

Aging with Pride and Authenticity: Challenges and Supports for Two-Spirit, LGBTQIA+ Native American and Indigenous Older Adults



UC Berkeley's Center for the Advanced Study of Aging Services conducted **23** focus groups with **208** LGBTQIA+ older adults across California to explore the unique challenges, support systems, and aspirations of the LGBTQIA+ aging community. This handout presents findings from **23** Two-Spirit / LGBTQIA+ older adults who identify as Indigenous, Native American, or American Indian.

CHALLENGES

Social Isolation and Physical Limitations: Many older adults were homebound, disabled, or had limited mobility, relying on technology or mobility devices to stay connected.

Cultural Disconnection and Loss of Traditional Knowledge: Colonization, family shame, and disrupted upbringings have left some older adults without access to cultural teachings or identity affirmation.

Exclusion within Native and Spiritual Communities: Queer and Two-Spirit elders reported being pushed out of ceremonies or spaces, and others face rejection due to mixed heritage or not appearing "visibly Native."

Housing and Service Fragmentation: Older adults faced housing insecurity and displacement while Native agencies are sometimes in competition for scarce resources.

Health Barriers and Chronic Conditions: Many experienced difficulties accessing healthcare due to disability, distance, or chronic illnesses like diabetes.



I'm disabled and homebound pretty much... So I'm just communing, communicating through Zoom...



We are survivors... we helped to open the door for that younger generation.



STRENGTHS & SUPPORTS

Resilience and Intergenerational Leadership: Older adults viewed themselves as survivors who have endured adversity and created paths for younger generations.

Wisdom, Experience, and Cultural Knowledge: Older adults possessed deep lived experience and serve as stewards of cultural memory and tradition in Native / American Indian communities.

Community-Building and Chosen Family: Older adults created nurturing, intergenerational support systems outside of biological ties.

Mental Health and Peer Support Contributions: Older adults led or participated in community-based healing practices for trauma and PTSD, especially among veterans.

Mentorship and Activism: Older adults provided mentorship to youth and led community efforts for social justice and representation.

Engagement in Traditional and Holistic Healing: Older adults continued to practice and teach healing arts, herbal medicine, and ceremony.

NEEDED SUPPORTS & SUGGESTIONS

Safe, Affirming Community Spaces: Older adults desired dedicated gathering places for Two-Spirit and Native people, including elders, that were welcoming and not centered around nightlife.

Health Education and Wellness Programming: Older adults wanted access to culturally relevant classes on nutrition, diabetes prevention, and physical activity.

Recognition and Support for Traditional Medicine: Older adults emphasized the need for greater respect and backing for plant-based and traditional healing practices.

Affordable, Accessible Housing Options: Older adults sought stable housing that accommodates their identities and mobility needs.

Improved Collaboration Across Community Groups: Older adults called for better coordination of events and services to reduce overlap and foster inclusion.

We need a space again where we as Two-Spirit people can come together... And it doesn't have to be in a bar.

IF GIVEN A MAGIC WAND, THEY WOULD WISH FOR:

CREATE A TWO-SPIRIT CULTURAL CENTER AS A CENTRAL HUB:

Build a dedicated space for community events, cultural expression, and connection.

BUILD HEALTHIER, SELF-SUSTAINING COMMUNITIES THROUGH TRADITIONAL PRACTICES:

Reclaim traditional foods and promote health education rooted in cultural knowledge.

ENSURE VISIBILITY AND LEADERSHIP FOR ELDERS IN TWO-SPIRIT COMMUNITIES:

To be seen and valued as role models, particularly for younger generations.

FOSTER CROSS-AGENCY COLLABORATION AND RESOURCE SHARING:

Opportunities for agencies to work together rather than compete, ensuring broader and more equitable access.

FURTHER DEMOGRAPHIC DATA: This handout includes data from one talking circle with 13 Two-Spirit older adults who identify as Indigenous, Native American, or American Indian. This group was led by Bay Area American Indian Two-Spirits (BAAITS) organization who shared their data with the CASAS research team. Data from ten additional participants from the larger LGBTQIA+ aging project were included who also identified as Two-Spirit, LGBTQIA+ Indigenous, Native American, or American Indian older adults.

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