

# MAZON's Response to Hunger Among LGBT Seniors

## TOO MANY LGBT SENIORS STRUGGLE WITH FOOD INSECURITY

MAZON has made it a priority to address food insecurity facing America's seniors. Our efforts have emphasized the need to ensure that there is a robust government nutrition safety net that is well-funded and easily accessed by those who must rely upon it. MAZON is also committed to identifying and working to remove barriers to access and participation in these programs, including for LGBT seniors who typically face unique and persistent challenges to accessing such programs and the complementary services offered through the charitable food network.

MAZON's work to date has provided meaningful insights into the depth and breadth of the challenges facing seniors, and the complexities regarding which seniors struggle with food insecurity. MAZON works in partnership with leading advocacy groups like SAGE (Services & Advocacy for LGBT Elders) and the Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law to explore the unique barriers to food security faced by LGBT seniors and to craft viable actions to remove those barriers.

## THE SCOPE OF LGBT SENIOR HUNGER

Limited data are available about food insecurity among LGBT seniors, which is why MAZON has made it a priority to pursue more comprehensive research. Currently, we know that:

- **60% of LGBT seniors are more likely to experience food insecurity** in comparison to their non-LGBT counterparts, with higher levels among transgender and non-white LGBT seniors.
- However, only **42% of eligible seniors actually enroll in SNAP** in comparison to 83% of all eligible people.
- Half of all Americans with HIV are over age 50, as are 15% of all new HIV/AIDS diagnoses and 29% of those living with AIDS. **Hunger is particularly devastating to those who are aging with HIV or AIDS**, because lack of reliable access to proper nutrition causes a drastic reduction in life expectancy rates.



*"As a lesbian senior, it's extremely hard to live in this society. Most of us in the gay community never thought we'd end up poor. And if sickness comes along, it can drain all your money in one day. That's what happened to me. No way did I ever think I'd be in this position. I did everything right in my life."*

- Barbara  
New York City, New York

For more information and to discuss opportunities to better address LGBT senior hunger, contact **Josh Protas, Vice President of Public Policy: [jprotas@mazon.org](mailto:jprotas@mazon.org) or (202) 888-6526.**

## OPPORTUNITIES TO ADDRESS LGBT SENIOR HUNGER

Recent reports suggest that LGBT seniors are at heightened risk of experiencing poverty and food insecurity. Today's LGBT seniors joined the workforce long before anti-discrimination policies were implemented, and it is still legal to fire someone on the basis of sexual orientation in 28 states and for gender identity/expression in 31 states. The result is not only lower incomes over the course of a lifetime, but many fewer accumulated assets, pensions, and other revenue sources on which many other seniors rely.

Additionally, many LGBT seniors want to live in proximity to inclusive locales, which often results in disproportionately high housing and healthcare costs. For those living with HIV/AIDS, life-saving medical care is an additional—and expensive—necessity.

It is heartbreaking to know that LGBT seniors are often forced back in the closet just to be able to safely secure basic services available to them, having been denied equal access to the social safety net.

MAZON has identified several policy solutions to address the current challenges to access to food security facing LGBT seniors. These include:

- Increasing data collection on this issue to ensure policies are adopted that address actual needs appropriately. To this end, **MAZON has partnered with the Williams Institute at the UCLA School of Law to collect qualitative data on LGBT seniors who experience food insecurity** and how they interact with the emergency food system alongside SNAP enrollment. MAZON has also made it a priority to ensure that sexual orientation and gender identity are included in the 2020 Census.
- **Adding sexual orientation and gender identity as a “greatest social need” category alongside race under the Older Americans Act** for increased funding for LGBT-inclusive programs. Currently the greatest social need category only includes low-income, non-white, English proficiency, and rural elders over age 60.
- **Ensuring that U.S. government nutrition programs for seniors do not include either explicit or implicit discrimination against LGBT seniors**, particularly in U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Health and Human Services (HHS) programs like SNAP and OAA-funded anti-hunger efforts.
- Exploring whether biased policies or practices are precluding access for LGBT seniors to anti-hunger charitable organizations, including faith-based organizations, and those that receive federal funding to provide anti-hunger programs.
- **Ensuring that there is cultural competency among providers of anti-hunger programs and services to LGBT seniors.** MAZON is advocating to secure funding for cultural competency training for anti-hunger program administrators.

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To Hunger