery in 1993), one M to F (surgery uncertain), one gay cis man, one partner of participant whose gender identity was not disclosed

Q23 Information about you: What is your sexual orientation?
Multiple Choice



Q21 Information about you: What is your gender identity?
Multiple Choice

