

# Secure, Accessible, Friendly, Equal (SAFE) Housing

The housing experiences, concerns and  
preferences of Older LGBT\* people



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# ABOUT THE STUDY

## What was involved? Who took part?

The SAFE Housing study used focus groups and an online survey to ask LGBT\* people over fifty years of age about their housing experiences, concerns and thoughts about future needs. All the research took place in 2016 in the Greater London area and a county in the West of England. Five focus groups were conducted and 175 people completed the survey. For full details about the people who took part, see the appendix on page 11 of this report.

This research has shown how we can begin to understand the housing experiences, concerns and preferences of older LGBT\* people, by taking into account people's interactions and relationships with others. This means that policy makers and housing providers need to consider not only the individual's needs –important

as these are –but how individuals are connected to others.

Overall, very little is known about older LGBT\* people's housing needs and preferences but some research has suggested that older LGBT\* people want to remain in their own homes for as long as possible, being treated with dignity and respect by support services. Reports of homophobia, biphobia and transphobia from staff and/or other residents in care homes and sheltered housing is a concern for many. These and other issues can affect how LGBT\* people view their future housing choices.

The SAFE Housing study sought to begin to fill a gap in knowledge about older LGBT\* people and their housing needs –building an evidence base that can be used to inform future policy, service practices and research.



# SAFETY, COMFORT AND TRUST

Most participants felt safe in their own home, however this was dependent upon the amount of control the person felt they had over their home environment.

- Trans\* respondents were particularly concerned about safety in their neighbourhood, with transphobia and transphobic hate crime being the main issues.

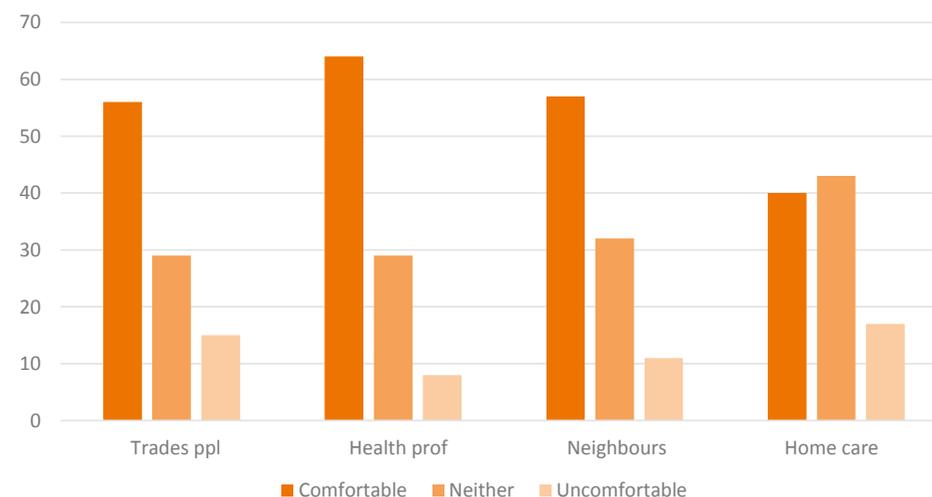
- Respondents to the survey were mostly comfortable having different groups of people (e.g. tradespeople, health professionals, home care workers) enter the home, however this was variable.
- Participants recognised that increasing frailty, poor health and reduced mobility may make them more vulnerable and feel less safe.

## A key concern for older LGBT\* people living in sheltered housing related to 'who' enters the home:

- ♦♦ We have a sheltered housing manager but I don't feel safe to express my sexual orientation. Probably she does know but unfortunately there's an awful lot of people in the caring profession who tend to be religious ♦♦

Lesbian, 60s

This graph shows the % of respondents' feelings of comfort/discomfort to certain groups of people who may enter their home



# COMMUNITY AND CONNECTIONS

Social isolation from friends, partners, and/or other LGBT\* people was one of the biggest concerns expressed in SAFE Housing.

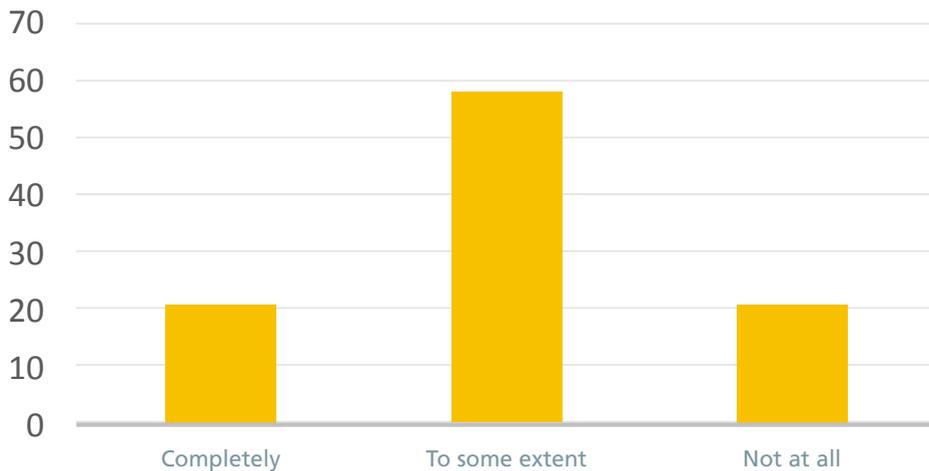
- The majority of respondents currently had access to support networks from which they could get practical help, however 18% of participants had no-one whom they could rely on.
- 72% had someone they could rely on for personal care but 28% did not.
- Most survey respondents felt connected to a wider LGBT\* community, but 21% did not at all.

- The majority of lesbian and bisexual women respondents expressed a preference for a carer of the same gender as them, the majority of gay and bisexual men expressed a preference for a carer with the same sexuality as them.
- When asked how they felt about ageing, a poor housing situation, a lack of community connection, and worry about future housing were linked to feelings of reduced vitality and increased loneliness.

“I’m getting older and you suddenly think, I’m on my own, you know, what’s going to happen? And how long am I going to be able to live independently”

Bisexual Trans\* Woman, 50s

% that respondents felt part of, or not part of, a wider LGBT\* community



# IMAGINING THE FUTURE

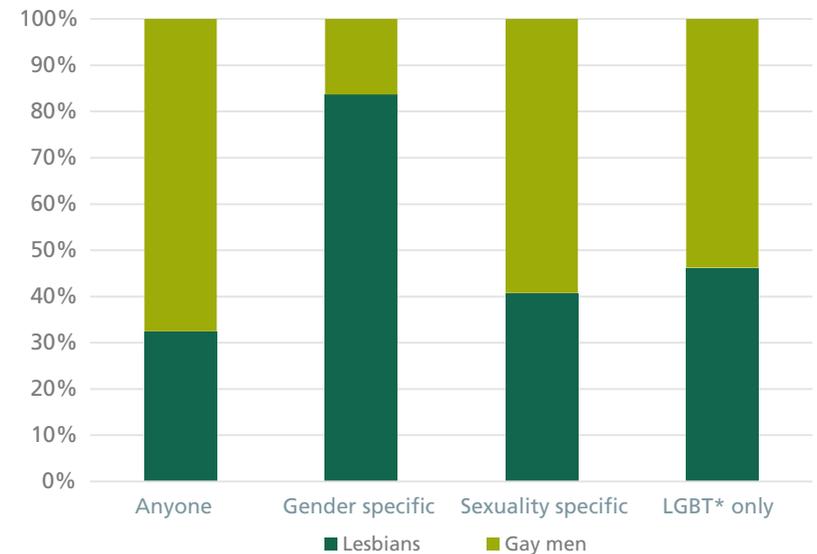
58% of survey respondents had concerns about housing later in life but 72% had not made any plans in relation to their future housing.

- Concerns expressed included: “risk of homophobia in mainstream services”, “intimidation and harassment because of my HIV status” and “housing services assume everyone is heterosexual”.
- Transphobia was a particular concern, potentially having a significant impact on how a Trans\* person presents their gender identity.
- Opinion varied with regard to future housing preferences, as illustrated in the accompanying graph. Older lesbian

respondents indicated a stronger preference for gender-specific housing whereas gay men preferred housing for anyone.

- When asked about housing with care, older lesbians, bisexual women and gay men all preferred more specific types of housing. Trans\* people were more divided and concerned about transphobia in LGBT\* specific housing as well.
- 75% felt that a ‘charter mark’ scheme to identify organisations with a culture of acceptance and benevolence towards LGBT\* people was a good idea, although some expressed reservations about the qualifying criteria and reliability of such a scheme.

HOUSING PREFERENCE



# RECOMMENDATIONS



## 1. Create a range of housing options

People should be able to age-in-place and/or have access to specialist facilities that recognise diversity and difference within L,G,B and T\* communities. There needs to be a 'mosaic' approach to housing and older LGBT\* people –people want a variety of choices.



## 2. Raise awareness in LGBT\* communities and amongst policy makers

We need to build awareness of housing issues in LGBT\* communities to enable people to plan ahead and make informed choices as they get older. We also need to inform and educate housing policy makers and providers.



## 3. Conduct more research

SAFE Housing was a pilot study for a much larger study to be run across the country – we learned a lot about housing preferences but we still don't fully know about the diverse needs of older LGBT\* people and what they want.



## 4. Address the knowledge gaps

We need to know more about the future housing needs of specific groups of older LGBT\* people, particularly those from working class backgrounds, from Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities, and gender diverse, non-binary and intersex people.

# CONCLUSIONS

It has been over 20 years since there was a general survey of the housing preferences of older lesbian and gay people, whilst older bisexual and trans\* people have not been surveyed in such a way before.

Now SAFE Housing has begun to fill this gap in evidence.

It aimed to provide evidence for service providers, policy makers and activists in the field of LGBT\* housing but it also aimed to provide information for LGBT\* people, to raise awareness about the housing concerns and preferences of older LGBT\* people.

But more needs to be done....



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[surrey.ac.uk/sociology/research/researchcentres/crag/safe](http://surrey.ac.uk/sociology/research/researchcentres/crag/safe)

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# APPENDIX—DETAILS OF THE SAFE HOUSING STUDY

The SAFE Housing study used focus groups and an online survey to ask people about their housing experiences and thoughts about future needs. All the research took place in 2016 in the Greater London area and a county in the West of England.

## Focus Groups:

- 26 people, aged 50-85, took part
- 13 participants identified as women and 9 as men. 4 people identified as trans\*
- 14 participants identified as lesbians, 9 as gay men, 1 as a bisexual woman and 2 as pansexual
- The majority of people (73%) were home owners

## Survey:

- 175 people, aged 50-86, completed the survey
- 50% identified themselves as women, 47% identified themselves as men and 3% gave their own terms, 7% specifically identified as trans\*
- 42% identified as a lesbian, 43% as a gay man, 5% as a bisexual woman, 2% as a bisexual man, 2% as a heterosexual woman, 1% as a heterosexual man, 4% provided their own terms, and 1% preferred not to say
- The majority (92%) were living in independent accommodation without formal support



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