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# Caring for L.G.B.T.I. People with Dementia

## Dispelling Some Unbelievable Myths

by Michelle de Mari, Coordinator, Library and Information Services, Alzheimers Australia

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**T**here is apparently a fairly widespread belief in the aged care sector that L.G.B.T.I. people with dementia lose their sexual or gender diversity. This belief has been held not only by carers but has also been aired in professional conferences, as recently as in the past year.

Research at La Trobe University, led by Dr Catherine Barrett in conjunction with Alzheimer's Australia, has addressed this misconception by documenting the experiences of L.G.B.T.I. people with dementia. Dr Barrett said "It's a kind of homophobic view, in a way, that being L.G.B.T.I. is some kind of performance and that we lose the capacity for the performance if we get dementia".

In an interview with the *Star Observer* she said the view was harmful because it was being spread by people of authority in the field of dementia. She said it suggested that L.G.B.T.I. people had regressed to a point before they 'chose' to be sex or gender diverse. A study conducted by older gay and lesbian groups, Vintage Men and Matrix Guild, had created a study called 'My People', that cited an aged care worker asking for help in understanding how to meet the needs of a new resident who used to be gay".

Barrett suggested that views such as these could have severe effects on L.G.B.T.I. clients as it meant that aged-care service providers felt they did not need to take note of the the sexual and gender diversity of those with dementia.

She cited the case of an individual whose partner was , was living in an aged-care facility for people with mental illness. The partner with dementia did not understand why he was in the institution and needed a lot of tactile reassurance, holding, kissing, touching, holding hands. This evidence of same-sex love evoked some discriminatory episodes from others in the institution.

Another gay man was questioned by Dr Barrett. "I said, 'so do you think, as a person with dementia, you are still gay?' and he laughed and laughed and then he said 'naturally'.

Barrett's interviews will be gathered into book form and published in order to shed light on the personal and unique experiences of L.G.B.T.I. people with dementia.

The project is hoping to hear from L.G.B.T.I. people living with dementia, and from their partners, families and carers. [Email Dr. Catherine Barrett](#)  to find out how you can participate

**Note: This piece was transcribed with minor editing from an email generated for various recipients by Michelle de Mari, Coordinator, Library and Information Services, Alzheimer's Australia N.S.W., Vincent Fairfax Resource Centre, 120 Coxs Road, North Ryde N.S.W., 2113**

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