

Understanding the Circumstances of LGBTQ+ Seniors

Over the past several decades, the population of aging individuals has increased and become much more diverse. With a rapidly increasing group of elders, there is a necessity to provide senior support systems for a variety of different groups of individuals, including sexual and gender minorities. These individuals, due to varying life events, have varying degrees of health and wellbeing, and therefore have varying needs and preferences in terms of late-life care. It is important to acknowledge the life events of LGBTQ+ seniors and how they may affect mental health, physical health, and overall quality of life.

LGBTQ+ individuals had been systematically oppressed by the Canadian government and judicial system up until the nationwide legalization of same-sex marriage in 2005. Individuals aged 55 and above may have had negative experiences and turmoil due to their sexual orientation or gender identity.¹


Timeline of LGBTQ+ Rights in Canada


1969	Homosexuality is decriminalized in Canada.
1973	Homosexuality is removed from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-3).
1996	Bill C-33, which adds "sexual orientation" to the Canadian Human Rights Act, is passed by the federal government.
2000	The Government of Alberta passes Bill 202, indicating their intent to use a notwithstanding clause if the federal government legalizes same-sex marriage.
2005	Same-sex marriage is legalized in Canada. ³
2013	Bill C-279 passes in Canada, extending human rights protections to transgender individuals. ²

Fast Facts

There are at least **3 MILLION** LGBTQ+ people aged 55+ in the US.

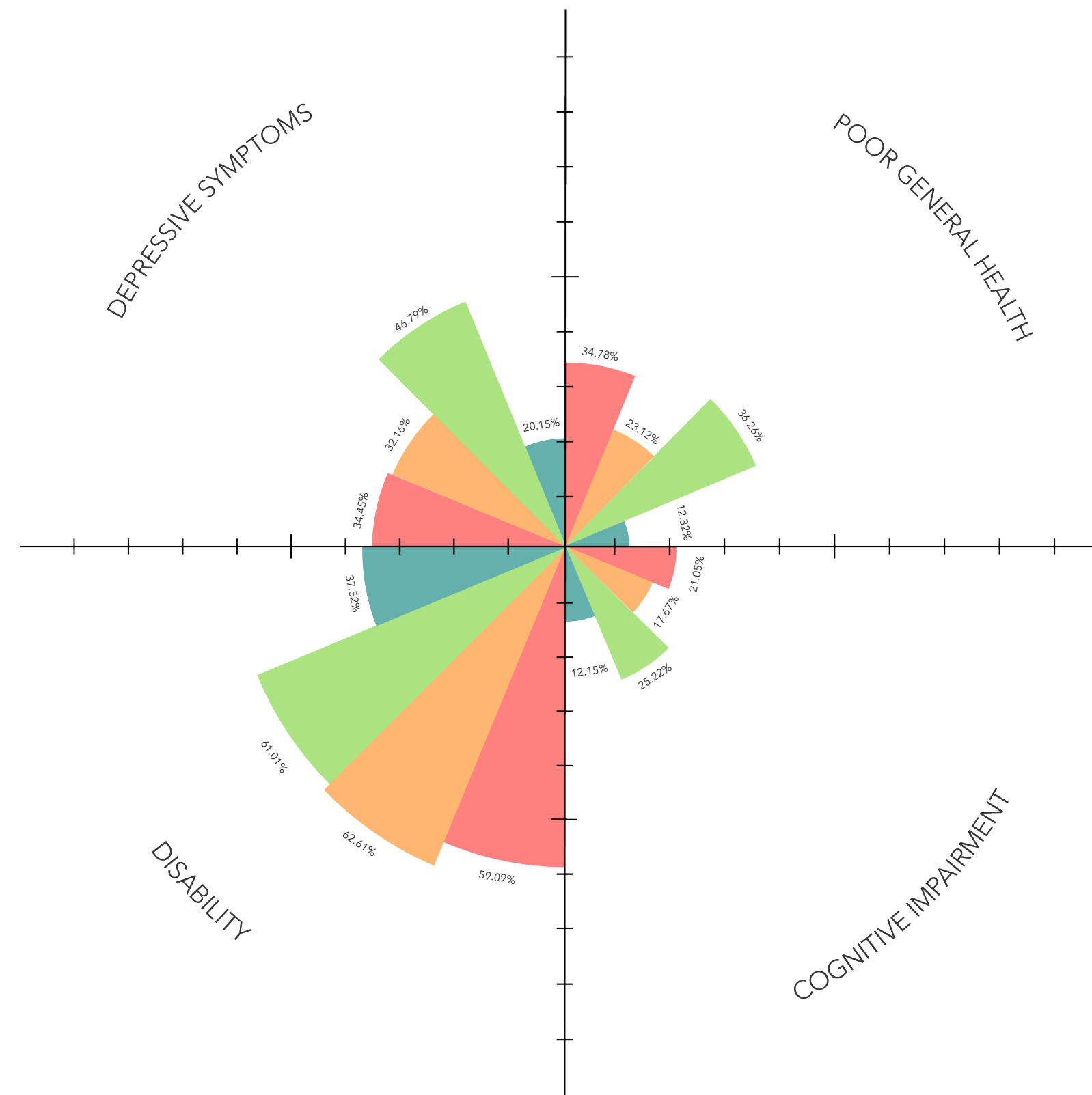
This number is expected to **DOUBLE** by 2034.

 **51%** of LGBTQ+ people aged 55+ state that they are concerned about their financial futures.

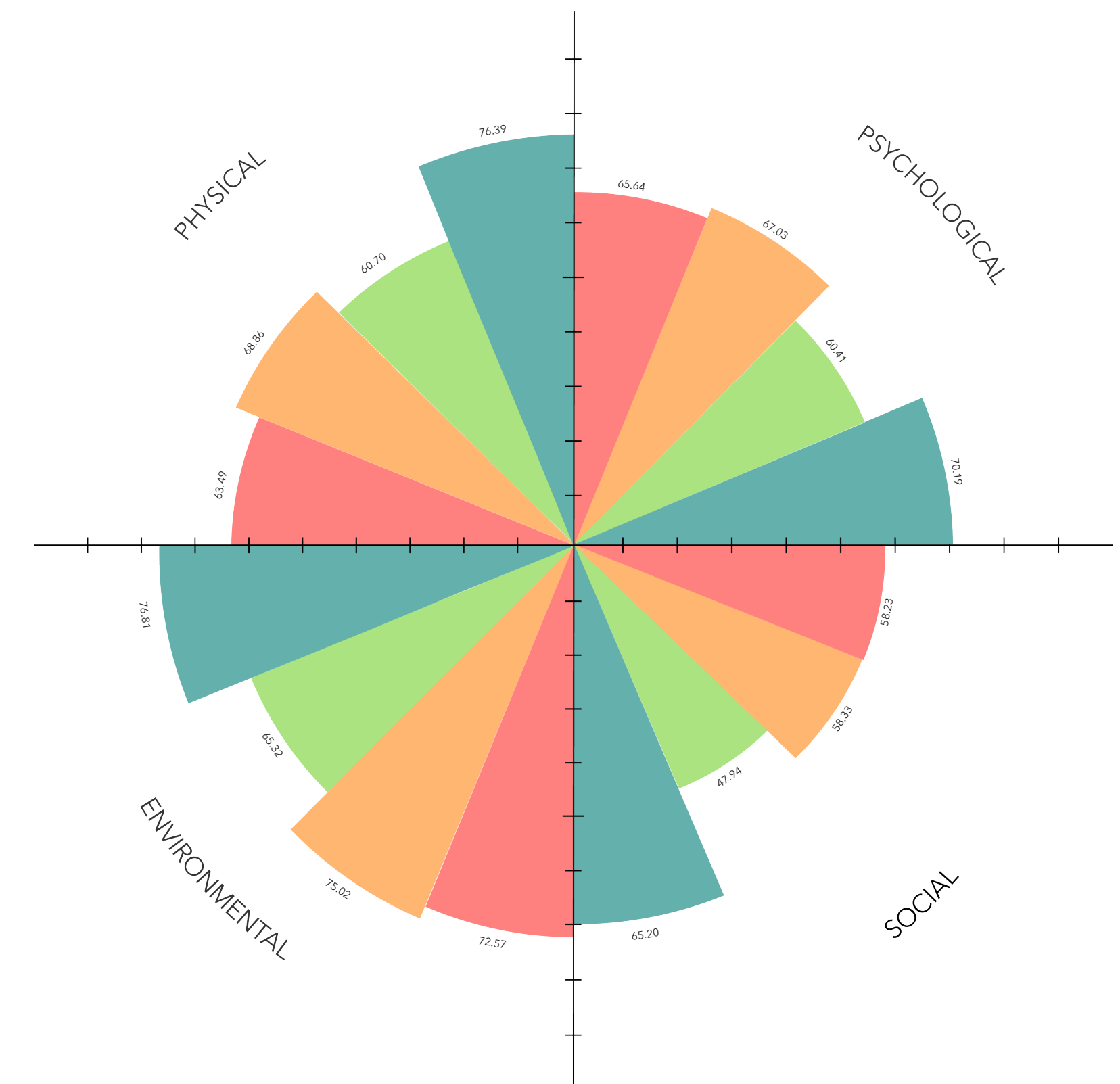
 **2/3** of transgender seniors worry about being denied or given limited access to health care.

 **24%** of LGBTQ+ seniors of colour have experienced housing discrimination.⁴

Percentage of LGBTQ+ seniors reporting negative health conditions.¹



Self-reported quality of life in LGBTQ+ seniors (range of 0-100).¹



Cluster 1: Retired Survivors

Cluster 1 is composed of individuals who became aware of their LGBTQ+ identity in early adolescence and disclosed this identity in early adulthood. Retired Survivors are categorized by a high rate of retirement, at 68.2%. 40.1% of Retired Survivors were involved in a current partnership, and 36.6% reported the death of a partner.

As one of the oldest clusters, these individuals likely experienced social exclusion and marginalization during formative times of their lives, which in turn impacted other parts of their lives. This is shown in their indications of quality of life, where social quality of life receives the lowest score. As the majority of Retired Survivors are not currently partnered, it can be assumed that many of these individuals have lived in isolation and poverty. Those whose partners died prior to the legalization of same-sex marriage could not have received financial benefits.

In order to support Retired Survivors, it is important for senior centres to provide financial advising as well as LGBTQ+ friendly social events.¹

Cluster 2: Midlife Bloomers

Midlife Bloomers became aware of their sexual or gender identity in their mid-40s. 80.3% of these individuals were in a heterosexual marriage prior to realizing their LGBTQ+ identity, and approximately 3/4 individuals had children.

Due to historical and individual life events, Midlife Bloomers either did not recognize their identity, or chose not to disclose it for fear of discrimination and social exclusion in early life. As well, many of these individuals reported a degree of religious or spiritual involvement, which may have contributed to their late recognition of LGBTQ+ identity. Midlife Bloomers, the youngest of the clusters, reported lower physical health than expected. This indicates that there may be some unique risks associated with this group of individuals, including a high percentage of transgender people and a low level of outness.

In order to support Midlife Bloomers, senior centres should offer financial advising, as many may have experienced divorce from a previous partner, as well as opportunities for spiritual and religious engagement.¹

Cluster 3: Beleaguered At-Risk

Beleaguered At-Risk individuals became aware of their LGBTQ+ identity in adolescence and disclosed their identity in early adulthood. 95.1% of these individuals reported job related discrimination. As well, only 37.8% of individuals in this cluster were involved in a partnership.

Cluster 3 is clearly the most disadvantaged of the four clusters, reporting high rates of job discrimination, involuntary job loss, and poverty. As the Beleaguered At-Risk is the youngest of the four clusters, it is assumed that many of these negative experiences occurred in early life, contributing to high percentages reporting negative mental and physical outcomes and low scores in all aspects of quality of life. As well, this group included a high proportion of ethnic minorities, a lower average education level, and higher levels of poverty in comparison to other clusters.

Support for Beleaguered At-Risk individuals must extend across a variety of fields such as financial counselling, access to health related care, unbiased housing information, and resources to assist with mental health issues.¹

Cluster 4: Visibly Resourced

Visibly Resourced individuals became aware of their LGBTQ+ identity in adolescence and disclosed their identity in their mid-20s. With a high degree of LGBT outness, these individuals reported high rates of employment and partnership (89.1% and 67.7% respectively). 35.7% of individuals in this cluster were part of a same-sex marriage, and approximately one third had children.

The Visibly Resourced cluster is the most advantaged of the four clusters, reporting higher incomes and levels of education, and low rates of victimization and discrimination. This may be in part due to the historical context during which Visibly Resourced individuals experienced many transforming life events. For example, many of these individuals came of age during the LGBTQ+ rights movement. As well, these individuals may have lived in cities or states with a higher degree of acceptance than that of individuals in other clusters. Fortunately, this is one of the most prevalent clusters, indicating that many LGBTQ+ seniors display good health and quality of life.¹