

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion in Senior Living



PRESBYTERIAN
SENIOR LIVING

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Introduction

Life plan communities promote a sense of belonging among residents and families. Whether a person enjoys the active lifestyle of an independent living community or a senior with dementia needs a secure, supportive environment, there's a home for them on a life plan campus.

Another way life plan communities promote belonging is through their commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). This commitment ensures that all stakeholders, from residents and families to team members and volunteers, feel welcomed.



Inside this Guide

At PSL communities, we believe that by lifting up and recognizing all members of society, we create an organization where everyone feels that they are valued. With this guide, we hope to provide people with an opportunity to learn more about DEI.

We'll explain the acronym DEI in more detail, discuss nationwide trends, talk about diversity, equity, and inclusivity in the senior living sector, offer ideas for promoting DEI in senior communities, and conclude by sharing PSL's commitment to embracing and welcoming differences.

What Does the Acronym *DEI* Stand For?

While many people have heard of *diversity*, the acronym *DEI* and the terms *equity* and *inclusion* are less familiar. Let's take a closer look at what DEI stands for and the meaning behind each of these terms:

Diversity: This is a broad term that encompasses all aspects of human differences, identity, and social groups. At a minimum, diversity can refer to race, ethnicity, creed, color, sex, gender/gender identity, sexual identity, socioeconomic status, language, culture, country of origin, religious beliefs, spirituality, age, (dis)ability, active military service/veteran status, and political affiliation.

Equity: Equity is different than equality, a term more people know. Equality is based on the idea that everyone is treated as if their experiences are the same. But equity refers to fair and just practices that allow people to thrive. It means acknowledging and addressing structural inequalities, both past and present, that advantage some and disadvantage others.

Inclusion: Another term people don't fully understand is inclusion. It occurs when all members of an organization or community feel respected and as if they belong. It's important to note that organizations and communities can be both diverse and non-inclusive at once. That's why it's important to create environments that nurture both.

Next, let's examine the shifting demographics in this country. And talk about how these changes are advancing the cause of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in a generation that has been slower to accept differences.





The Nationwide Shift in Diversity Trends

While cultural bias continues, more so in some areas of the country than others, there is reason for hope. On the whole, the general population is changing in demographic makeup as is the acceptance of people who have different beliefs and lifestyles.

Record High Approval of Same-sex Marriage: According to Gallup, the acceptance rate for same-sex marriage continues to trend upward. The current high of 70% is a 10% increase since 2015, when the Supreme Court ruled that all states must recognize it.

Overall Changes in Race and Ethnicity Numbers: As a nation, our racial and ethnic makeup is shifting. Surveys from the [Pew Research Center](#) highlight just how much racial and ethnic composition is changing in the United States. While growth of the Asian American population is slowing, it is still the fastest climbing racial or ethnic group in the U.S.

Another interesting statistic comes from the 2020 census. It revealed that the non-Hispanic White population, who identify as a single race, fell by 3% (or about 5.1 million people) between 2010 and 2020.

Younger People Represent a More Diverse Population: The racial diversity of the nation is predicted to increase from the younger to older age groups, according to the Brookings Institute. Between 2010 and 2019, the U.S. grew by 19.5 million people, a growth rate of 6.3%.

While the white population declined slightly, Latino or Hispanic, Asian American, and Black populations grew by rates of 20%, 29%, and 8.5%, respectively. The number of people who identify as biracial (falling into two different racial groups) is also up.

Why DEI Is Important in Senior Living

The number of older adults in this country is increasing, and this population is also becoming more diverse. Knowing and understanding the varied needs of older adults, while embracing this group with programs that celebrate who they are, is critical to the senior living sector. Using cookie-cutter programs that speak only to one dimension of the senior population doesn't work.

Instead, it is necessary to recognize that there are multiple intersections within the older adult population. Meaning that senior membership varies across, race, gender, age, nationality, religion, culture, sexuality, socioeconomic status and more. If senior living communities want to attract and retain residents who feel not only welcomed, but also have a sense of belonging, a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion must be evident.



This commitment needs to be visible in the diversity of staff working at senior communities, and at all levels of leadership. It needs to be authentic and apparent in the principles and values of an organization. Diversity, equity, and inclusion is important in senior housing to celebrate and promote the value of everyone who lives and works in this sector.



Is the Industry Becoming More Diverse and Inclusive?

In the past, LGBTQ+ seniors and older people of color sometimes felt it was a struggle to find acceptance in senior living communities. Fortunately, many organizations have made inclusion and diversity a priority and continue to accelerate their commitment. This has helped to make life plan campuses feel more welcoming.

The sense of acceptance and belonging is evident in a variety of ways:

Focus on Creating More Diverse Corporate Leadership Teams: Not-for-profit senior living organizations and corporately owned communities are beginning to recognize the value of creating diverse teams. That includes both community level caregivers as well as regional and senior leadership.

Family Decision Makers are Younger,

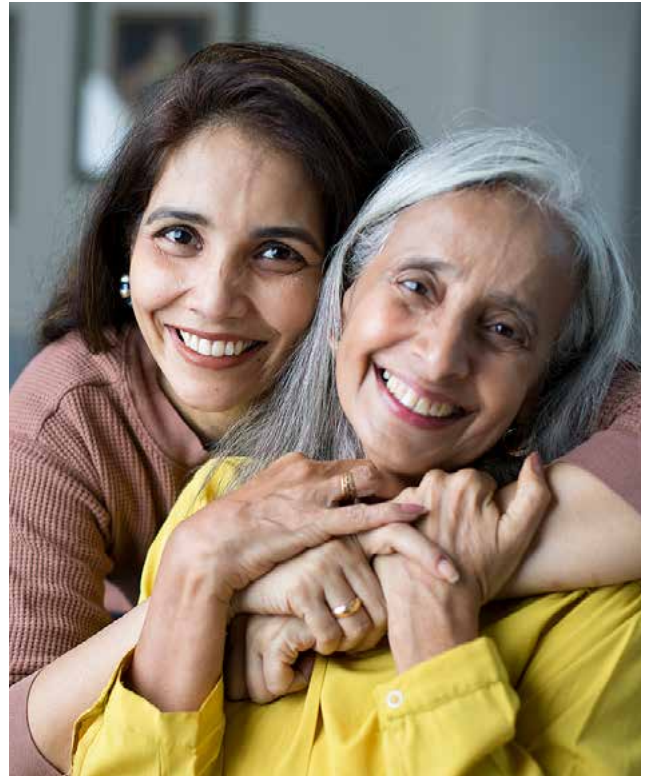
More Inclusive: Younger members of the family, such as adult children and grandchildren, often play a role in a senior loved one's decision about where to move. Because these family members often represent a more diverse population than their elders, the influence they have may be driving many senior communities to make changes. Because the younger generations may look for diversity and inclusion, they might make suggestions based on what they see and feel.

Recognition that Commitment to DEI

Attracts Better Talent: As more young people enter the job market seeking positions in everything from culinary departments to marketing and sales, it has become obvious that recruiting for diversity attracts top talent. When potential employees see organizations with environments that look like them, they are more likely to feel a sense of belonging and see a place where they can thrive.

Affordable Housing Options Help Break Economic Barriers: Another positive for senior living has been the growing number of affordable housing options. While PSL has been [working with older adults from all socioeconomic backgrounds](#) for over 90 years, that hasn't been the case for other housing providers. By offering housing choices that are income-based, senior living providers are better able to breakdown economic barriers and open up access.

While progress is apparent, there are other steps that life plan communities can take to further welcome and nurture a more diverse resident population.



How Life Plan Communities Can Promote DEI

What can senior housing organizations do to help advance DEI? And, what kinds of things should seniors and their adult children look for to evaluate a community's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion?

We have some suggestions that we hope you might find helpful:

Be Mindful of Photos and Stories Used in Advertising: The images a community puts out to the world tell a story. They can convey a message of welcome and inclusion or just the opposite. By ensuring that both print and digital images convey DEI, an organization can express their commitment to potential residents, families, and employees.

Host Celebrations Beyond Traditional Holidays: Senior living communities go above and beyond to celebrate many holidays and themed months such as Christmas, Independence Day, Alzheimer's Awareness Month, and Older Americans Month.

But there are many more that go unacknowledged. By expanding the activities calendar to include events like Black History Month, Pride Month, Kwanzaa, Hanukkah, and Las Posadas, communities send a message of welcome.

Combat Ageism and Promote Intergenerational Experiences: The senior living sector has long battled the myth that communities are full of fragile, old people. That visitors will largely find people who need assistance with even the smallest activities of daily living.



While we don't advocate excluding the oldest generation in advertising and promotions, it is important to show people who are younger and active. And to use images of residents engaged in down-to-earth activities, such as participating in a watercolor workshop or laughing over a card game with friends. Telling an intergenerational story through marketing efforts is important, so people understand the range of housing choices available in life plan communities.

Learn and Share Knowledge About Explicit and Implicit Bias:

Bias is prejudice against a person or group of people when compared to others. Our biases are usually based on factors such as prior experiences, socially constructed stereotypes, family, and personal background. There are two general types of bias—explicit and implicit.

When we have an *explicit* bias, there is an intentional component. We are very aware of our prejudices and accept the use of stereotypes. With implicit bias, however, there is no conscious recognition of bias. People act on a set of personal beliefs they aren't aware are prejudiced, intolerant, or discriminatory. As individuals, we can begin to recognize our implicit biases if we encounter a person or group that makes us feel uncomfortable, worried, unsure, or uneasy.

PSL's Commitment to DEI

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Commitment Statement

This statement represents the organization's promise that together we will work to bring forth the tenets represented in this commitment for all constituents:

The Culture and Values of Presbyterian Senior Living give assurance of our organization's commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion; ensuring that all stakeholders feel that they belong. Visible through our strategy of respecting individuals, we take initiative to cultivate awareness of personal differences and biases to establish an environment of understanding, acceptance, respect and support.

By lifting up voices and people, we will create an organization where all stakeholders feel that they are of value. Through this work, we will live out our commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion, in communion with our stakeholders.

Guided by our principles, PSL is committed to cultivating an open environment that actively encourages the unique experiences and backgrounds of all PSL employees. And one that ensures these perspectives are ingrained in decision-making processes. As we continue this journey, PSL will develop outcome measurements against which we will evaluate our successes and opportunities.

The following principles are at the forefront to guide our work:

- Engage and empower all stakeholders to embrace DEI philosophy.
- Pursue opportunities to engage, develop, and support all staff to foster an environment in which people see themselves as an integral part of the fabric of the organization.
- Include DEI practices throughout the organization so that a culture of belonging is evident to all persons served.

One program that helps PSL practice our principles is through what we call our *Culture Champions*.



Culture Champions Represent PSL Values

Culture Champions are PSL representatives empowered with living and teaching our values to others within their community or location. They lead the movement of our values and our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives forward and encourage others to do the same.



These team members represent all levels of living; every department, job title, and length of service. They participate in our new employee orientations, are a part of department meetings, and lead community/department celebrations recognizing the diverse culture that is a part of PSL.

According to Lajeune Adams, Corporate Director of Education, and Diversity and Inclusion Officer for PSL, "We ask interested team members to reach out to their leadership to be a part of this group. We look for those team members who demonstrate a positive attitude, are approachable and enthusiastic."

Lajeune further explains that PSL's Culture Champions "...are supported by all levels of leadership within the organization and meet as a group on a quarterly basis to share best practices."

Culture Champions provide a unique and meaningful way to educate stakeholders at all levels about PSL's initiatives and policies surrounding DEI. By inviting people at all levels of the organization to learn more, we believe we can create an environment that positions PSL as a leader diversity, equity, and inclusion in the senior living sector.

Continue Learning About PSL and DEI



In the [Embracing Our Differences series](#) on the PSL blog, we discuss topics related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. You'll find stories and articles ranging from a discussion on the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) to understanding bias. It's a great way to continue exploring DEI.

To stay connected and continue the discussion, we invite you to subscribe to the PSL blog. A few times each quarter, you'll have stories like these delivered directly to your inbox. And no worries about privacy! We'll never sell or share your information.

Schedule a Visit to a PSL Community

The best way to learn more about the services, amenities, programs, and mission of a senior living community is by visiting in person. We invite you to call the PSL community nearest you to schedule a visit today!



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