

## Howard Brown Launches Elder Initiative

by Amy Wooten  
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Howard Brown recently announced a partnership designed to create a model of care for local LGBT elders.

The Chicago Elder Services Community Initiative, a collaborative project aimed to reach about 1,500 LGBT seniors during its pilot year, is a partnership between Howard Brown, Council for Jewish Elderly-Senior Life, Heartland Alliance, Midwest Palliative & Hospice CareCenter and Rush University Medical Center. Its goal is to build and sustain comprehensive programs that will address the needs of local LGBT seniors.

The project will provide a broad range of much-needed services such as medical care, mental healthcare, drop-in services, an in-home visitation program, peer-to-peer support and more. The project strives to be a model of providing “one-stop-shop” services to LGBT seniors.

Howard Brown received initial funding of \$120,000 from Baxter International Foundation and the Chicago Community Trust. Longtime supporter U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky, D-Ill., sponsored a \$383,000 federal grant to further support the project.

Schakowsky, who was present for the press conference, said she was “thrilled” and “honored” to contribute to a program that addresses such a tremendous need. “I wake up every day thankful to be in a position that I can do things like this,” the congresswoman said.

The Chicago Elder Services Community Initiative is taking a proactive approach to serving the needs of a growing LGBT senior population across the United States. One national agency estimates there will be between three and six million LGBT elders in the next 30 years.

Providing care for these elders—already a vulnerable population regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity—is important considering the barriers they continue to face, including access to healthcare and the higher likelihood of growing older alone.

According to Howard Brown, there are an estimated 40,000 LGBT seniors in Chicago. Of these LGBT elders, one in five has an annual income below \$20,000. The organization has found that LGBT seniors are more likely to face depression, substance abuse and more.

**National Gay and Lesbian Task Force senior strategist Amber Hollibaugh was present for the announcement. Hollibaugh called the project a “replicable model” that NGLTF is very excited about. According to Hollibaugh, there is an absence of programs for LGBT elders across the nation, and NGLTF estimates the number of LGBT seniors will double by 2030.**

“This is incredibly historic,” community activist Vernita Gray told Windy City Times, adding that she never thought she'd live to see the recent strides that the community has made in terms of offering LGBT senior programming.

“Not only am I a senior now, but I'm in a community that will be taking care of me as I am aging,” Gray said.

