



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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ECUMEN DIVERSITY & INCLUSION COUNCIL RECEIVES MAKE ZERO HARM POSSIBLE AWARD

Saint Paul, MN (Oct. 3, 2019) – The Diversity & Inclusion Council at Ecumen was recently recognized with a Make Zero Harm Possible award from LeadingAge Minnesota.

The award recognizes individuals and staff teams in aging services settings who demonstrate their commitment to safe, quality care and to treating people with respect and dignity – always. Recognized for their leadership, commitment and dedication were Council members: Lisa Ambli, Wendy Brostrom, Sue Hillstad, Amber Hernandez, Christy Johnson, Corrine McCallum, Shannon Meyer, Carolyn Perron (council chair), Michelle Rivard, Tasha Saengo and Melanie Sullivan.

“To ensure respect and dignity for everyone they serve, Ecumen has made a priority of addressing the unique challenges of aging among people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT),” said Gayle Kvenvold, President and CEO, LeadingAge Minnesota. “Through their efforts, Ecumen is keeping residents and staff safe from all forms of harm, including discrimination based on sexual preferences or gender identity and creating a more welcoming organization for all who live and work in Ecumen settings.”

People over 60 in the LGBT community have lived much of their lifetimes dealing with discrimination because of their sexual preferences or gender identity, and that experience has shaped their attitudes much more than the very recent progress toward acceptance and inclusion. The fact is that many older LGBT adults do not think of senior communities as places where they will be welcomed, respected and treated with dignity.

A frequently cited national study documents the shockingly high percentage of LGBT adults who are fearful of being out and vulnerable in a senior care facility. Fully 89% of respondents predicted that staff would discriminate against an LGBT elder who was out. A majority (81%) also thought that other residents would discriminate and, more specifically, that other residents would isolate an LGBT resident (77%). Directly to the issue of safety, 53% predicted that staff would abuse or neglect an openly LGBT resident.

Ecumen’s Diversity & Inclusion Council is made up of team members from throughout the organization. The Council partnered with Training to Serve, a program of JustUs Health, to offer high-quality training on LGBT sensitivity to all Ecumen team members and to identify ways to be more welcoming to LGBT older adults.

The training sessions feature discussions on biological sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression; historical experiences that shape LGBT older adults’ lives; unique barriers faced by LGBT older adults; and opportunities to support welcoming services for LGBT older adults. The group exercises at the training sessions help participants better understand the world through the eyes of older LGBT people who have experienced a lifetime of discrimination.

To date, Ecumen has held 14 sessions with more than 300 participants. Additionally, Ecumen is hosting voluntary trainer-led discussions at its sites around the state to better acquaint residents with the LGBT community and its culture and challenges, and creating online training for team members unable to attend the in-person sessions.

The Make Zero Harm Possible award is one component of LeadingAge Minnesota's [Safe Care for Seniors](#) initiative, a comprehensive safety and quality improvement program. The program is designed to strengthen the culture of safety, prevent the risk of harm before it occurs, and uncover new opportunities for learning and improvement in the delivery of care and services.

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About LeadingAge Minnesota

Driven to transform and enhance the experience of aging, LeadingAge Minnesota is the state's largest association of organizations serving older adults. Together with more than 60,000 caregivers, our members provide quality, compassionate services and support to nearly 70,000 older adults every day in independent living, assisted living, adult day, and skilled nursing.