

For Immediate Release

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Let's Talk About SEX! An Educational Panel Discussion Event Provided by Erie County Senior Services to Challenge Stereotypes about Aging

Erie County, NY — SEX is an eyebrow-raising topic. It can be uncomfortable, challenging, and even silly—but it's also a normal, vital part of adult life. In celebration of Older Americans Month and its 2025 theme of *"Flipping the Script,"* Erie County Senior Services, in partnership with the Buffalo History Museum, hosted a powerful and enlightening event that confronted outdated perceptions of aging, sexuality, and relationships.

Titled *"Let's Talk About SEX: Flipping the Script on Aging and Intimacy,"* the event brought together a diverse audience of older adults, caregivers, and community members for an open, affirming conversation around topics that are too often silenced in later life. The event was also offered virtually to ensure accessibility for homebound older adults or for those who preferred to engage with the material in a more private, comfortable setting.

Aging isn't the end of the story—life, connection, and intimacy don't stop as we get older. But avoiding these conversations only adds to the stigma. That's why we created a space for open, honest, and sometimes uncomfortable, dialogue. Our goal is to assist everyone to age confidently.

Older adults often grew up in a time when sex education was either minimal or completely absent from school curriculums. Discussions around topics like consent, healthy relationships, or even the basic mechanics of sex were rarely addressed openly. Instead, the prevailing message was often a vague but firm "don't do it," rooted in shame and moral caution rather than information and understanding. Many were also raised to believe—or were encouraged to assume—that their parents were essentially asexual, and that sex was something inappropriate to discuss, let alone acknowledge as part of family life. As a result, there's a lingering perception among some that romance and sexuality are meant only for the young, and that love, intimacy, or desire naturally fade with age. This mindset can lead to the harmful belief that aging and romance are mutually exclusive, further silencing conversations and limiting emotional connection later in life. Even in long-lasting, healthy relationships, communication about sex and emotional needs can remain limited or entirely absent, simply because those conversations were never modeled or encouraged.

As part of its mission, the Department convened a panel of experts in healthcare, social work, therapy, and senior advocacy—including distinguished professionals from the University at Buffalo. Together, these thought leaders led a thoughtful and engaging discussion on a wide range of important topics, from self-esteem, body image, and physical

health to dating app safety, romance scams, and love bombing. They also addressed how to build healthy connections, navigate intimacy with limited mobility, and honor the unique experiences of LGBTQIA+ older adults.

The panel offered valuable insights into fostering healthy relationships, practicing consent, using dating apps safely, and maintaining sexual wellness at every stage of life.

Panelists included:

- **Jane Orlowski**- An Erie County older adult who shared her life experiences with the crowd.
- **Stephanie Saia**- A Public Health Educator at the Erie County Family Planning Center, where she specializes in sexual health education across all ages. With a background in health equity and a passion for promoting safe sex, sex positivity, and healthy relationships, Stephanie brings both expertise and empathy to every conversation. She explored how our bodies and sexual health evolve over time—an important, often overlooked topic.
- **Jack Kavanaugh (he/him)**, a seasoned nonprofit executive and social worker focused on youth advocacy and community development. As Executive Director of GLYS: Growing LGBTQ+ Youth Support, Jack also teaches at the University at Buffalo and mentors nonprofit leaders nationwide. His experience bridges intergenerational connection, inclusion, and empowerment—essential in fostering understanding across age groups.
- **Dr. Darci Cramer**, a marriage and family therapist with over three decades of experience. She serves as Assistant Research Professor of Psychiatry at the University at Buffalo and has held national leadership roles in her field. Dr. Cramer offered valuable expertise on emotional intimacy, navigating long-term relationships, and addressing the evolving dynamics of sexual health in aging.
- **Cynthia Stewart, PhD**, Executive Director of DART Collective and Program Manager for the Center for Information Integrity at UB, where she works to combat online misinformation. With over 20 years of experience, Dr. Stewart addressed issues around digital safety for older adults navigating online dating and relationships in the digital age.

“Too often, society treats older adults as invisible or uninterested when it comes to intimacy,” said **Randy Hoak, Commissioner of Erie County Senior Services**. “This event was about breaking down those harmful myths and giving everyone the tools and information they need to live fuller, more empowered lives.”

Recent data underscores the urgency of these conversations. Between 2015 and 2022, New York State reported a steady rise in sexually transmitted infections (STIs) among adults aged 60 and older, including chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis. These trends emphasize

the importance of accessible sexual health education tailored to older adults—an age group often overlooked in traditional public health outreach.

Panelists emphasized that healthy aging includes emotional intimacy and connection. Love, desire, and pleasure do not have an expiration date. Attendees left the event equipped with resources, practical knowledge, and a renewed confidence in embracing their sexuality on their own terms.

Erie County Senior Services extends heartfelt thanks to The Buffalo History Museum for their partnership and hospitality. The museum's support helped foster a vibrant, inclusive atmosphere where participants felt safe, seen, and celebrated.

This event was a powerful reminder: aging doesn't mean invisibility. It means living boldly, asking questions, and continuing to grow. And yes—still having fun.

To learn more about Erie County Senior Services, visit: <https://www3.erie.gov/seniorservices/>