

2SLGBTQQIA+ Gender Affirming Care for Healthcare Providers

Gender-Affirming care is the care that supports a client, patient, or service user's experience that is appropriate for their gender and/or sexual orientation. Having a positive, affirming and respectful experience is important for anyone accessing health or social services, but it is especially important for 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals accessing health or social services. These experiences have a direct impact on health and wellbeing and if the services will be accessed again. As a healthcare provider, providing gender-affirming care fosters a trusting and inclusive environment. A positive experience means service users are more likely to be open and honest about their experiences and needs. A negative experience's possible outcome may inhibit an individual from accessing preventative and necessary care. Gender-affirming care is life saving healthcare.

What does gender-affirming care include?

First point of contact employees should have the knowledge and capacity for a positive and affirming experience of 2SLGBTQQIA+ service users. Interactions with employees of these settings at any level can indicate treatment of 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals. It is imperative that first point of contact employees are able to be respectful of desired pronouns (including use) and personal experiences (that are gendered and related to sexual orientation).

When new service users access health or social services it is important to have intake forms that reflect the diversity of the population. Intake forms are one of the first steps in accessing services. Make space for preferred names and pronouns. Avoid using gendered language and instead use terms like people with a uterus or chest-feeding. Provide options that are outside the gender binary.

A comfortable environment will ease people accessing services. Pride Flags or posters support a safe space for all to access are essential for informing individuals that this is a space that they can use safely. Avoid gendering washrooms or provide an all-genders washroom. Inform new service users or post that there are policies that are enforced to provide a non-discriminatory service and ensure that all staff have applicable knowledge, training, and awareness of policies. Support from families is beneficial but respecting the individual's choice of this involvement is key.

What should appointments look like?

FAs as a healthcare provider or social service provider you have a duty in your actions to ensure that you are promoting a positive and welcoming space for 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals accessing services.

1. Never assume that a person is heterosexual or cisgender, these perceptions can be harmful and invalidating and starts rapport on a negative note.
2. Use open-ended questions to engage and find further information and do not assume experiences. Individuals are the expert on their own bodies and should have autonomy when it comes to disclosure and decisions surrounding their treatment plan.
3. Be sure to be knowledgeable about the health and social determinants of health that affect 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals, this will ensure that wrap-around care and a holistic approach is centered to benefit the individual. This also ensures that other intersections of identity is not being overlooked such as age, race, ability and socioeconomic status.
4. Provide services with a trauma-informed approach by checking in with the individual and making sure that the experience is beneficial for them. Pay attention to the language that is used by the individual describing their body and care that they are receiving and have received.
5. Take accountability for mistakes and be open to discussions on how to move forward around this.

What knowledge of practices should you be familiar with?

2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals may seek medical or social assistance in aligning with gender identity. Gender dysphoria is feelings of discomfort or stress related to a person's gender identity this is because the person's gender identity does not align with the sex assigned at birth. This may appear at any age or stage in a person's journey. Individuals may request medical interventions to help with gender affirmation as well as social interventions with care providers that are knowledgeable with education on processes and counselling. An individualized approach is essential in these services. It is important to understand the risks of treatment but also the risks of withholding treatment.

Hormone Replacement Therapy

Hormone Replacement Therapy is a collaborative endeavor that requires a positive relationship with a medical provider. Hormone Replacement Therapy helps with bringing appearance in line with gender identity. This therapy involves taking prescriptions to increase hormones and block other ones such as Testosterone-based hormone therapy and Estrogen-based hormone therapy. Youth are able to access Hormone Replacement Therapy without the consent of caregivers. Assessment is conducted over a couple of visits. Number of visits is determined by physical and mental health of the individual seeking treatment. If you as a healthcare provider are not able to competently support Trans individuals or other gender diverse individuals, please refer to designated specialists.

Transition Related Surgeries

There are a number of gender-affirming surgeries that individuals may choose. To access publicly funded surgeries, individuals need to meet WPATH criteria and psychosocial readiness. You must be a qualified provider to assess individuals. Specific training and supervision are required to qualify. Once assessments are completed you are able to refer service user's for procedures. If you as a healthcare provider are not able to competently support Trans individuals or other gender diverse individuals, please refer to designated specialists.

PrEP or PeP

PrEP and PeP are primarily used for the prevention of HIV exposure but there are also other reasons that one might wish to access preventative treatment such as measures to control one's own sexual health and reduce anxiety about HIV exposure. Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis is a medication routine that is most beneficial when taking the prescription up to 4x a week becoming 99% effective^[1]. There is public funding for individuals to access PreP. PeP, Post-Exposure Prophylaxis is used when an HIV negative person might have come into contact with HIV. PeP must be taken within 72 hours of exposure and conducted over a period of a few weeks. Some provinces have subsidized cost for these medications and some provinces provide them for free. If you as a healthcare provider are not able to competently support Trans individuals or other gender diverse individuals, please refer to designated specialists.

Along with medical supports, social supports may be needed for Trans and gender diverse individuals. Rainbow Health Ontario provides a directory of listed social service 2SLGBTQQAI+ providers which can be consulted here: [Rainbow Health Ontario - Service Provider Directory](#).

Indigenous Individuals can receive gender-affirming health benefits from the First Nations Health Authority. Many gender-affirming surgeries are covered under these benefits as well as some medical supplies and travel expenses. If an individual is not able to access benefits from the First Nations Health Authority, expenses can be expended through the federal Non-Insured Health Benefits Program. Alternative funding may also be covered through association with Individual Bands. Although these benefits are for Indigenous individuals that have registered status some individuals may meet the criteria to be registered and support could be given to have this. It is important to keep in mind that status has been used as an exclusionary practice historically and criteria has and can change.

For more information as a healthcare provider or social service provider please refer to the following link: [Trans Care BC - Health Professionals](#)