



WHY DON'T WE KNOW HOW MANY 2S2SLGBTQ+ CANADIANS THERE ARE?

With nearly any other group, it would be fairly easy to access demographic data about our target audience. However, getting a clear demographic picture of the rainbow community in Waterloo Region is complicated by the following factors.

The Failure of Governments to Collect Data

Even after homosexuality was decriminalized in 1967, governments and other data-gathering organizations failed to ask questions about 2SLGBTQ+ populations, meaning that no data was collected about these populations. Even after decriminalization, government was slow to implement data collection mechanisms about 2SLGBTQ+ populations:

- Statistics Canada didn't include its first question about sexual orientation on the national census until 2003.
- In 2006, the national census included its first question about same-sex married couples, following the legalization of same-sex marriage in 2005.
- It did not include questions about same-sex common-law couples until 2011.
- The census *has never included* questions about gender identity. Questions are currently being tested on "sex at birth" and gender identity for the 2021 census, but this data will likely not be available to the public until 2022.

The result of these failures of information gathering is that we have only a decade of marginally useful census data about people in same-gender relationships, and have no census data on people who are trans, non-binary, Two-Spirit, or otherwise not cisgender.

The Lived Experience of Elders: Closeting as a Survival Skill

The additional complicating factor is that any government-led information gathering is going to underrepresent the true numbers because of the lived experience of rainbow elders who have

directly experienced violence and marginalization as a result of their identity or orientation and who are therefore less likely to share information about gender and sexual identities in government surveys.

Additionally, while same-gender relationships are no longer criminalized, transgender and gender-nonconforming people are still greatly targeted for violence and persecution by police, especially trans women of color¹. Governments have not done enough to earn the trust of the rainbow community, so any official statistics should be seen as under-representing the actual numbers.

Best-Guess Demographic Analysis

Thanks to the efforts of a number of rainbow-led and rainbow-focused support and advocacy organizations, there have been a number of smaller studies conducted over the last decade that can help us piece together a best-guess understanding of the 2SLGBTQ+ people in Waterloo Region.

- Government sources say report the 2SLGBTQ+ population at between 4-6%; Other surveys have reported numbers as high as 13%. Splitting the difference, a conservative estimate that 2SLGBTQ+ people comprise 7.5% of the adult population is probably a reasonable operating assumption. **This would put the 2SLGBTQ+ population in Waterloo Region at between approximately 39,000 and 46,000².** (The lower number is if you entirely exclude children; there are no specific census numbers for teens.)
- **Younger people are significantly more likely to have a gender identity that is not binary.** Among respondents to the WRRRC OutLook Study, approximately one tenth (12%) identified with genders outside the binary. However, people outside the binary comprised nearly a fifth (19%) of respondents ages 16-19.
- **About a third of rainbow youth in Ontario are racialized.** Among the 2019 YouthLine survey of 2SLGBTQ+ youth in Ontario, 32% of respondents were BIPOC.
- **Around a tenth of trans and non-binary youth in Ontario are Indigenous.** A large 2019 national survey of trans and non-binary youth reported that 10% of respondents in Ontario were Indigenous. However, an Ontario-specific 2019 survey of 2SLGBTQ+ youth conducted by YouthLine reported that 15% of respondents were indigenous.

¹ Math according to Region of Waterloo 2019 population estimate:

<https://www.regionofwaterloo.ca/en/regional-government/population.aspx#>