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PRESS RELEASE

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IL Department on Aging Celebrates Pride, Announces New Inclusive Intake Forms

Chicago, IL - During LGBT Pride Month, The Illinois Department on Aging (IDoA) announced that it will include sexual orientation and gender identity questions in its referral and intake processes, expanding the Department's commitment to LGBT older Illinoisans.

Specifically, when an individual calls the IDoA Senior HelpLine, and completes the referral and intake process for services under the Community Care Program (CCP), among the questions as part of the demographics section, will now include how the individual identifies their sexual orientation and gender identity.

One of the Department's main goals of enhancing its data collection efforts is to learn more about older adults who are seeking services in order to develop a person-centered plan of care and to link LGBT older Illinoisans to culturally competent services and supports. LGBT older adults are often invisible in aging service demographics resulting in an inability to evaluate the effectiveness of existing services and inefficient planning for future programmatic expansions. In addition, LGBT older adults have often lived through discrimination, social stigma, and the effects of prejudice resulting in poor health outcomes and greater risk for chronic illnesses and mental illnesses.

Like all demographic questions, the gender identity and sexual orientation questions are completely optional and allows for an older adult to self-disclose. However, collecting this data is essential to IDoA's mission of providing high-quality, person-centered care to older Illinoisans and supporting efforts to maintain older adults in their own homes. By creating a welcoming, safe and LGBT-affirming space, the Department and its service providers will be better able to link LGBT older adults to culturally competent resources and encourage honesty and trust so that clients can be their authentic selves.

"I'm extremely proud to be able to roll these new questions out. Collecting this data is essential to illuminating the nature of disparities among older Illinoisans, and to breaking down the obstacles of exclusion that face our LGBT older adults," said Paula Basta, Director of IDoA. "IDoA is committed to supporting all our older Illinoisans with diverse programs and services, and we look forward to continuing to strengthen our outreach and education efforts as we help every LGBT older adult successfully age with dignity and respect."

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The national organization SAGE (Services & Advocacy for GLBT Elders) estimates that there are at least 3 million LGBT individuals 50 years of age and older living in the U.S, and is expected to rise to 7 million by 2030. Additionally, it is estimated that 4.3% of the older adult population in Illinois identifies as LGBT. However, these numbers are difficult to track due to defining the age of LGBT older adults, and the failure to collect this data previously.

“In rolling out these LGBT-inclusive questions on this 50th Anniversary of Stonewall, Illinois is saying that it sees, respects, and cares about serving LGBT older people in Illinois. Too often, LGBT older people feel invisible. Now, in Illinois, they have an opportunity to be seen,” said Aaron Tax, Director of Advocacy of SAGE. “Now that they have the opportunity to be seen, Illinois can ensure that they receive the services and supports that they need to remain independent. More states need to follow the lead of Illinois and its sister states that already collect this critical information. While Illinois may be at the vanguard of LGBT data collection, we hope it will not be the last state in the country to see not only the utility but also the humanity in acknowledging the existence of LGBT older people. We know that if LGBT older people are not counted, they don’t count. Now, thanks to the leadership of Governor Pritzker and Director Basta, Illinois is saying to LGBT older people we see you and you count.”

Created in 1973, IDoA strives for efficient and effective access to services that prevent premature nursing facility placement and maximizes the state’s nearly 2.7 million older adults’ ability to remain as independent as possible within their community. For more information about programs and services to assist older adults in Illinois, their families and caregivers, log on to the department website at: www.illinois.gov/aging/ or call the Senior HelpLine at (800) 252-8966 (hearing impaired call 888-206-1327).

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