

# Resources For Service Providers

*Preventing Suicide and Promoting Trans Wellness For Service Providers*



# Preventing Suicide and Promoting Trans Wellness: Resources for Service Providers

Equity and inclusion should always be part of the conversation. Providing trans inclusive care in front-line services is essential to addressing the significant health disparities and barriers to services experienced by many trans people.

## Core Inclusion Practices for Working with Trans People

Trans people are diverse, and our care-related needs are too. The tips identified below are key practices that service providers can utilize to inform their work with trans and gender diverse communities. These are not comprehensive, nor are they intended to be, but pertinent core practices that are essential to inclusive care.

### Tip 1: Respect Pronouns and Chosen Names

Respecting the pronouns of individuals accessing services makes or breaks an inclusive experience. Trans and gender diverse people often experience microaggressions (meaning indirect, subtle, and/or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalized group) when accessing services, often through misgendering (use of the wrong gendered term or pronoun) or deadnaming (use of a previous name that is no longer used). Provide inclusive services to trans and gender diverse individuals by asking clients what pronouns they use, using chosen names when speaking with clients, and normalizing the use of gender-neutral pronouns (like “they” and “them”) in instances where you are unsure of someone’s

correct pronouns.

### Tip 2: Use Gender-Neutral Language

Respecting pronouns and chosen names are a big first step, but we must unpack the assumptions we make in other parts of our language. We often assume that everyone is heterosexual and/or cisgender (i.e., not trans) by default. Our language often reflects that. Using gender-neutral language helps everyone feel welcome and included while accessing services.

“Could I have everyone’s attention? I think Jay left their health card at the front desk.”

### **Tip 3: Lead with Empathy**

Many people within trans and gender diverse communities struggle isolation, fear of harassment, and higher rates of mental health problems. Many 2SLGBTQ+ individuals are not connected to their families due to histories of homophobia and transphobia and don't have access to personal support networks. While we may not be able to completely understand or put ourselves in the heads of our trans clients, we can lead with empathy.

"Thank you for sharing your story with me. I can imagine it's been hard to manage being stuck in an unsafe home and family environment. I'm here to help as best I can."

### **Tip 4: Acknowledge and Apologize for Mistakes**

No one expects you to be perfect. We are all trying our best to provide inclusive, evidence-based care. Mistakes can and will happen. But when it comes to inclusion and equity, we must acknowledge that our mistakes, intentional or not, can cause harm. Apologizing for and correcting our mistakes helps ensure trans and gender diverse clients feel seen and safe accessing services.

### **Tip 5: Care for Yourself**

Care work is hard work. Service providers often have significant case-loads, a huge diversity of clients with distinct needs, and many other stressors. We must care for ourselves in order to provide inclusive and empathetic care to others. Caring for ourselves best positions us to care for and support others. By prioritizing our own health and well-being, we also model those practices with our clients. We deserve time to recuperate and support ourselves.

"It's been a really hard day, week, month and year. I think I'll treat myself to some Netflix binge-watching tonight to get my mind off everything going on at the clinic and help me decompress."

## **Creating Welcoming and Trans-Inclusive Environments**

Creating an inclusive and welcoming environment is essential to supporting and affirming trans and gender diverse communities accessing community, health, and social services. Physical environments fundamentally shape how people feel while they access services. By taking trans communities into consideration in physical space design, you can demonstrate your commitment to trans inclusion, and signal to trans people accessing care that your organization is committed to providing a welcoming and affirming experience.

### **Here are Some Steps You Can Take to Create a Welcoming and Inclusive Environment for Trans and Gender Diverse People:**

#### **Step 1: Provide Gender Neutral Washrooms**

Many spaces don't provide gender-neutral washrooms, and many trans people, including trans women, trans men, non-binary folks and others often feel unsafe accessing gendered washrooms. Many trans people have experienced harassment or discrimination while using gendered washrooms.

It is important to note that trans people have every right to use whichever washroom they so desire. Trans people should never be forced to use gender-neutral washrooms, but the option should always be available.

## **Step 2: Display Trans-Specific and Trans-Inclusive Resources**

Community, health and social services often have pamphlets, posters and other resources on display to help individuals gain new knowledge or learn about other available services. By including resources for trans-specific services in your community, and ensuring that available resources utilize trans-inclusive language, you can create a more welcoming environment for trans people.

Consider reaching out to local 2SLGBTQ+ and trans organizations to identify and share local resources.

## **Step 3: Include Pronouns on Name Tags**

Creating an inclusive environment extends not only to the physical features of a space, but to the people in your space as well. Consider adding pronouns to your staff team's name tags. Including pronouns on name tags signals to trans people that your staff are knowledgeable about pronouns and acts as an invitation for trans people to disclose their own pronouns. You may also wish to consider having pronoun buttons available in your waiting room, to help ensure your staff respect the genders and pronouns of all service users

## **Step 4: Explore Other Opportunities to Signal Your Commitment To Trans Inclusion**

Consider creating explicit messaging on posters and signage that communicates your commitment to trans inclusion. Putting up rainbow stickers, adding a sign saying, "all genders are welcome here," and similar indicators of your commitment to trans and 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion are an effective way to ensure trans and gender diverse people know they are welcome and accepted in your space.

As you explore making changes to your physical space to better convey your commitment to trans inclusion, keep in mind that these changes entail a promise to trans and gender diverse communities. Before putting up a rainbow flag, make sure your staff have the knowledge and tools they need to provide inclusive services to trans and gender diverse people.

## **Ensuring Privacy and Confidentiality for Trans People**

Many trans people have unique privacy and confidentiality needs that require particular consideration, given that service providers are often privy to confidential information about trans people.

For example, many trans people use chosen names which differ from their legal names, so providers may know a legal name that their trans client prefers not to use. Providers may be aware of the designated 'sex' marker on a trans client's identification documents. Providers may also know additional information expressed in confidence by their trans client, or within shared medical documents.

Private information about trans clients should only be shared with the express and informed consent of the trans client in question. Due to transphobia, information about trans people, such as their medical histories and their trans status, are often of particular interest to cisgender people. This can, in some instances, result in service providers inadvertently violating a trans person's right to privacy through the disclosure of confidential information.

Violations of privacy or confidentiality can often become safety concerns for trans people. For example, some trans people are not out to their families, and disclosure of their

trans status can jeopardize a trans person's safety in their familial context. The utmost care and consideration should be taken to ensure all private information shared in confidence by trans people is kept private and confidential.

Organizations should create clear policies and procedures pertaining to confidential information shared by trans clients and colleagues. For example, while a legal name is often required for medical records and during intake processes, organizations should take every step possible to ensure this information is kept confidential, and that the chosen name provided is used in every possible instance.

### **Tips for Protecting the Privacy and Confidentiality of Trans Clients**

- 1) Communicate clear expectations with all members of your staff regarding trans-specific privacy and confidentiality issues, including legal name, trans status and medical histories.
- 2) Provide staff members with training on trans identities and trans inclusion, including practices for navigating confidentiality and privacy rights.
- 3) Introduce formal policies to guide the use of chosen names versus legal names, and to codify organization-wide practices for maintaining privacy and confidentiality pertaining to legal names that differ from chosen names.
- 4) Codify processes for managing complex privacy and confidentiality issues, such as situations where a trans youth is accessing care under a different name than they use with their family.

- 5) Immediately address any and all instances where staff members have violated a trans person's confidentiality and privacy.

## **Building Organizational Capacity for Trans Inclusion**

We all have to start somewhere on our individual and organizational journeys towards trans inclusion. However, many of us often struggle to take those first steps, or to understand what shape our journeys might take. This resource is intended for organizational leaders and change champions to explore an implementation-based and community-engaged approach to building organizational capacity for trans inclusion.

### **Step 1: Conduct preliminary staff capacity building on trans inclusion**

First and foremost, organizations should build baseline competencies across their staff teams. This includes building common knowledge of key concepts related to trans inclusion, such as gender identity, gender expression, pronouns, and other core competencies. Staff training should be provided to all members of an organization - from front-line staff all the way up to senior leadership and board members - to ensure that all members of the organization have the knowledge they need to positively engage with trans communities.

### **Step 2: Engage trans communities and organizations**

Engaging with local trans communities and organizations is essential to building organizational capacity on trans inclusion. Through engagement with local trans communities, your organization can respond to the unique needs of your region, build relationships of trust, and work with trans communities to address barriers to trans inclusion within your

workplace.

By creating an advisory committee, working group, or similar body, with compensated members of trans and gender diverse communities, you can work together to strengthen your organizational commitment to trans inclusion.

### **Step 3: Conduct a trans inclusion audit**

Addressing issues and gaps regarding trans inclusion first requires a comprehensive audit of existing policies, procedures and practices, across every aspect of your organization. Consider inviting members of local trans communities to undertake a tour of your physical locations, review your policies and procedures, model a typical intake process and otherwise audit your organization for gaps in trans inclusivity. Collect a comprehensive inventory of gaps and opportunities to be addressed through a trans inclusion strategy.

### **Step 4: Create a trans inclusion strategy**

Based on the findings of your trans inclusion audit and input from local trans communities, develop a trans inclusion strategy to guide your efforts. Identify key activities, establish clear timelines and allocate the necessary financial resources to put your trans inclusion strategy into action. Review your trans inclusion strategy on an annual basis to assess progress, identify barriers, and adapt as needed to ensure effective implementation. In developing your inclusion strategy, review established best practices on trans inclusive policies, such as those created by the Ontario Human Rights Commission.

### **Step 5: Provide comprehensive and ongoing trans inclusion training**

Ensuring that all members of your organization have the core competencies and tools required to support trans service users is an essential first step, but organizations should

also explore in-depth and program-specific training for different staff teams. This ensures that all teams within an organization are gaining the specific knowledge and skills relevant to their particular roles. For example, the knowledge and tools required to provide trans-inclusive housing services are distinct from those working in a sexual health clinic, which are in turn distinct from those working in a peer drop-in program.

### **Step 6: Evaluate, measure, and refine trans inclusion efforts**

Monitor and evaluate your trans inclusion efforts to ensure fulsome, organization-wide capacity for trans inclusion. Through ongoing monitoring and evaluation activities, you can adjust to address gaps, adapt planned activities to better align with the needs of local trans communities, and otherwise ensure that your efforts towards trans inclusion are resulting in concrete organizational and practice-based change.

## **Communicating Your Commitment to Trans Inclusion**

Trans communities and healthcare institutions have a long, tumultuous, and traumatic history. For generations, healthcare systems have treated trans people as ‘disordered’ individuals who need to be ‘cured’ or ‘fixed.’ While social acceptance of trans people has grown in recent decades, those histories still influence health services and the relationship between trans communities and healthcare systems.

Historical and contemporary transphobia result in feelings of fear and uncertainty for trans people seeking access to community, health and social services. Given that trans communities have higher rates of poverty, homelessness and other health and socio-economic issues due to transphobia, access

to inclusive health services is absolutely essential.

Demonstrating your commitment to trans inclusion is an opportunity to reduce trans people's fears and anxieties about accessing health services. While organizations must take steps to bolster their capacity to deliver trans-inclusive care, they must also communicate their commitment to trans inclusion with the public as a means of building trust with trans and gender diverse communities.

## How to Communicate Your Commitment to Trans Inclusion

- 1) Publish a statement articulating your support for trans inclusion, and your organization's commitment to trans inclusion in every facet of your work. Within such a statement, be honest about your organization's current capacity to serve trans people, provide information on what steps you have taken to build your capacity, and include concrete next steps that your organization is taking to advance trans inclusion.
- 2) Communicate with your staff, board and volunteers: Take steps to make sure all employees within your organization understand your commitment to trans inclusion. Provide clear communication to staff and volunteers articulating your expectations of trans inclusion in every aspect of your work and ensure that staff members have access to necessary training and resources to put trans inclusion into action.
- 3) Participate in local, regional and national events and days of action: There are numerous opportunities year-round for your organization to

be present at local events, and to mark important annual events relevant to trans communities. Examples include Trans Day of Remembrance, every year on November 20<sup>th</sup>, Trans Day of Visibility, every year on March 31<sup>st</sup>, Pride Season - local pride events traditionally take place between June and August every year and the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia, every year on May 17<sup>th</sup>.

- 4) Share relevant resources and information about trans-inclusive services: Your organization can share resources on trans inclusion, trans health, and trans rights on your social media and website. You can also identify and promote local resources that are specific to trans and 2SLGBTQ+ communities. For resources to share, you can connect with local 2SLGBTQ+ and trans organizations or share resources from provincial or national organizations. Some great places to start include Trans Care BC, Rainbow Health Ontario, The Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity or Egale Canada.

# Additional Learning Opportunities for Service Providers

It is important for service providers to continue learning about trans and gender diverse people and to build their capacity to provide inclusive and affirming services to trans communities. While this toolkit has identified core concepts and key practices, it is but a first step on a much longer journey. The resources identified below can help you continue to learn about how to support trans and gender diverse people.

- **Trans Inclusion in Action with Wisdom2Action and the Canadian Public Health Association:** These practical guides and resources can help you learn more about trans people, advocate for trans inclusion in your workplace, and further refine your practice with trans communities. You can view the full resource kit at [www.wisdom2action.org/transinclusion](http://www.wisdom2action.org/transinclusion)
- **LGBTQ2+ Health Connect with Rainbow Health Ontario:** LGBTQ2+ Health Connect is a virtual learning platform with a wealth of resources and training opportunities on gender and sexual health and well-being. You can visit the e-learning platform at [learn.rainbowhealthontario.ca/](http://learn.rainbowhealthontario.ca/)
- **Fostering environments that are inclusive of gender identity and gender expression, by the 519:** This campaign created by the 519 includes posters, resources, a language guide and a toolkit on creating Authentic Spaces. You can view it here: [www.the519.org/education-training/our-campaigns/trans-inclusion-matters](http://www.the519.org/education-training/our-campaigns/trans-inclusion-matters)
- **The Remedy: Queer and Trans Voices on Health and Health Care, by Zena Sherman:** This book brings together key concepts and practices for service providers to better support 2SLGBTQ+ people in healthcare contexts. <https://zenasharman.com/the-remedy>
- **Gender Basics & Education by TransCare BC:** Trans Care BC has a comprehensive set of digital resources pertinent to trans inclusion and trans healthcare, including self-reflection tools, online courses and key information on transition-related healthcare. [www.phsa.ca/transcare-bc/gender-basics-education](http://www.phsa.ca/transcare-bc/gender-basics-education)
- **SPECTRUM's Rainbow Diversity Training:** SPECTRUM offers a variety of workshops in 2SLGBTQ+ cultural competency that help organizations along the path towards becoming more welcoming and inclusive to 2SLGBTQ+ employees, clients, and other partners or stakeholders: <https://www.ourspectrum.com/services/rdt/>.