

# JUST BE YOURSELF

A HEALTH AND WELLNESS  
GUIDE FOR TRANS, TWO-SPIRIT,  
& NONBINARY YOUTH

x<sup>w</sup>məθk<sup>w</sup>əyəm Territory  
Healthcare Ethics & Equity Team  
School of Nursing  
The University of British Columbia  
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HEALTHCARE  
ETHICS & EQUITY  
T E A M

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# Land Acknowledgment

*We begin by acknowledging our research team works on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the Musqueam people. The land it is situated on has always been a place of learning for the Musqueam, who for millennia have passed on their culture, history, and traditions from one generation to the next on this site.<sup>1</sup>*

We offer our acknowledgement, gratitude, and respect to all Indigenous communities on whose traditional territories this guide is shared. We encourage you to take the time to reflect on the lands you are on while accessing this guide.<sup>2</sup>

We celebrate and honour Indigenous transgender, nonbinary, and Two-Spirit people and communities. We recognize the harms of colonization and the ongoing role colonialism plays in disrupting Indigenous Ways of Knowing, including through imposing binary concepts of gender and sex.

This guide addresses wellness-related questions from Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth from across the country colonially known as Canada. We recognize that Indigenous transgender, nonbinary, and Two-Spirit youth have unique experiences with healthcare services and our work to improve health information and health services must be intersectional.

We encourage everyone seeking to improve gender-affirming care and wellness services to strive to do this in a good way, engaging with cultural humility<sup>3</sup> as we collectively work toward cultural safety,<sup>4</sup> truth and reconciliation, and the eradication of Indigenous-specific racism.

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<sup>1</sup> UBC Vancouver Indigenous Portal: <http://aboriginal.ubc.ca/community-youth/musqueam-and-ubc/>

<sup>2</sup> Visit <https://native-land.ca/> to learn more about Indigenous lands.

<sup>3</sup> “Cultural humility is a process of self-reflection to understand personal and systemic biases and to develop and maintain respectful processes and relationships based on mutual trust. Cultural humility involves humbly acknowledging oneself as a learner when it comes to understanding another’s experience.”

(<https://www.fnha.ca/what-we-do/cultural-safety-and-humility>)

<sup>4</sup> “Cultural safety is an outcome based on respectful engagement that recognizes and strives to address power imbalances inherent in the health care system. It results in an environment free of racism and discrimination, where people feel safe when receiving health care.” (<https://www.fnha.ca/what-we-do/cultural-safety-and-humility>)

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# Introduction

## *Overview*

Welcome to *Just Be Yourself: A Wellness Guide for Transgender, Two-Spirit, and Nonbinary Youth* in Canada! We're glad you're here. You are not alone. Wherever you are on your journey, we hope that this guide will help you to find answers to some of your questions.

We know Transgender, Two-Spirit, and Nonbinary (TTNB) youth across Canada have questions about ways to support their gender journeys. We received a grant from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research to support this project, which addresses the health information needs of TTNB youth up to age 25.

A TTNB Youth Advisory Team guided this project, working collaboratively with researchers at The University of British Columbia from May 2023 through April 2024. To learn about health-related questions of TTNB youth, we held 6 online focus groups. Based on the information we learned in the focus groups, we created an anonymous online survey, to which over 100 youth responded. Our research team reviewed participants' responses and developed this guide to address as many questions as possible.

We also asked youth what research questions were of importance to them. These will be shared with researchers to encourage future research on questions prioritized by TTNB youth.

## *How to use this guide*

The information in this guide focuses on social transition and affirmation, navigating social spaces, gender-affirming healthcare, and rights, advocacy, and allies. We encourage you to read about the topics of interest to you. There is no single pathway to gender health. We hope some of the information in this guide will help you on your gender journey.

## *Terms*

There are many different terms people use when talking about TTNB youth and gender-affirming care. We have chosen to use the following terms in this guide:

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## **TTNB**

*TTNB* stands for transgender, Two-Spirit, and nonbinary. TTNB is an umbrella term intended to include all youth, up to age 25, whose gender does not align with social and cultural expectations based on the sex/gender assigned at birth.

### **Gender health**

*Gender health* describes the experience of living in genders that feel most real or comfortable and being able to freely express those genders.

### **Gender-affirming care**

*Gender-affirming care* describes any healthcare or social support provided in ways that affirm a person's gender and support their gender embodiment.

### **Gender-affirming medical interventions**

*Gender-affirming medical interventions* describe specific medical interventions like puberty blockers or hormone therapy provided to support a person's gender health goals and gender embodiment.

### **Disclaimers**

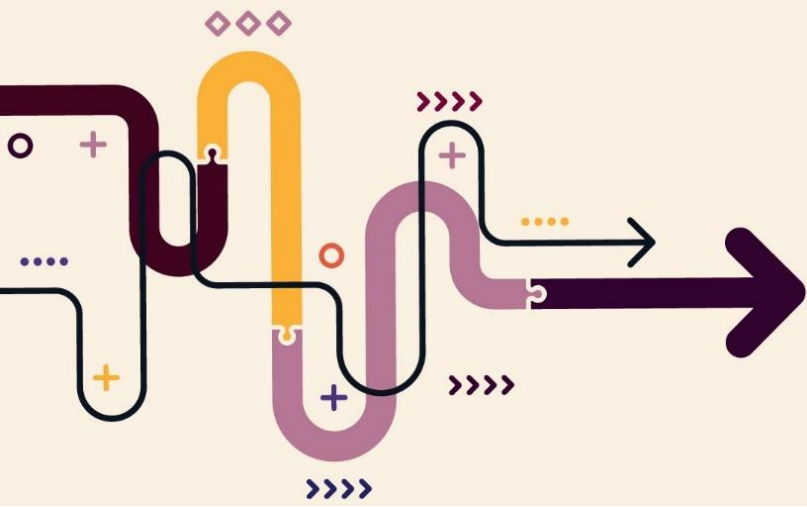
We published this guide in 2024. We know that laws, policies, and options for healthcare change over time and vary across provinces, territories, and Nations. To find specific information for your region and to keep up to date on changes that may affect you, look for trustworthy resources near you. This guide is not intended to provide medical or legal advice. If you have questions about accessing gender-affirming healthcare for yourself or a loved one, we encourage you to reach out to a trusted healthcare provider or organization.

### **Citation**

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# JUST BE YOURSELF

*A Health & Wellness Guide for  
Trans, Two-Spirit, & Nonbinary  
Youth*



*Part 1:*

# SOCIAL TRANSITION & AFFIRMATION

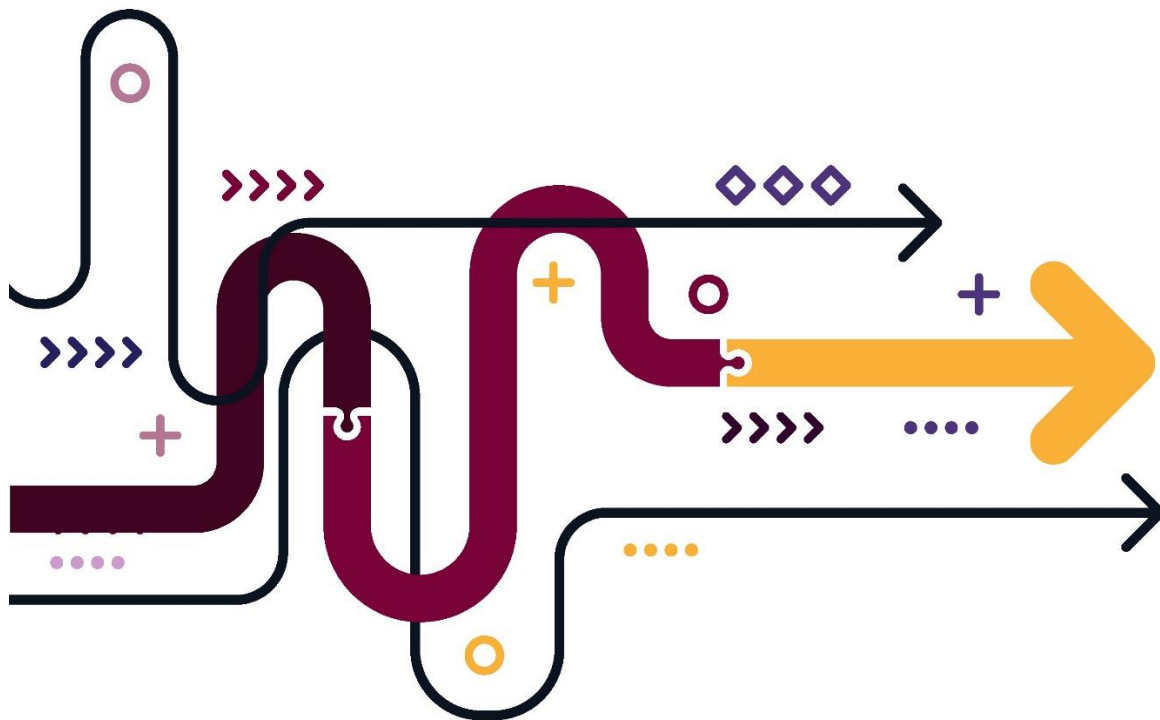


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## PART 1: Social Transition and Affirmation

There are many ways to explore and express gender. Social transition and affirmation describe nonmedical steps people take to live more comfortably in their genders. These steps can include changing name or pronouns and expressing gender through clothing, hair, makeup, voice, and mannerisms.

People may make many changes or no changes at all. People may share their gender in some, all, or none of the spaces in which they spend time. For example, someone may use a new name only with their close friends or wear certain types of clothes only at home. This section focuses on information about some common options for social transition and affirmation.



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# Names, pronouns, and gender markers

## Overview

### Names

Some trans, Two-Spirit, and nonbinary (TTNB) youth change their names as part of their gender journey. You can change your name socially, legally, both, or neither. A legal name change means applying to government agencies to change your name on legal documents. Once the initial name change is processed, you can update your name in all the places that require legal names, like bank accounts and school records.

Regardless of whether you change your name legally, you can change your name socially by using a different name with friends and/or family. You can use a different name (sometimes called a “preferred name”) in record systems, for example, at school or work. If you ask to be called by a chosen name which is not your legal name, it is a human rights violation to ignore your wishes, even without a legal name change.

### Pronouns

You can also change your pronouns socially. Pronouns are sometimes included on medical, school, or work records. There are no legal records of a person’s pronouns.

### Gender (or sex) markers

Gender or sex markers are included on most identification documents. You can change gender or sex markers legally or socially. A legal gender or sex marker change means applying to government agencies to make changes to legal documents.

In most provinces and territories, people have the option to change the gender or sex marker on their birth certificate to F, M, or X (‘unspecified’). While the ‘X’ gender marker is recognized in Canada, not all countries include ‘X’ as a legal option. In some places, there is an option to leave gender or sex markers blank.



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Regardless of whether you change your sex or gender marker legally, you can choose to share your gender with friends, family, healthcare providers, and others. You may also be able to share your gender in record systems, for example, in electronic health records kept by your healthcare provider. If you ask to be referred to with specific gendered language like pronouns, titles or gender markers, it is a human rights violation to ignore your wishes, even without a legal gender marker change.

### **Process**

The requirements and process to legally change your name and/or gender marker varies in each province and territory. Most provinces and territories have a website with instructions to follow.

When you are ready to legally change your name(s) and/or gender marker, you will generally need to gather supporting documents, have applications notarized, and pay processing fees. For name changes, you may need to complete a criminal record check, which can expire. Even though changing names and gender markers are often separate processes, it may be possible to work on both at once.

People change their name where they live. People born in Canada change their gender marker in the province or territory where they were born. People born outside Canada may not need to change their birth certificate in order to update their identity documents within Canada. It is a good idea to get legal advice about this. If you are or might apply to be a refugee, it is recommended that you do not contact your home country.

Once a legal name and/or gender marker change is complete, you can update your legal name and/or gender marker on identification documents and records. This will not happen automatically.

Start by updating your provincial identity documents, including your provincial/territorial ID or driver's license and healthcare card.

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Once you update your provincial identity documents you can use them to update Federal records like:

- Canadian passport
- Social Insurance Number
- Citizenship certificate
- Permanent Resident card
- Temporary Resident documents (work and student visas)
- Certificate of Indian Status
- Income Tax Records
- Voter Registration (federal)

Once you update your provincial identity documents you can also use them to update your legal name and/or gender marker on:

- School records
- Health records
- Work records
- Bank accounts
- Birth certificate
- Voter Registration (provincial/territorial, local)

Depending on your citizenship and residency, you may need to update documents in multiple countries. [Justice Trans](#) is a national organization that provides information about trans people's legal rights, including requirements for name and gender marker changes in different places. There may be local organizations that can assist you with this process. You can look for legal aid in your area often associated with law schools, queer-friendly organizations, and local clinics.

### **Fees**

A legal name and/or gender marker change can be expensive and take time to complete. Trans community organizations in some regions offer support for completing applications and paying application fees.

### **Parental consent**

Depending on your age, you may need consent from one or more parents or guardians to complete a legal name and/or gender marker change. The age and other requirements vary depending on province/territory.

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## ***Things to consider***

### **Choosing to update ID**

There is no requirement for TTNB people to legally change names or gender markers on identification. However, changing names and gender markers socially and legally can be affirming and important for many reasons. For example, updating identification may support safety for some people. For others, it may be safer to make changes socially and not on identification. You may consider things like plans to travel to various parts of the world when making personal decisions about changing names, pronouns, and gender markers.

### **Identification from outside of Canada**

If you have identification from different countries and have questions about the name and/or gender marker change process, it is important to seek advice from a reputable source, such as legal aid clinic. If you live in Canada with valid immigration documents, you do not need to have your international birth certificate match your provincial identification documents.

### **Medical requirements**

Gender-affirming surgery is no longer required to change a gender marker on ID in Canada. If you were born outside Canada and want to update your gender marker on documents in a country other than Canada, it is recommended that you get legal advice about your situation.

### **Notices of name change**

As of May 2024, in Quebec, Saskatchewan, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Prince Edward Island, name changes are public record, published in the provincial Gazette (e.g., the Saskatchewan Gazette or the Royal Gazette). Other provinces, like British Columbia, have stopped this practice. In places where name changes are published, you may be able to complete additional forms to request the name not be published and provide your justification. Be sure to review the specific requirements for your province or territory and seek out legal aid if you are unsure.

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## Resources

Justice Trans: <https://justicetrans.org/en/>

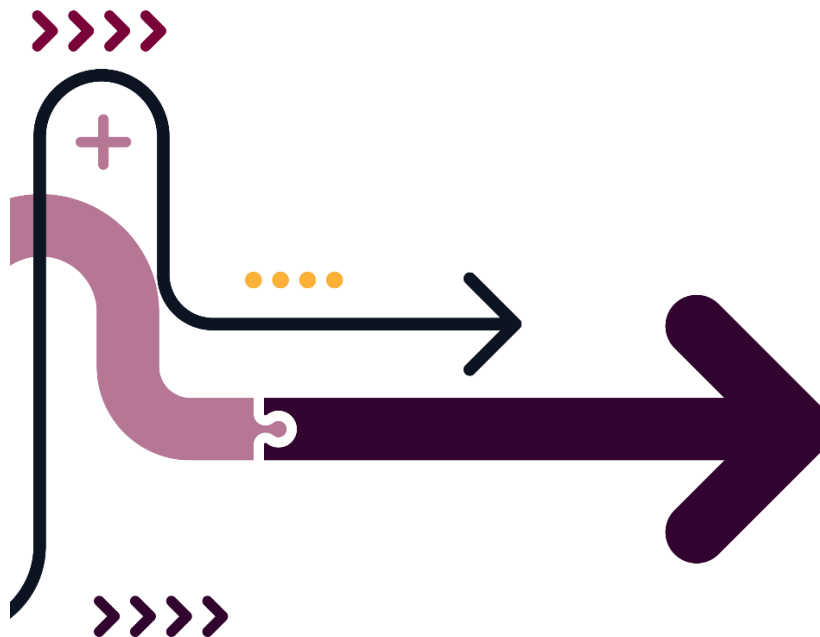
Trans Care BC Coming Out: <http://www.phsa.ca/transcarebc/care-support/transitioning>

Trans Care BC Guide to Changing ID: <https://www.transcarebc.ca/explore-transition/id-change>

US Legal name change by state: <https://namechange.uslegal.com/name-changes-laws-by-state/>

Vital Statistics Agencies for Canadian Provinces:  
<https://www.statcan.gc.ca/en/about/relevant/vsc/organisations>

Ward, J. (2014, April 25). *Quebec quits publishing addresses of transgender people seeking name changes*. Global News.  
<https://globalnews.ca/news/1289990/quebec-quits-publishing-addresses-of-transgender-people-seeking-name-changes/#:~:text=The%20British%20Columbia%20Gazette%20stopped,doing%20it%20for%20safety%20reasons.%E2%80%9D>



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# Clothes, accessories, and makeup

## *Overview*

Clothing, accessories, and makeup may help you feel more comfortable in your gender. These may also help others read your gender in ways that are affirming. Here are a few items that can help you express your gender identity:

- Clothing items and footwear, including experimenting with different fits or styles
- Accessories like jewelry, hats, ties, suspenders, bags, and purses
- Jewelry, including piercings
- Makeup, including foundation, powder, primer, lipstick, blush, contour, bronzer, concealer, eyeliner, eye shadow, lashes, and nail polish

## *Access*

Purchasing new clothing and accessories can be expensive. Some businesses and community agencies regularly hold free clothing swaps or offer exchange programs. These events may be promoted by community organizations, online or on social media.

Other budget-friendly options can include thrift, vintage, or consignment shopping, or getting second-hand clothing from friends and family members.

You can also look for trans-friendly and owned businesses for makeup, tattoo, and piercing services.

## *Things to consider*

### **Clothing**

Finding clothes that fit and feel gender-affirming gender can be a challenge. You may find it helpful to check out online resources. Trans, Two-Spirit, and Nonbinary (TTNB) content creators and organizations that serve TTNB youth often have great advice. Shopping or going to clothing swaps with friends and supportive family can be a fun experience. Ordering online may feel more comfortable than going to a store for some people.

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## Make-up

There are many resources available for learning about makeup, including:

- Experimenting on your own
- Tips and advice from supportive friends or family
- Online makeup tutorials, including tutorials for and by TTNB people
- Supportive local salons and barbershops
- Brands/companies that have gender-affirming staff training

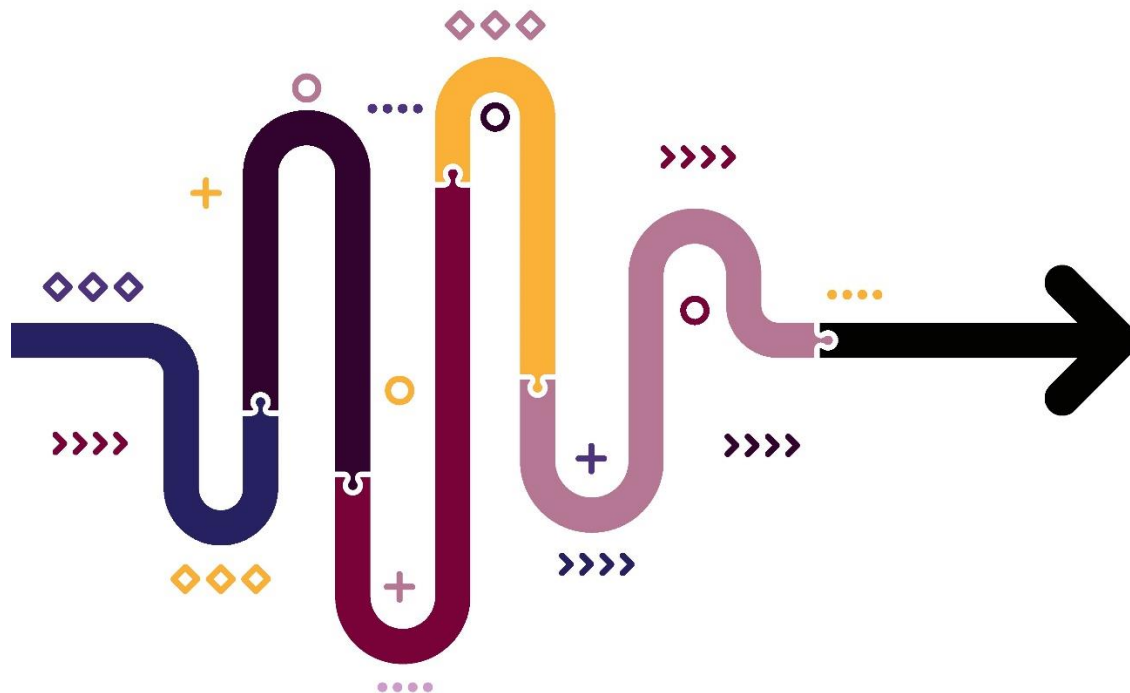
If you are looking for information on makeup and skincare, check for credentials (e.g., board certified dermatologists or estheticians who are certified by a college). They can offer advice important for protecting skin health.

## Resources

Gender Gear online store owned and operated by trans and nonbinary folks:

<https://www.gendergear.ca/>

Trans Hub Clothes sizing: <https://www.transhub.org.au/clothes>



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# Hairstyles and hair removal

## *Hairstyles*

Hairstyle can be an important part of gender expression. Some TTNB youth make changes to their hair as part of their gender journeys. You can experiment by styling or cutting your hair to make it appear shorter or try wigs or extensions to lengthen hair. Colouring, perming, or other treatments may also help you express your gender.

You may be able to find barbershops and hair salons near you that support TTNB communities. Strands for Trans (<https://strandsfortrans.org/>) is an online registry of trans-friendly barbershops and salons to find options near you.

## *Hair removal*

Removing hair can be important for gender affirmation. Additionally, hair removal may be required to prepare a surgical site before some gender-affirming surgeries. Temporary options for hair removal include shaving, plucking, threading, waxing, epilating, sugaring, and chemical depilatories. Electrolysis and laser hair removal offer longer-term hair removal options.

Electrolysis involves the insertion of a probe into each hair follicle to deliver electric currents that destroy the hair root. It can be used on any hair and skin type. It is the only permanent method of hair removal. There are 3 main types of electrolysis:

- Galvanic electrolysis: a direct electric current goes into a hair follicle to create a chemical reaction that destroys a hair bulb
- Thermolysis: a high frequency alternating current from a needle to the hair follicle causes follicle cells to vibrate with enough heat to cauterize a hair bulb.
- Blend method: when galvanic and thermolysis are combined

Laser hair removal offers long-term hair reduction but does not permanently remove hair. It is most effective on light, medium or olive skin with dark hair. Laser hair removal is faster, as lasers treat an area of skin rather than one follicle at a time (as electrolysis does). Regrowth is often finer and lighter.



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## ***Finding a Provider***

When choosing a hair removal provider, you can seek out recommendations from TTNB community members, organizations, or healthcare providers in your area. When possible, look for a hair removal service provider who is experienced, knowledgeable, and has positive reviews for providing gender-affirming services.

Ideally, a hair removal provider should:

- have experience working with trans clients (using correct pronouns and respectful language) and have knowledge about the hair removal goals you have
- offer a site/patch test to ensure the hair removal method is suitable for you
- have a sanitary practice – you can ask about the provider’s method of needle disposal (for electrolysis) or other one-time use supplies as well as the last inspection by an Environmental/Public Health Officer
- have a business license (according to municipal requirements) and hold insurance

When choosing an electrologist, it can be important to:

- get multiple consultations
- talk about costs, length and number of treatments, and office policies
- ask about the provider’s electrolysis training and qualifications (certification from a registered program or association membership)
- make sure their technique involves a probe going into the follicle rather than using electric tweezers or photo epilators
- ask which type of electrolysis they do (galvanic, thermolysis, or blend) and how much experience they have with each
- look for sterile conditions (hand washing, disposable gloves, masks, sanitization, sterilization in an autoclave, disposable probes)
- make sure it does not feel like hair is being tweezed or plucked;
- ask about pain management and potential side effects

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## ***Things to consider***

Make sure to follow your provider’s instructions for aftercare following each session. This may include avoiding hot baths for 24 to 48 hours, using clean cold packs to soothe the treatment area, applying soothing ointments to keep the area lubricated, and avoiding sun exposure, tanning, plucking, make-up, and lotions for a period following treatment.

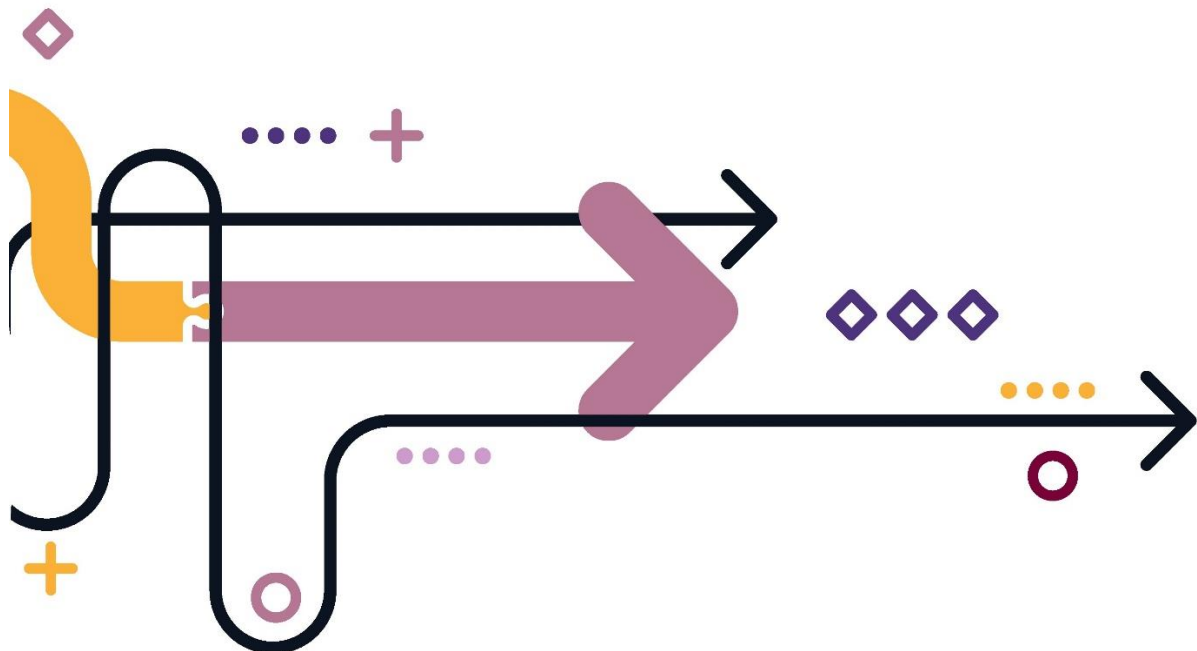
## ***Resources***

Phallo.net pre-op hair removal for phalloplasty: <https://www.phallo.net/hair-removal-phalloplasty.htm>

Strands for Trans online registry: <https://strandsfortrans.org/>

Trans Care BC hair removal: <https://www.transcarebc.ca/explore-transition/hair-removal?term=hair%20removal>

UCSF Trans Care hair removal guidelines: <https://transcare.ucsf.edu/guidelines/hair-removal>



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# Voice and mannerisms

## *Overview*

There is no right or wrong way to express your gender. Expression that feels safe and authentic is important. For some Trans, Two-Spirit and Nonbinary (TTNB) youth, changes to voice and/or mannerisms can support gender expression, gender perception (how other people understand their gender), and safety.

## *Voice*

You can change your voice by altering your pitch, inflection, quality, resonance, and articulation. Voice training is one option to support these kinds of changes. Taking testosterone can lower the voice. These changes vary from person to person. Taking estrogen does not raise a person's voice.

Voice change programs can help you with pitch, tone, and volume. Some may include other parts of communication, like body language, facial expressions, gestures, and laughter.

There are Speech Language Pathologists (SLPs) who specialize in TTNB gender-affirming voice training. These qualified professionals provide individual sessions to support specific types of gender-affirming voice goals. They typically charge between \$100 and \$200 per hour, which may or may not be covered by insurance. Some may offer sliding scale payment options.

In some places, it is possible to access voice support for free through SLPs at school. A school guidance counsellor may be able to help you with a referral to this service. If any of these options are possible for you, request information about rates and ask if the SLP provide the specific type of therapy you are looking for.

Some SLPs may post voice changing warmups and exercises online. Online guides, YouTube tutorials, apps, or online forums may also have voice change tips. When possible, you should look for information provided or reviewed by someone with training in speech and voice (e.g., SLP) to reduce the risk of harm to your voice.

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## ***Mannerisms***

Mannerisms involve ways of moving through the world such as posture, gait, facial expressions, and gestures. Some mannerisms are associated with gender expression, and you may choose to adopt specific mannerisms to live more comfortably in your gender.

If you want to adjust your mannerisms to align with your gender, online blogs and podcasts can be useful sources of information/ways to learn from other peoples' experiences. You can search for blogs or YouTube videos on walking, posture, sitting, gait, facial expressions, and body language. One way of learning mannerisms is to try 'people watching' (observing and paying attention to what others do), then practicing around safe people. Friends and TTNB mentors may have experience or advice on mannerisms.

## ***Things to consider***

Some sources of information on voice or mannerisms for TTNB people are based on binary ideas about gender. These will not fit everyone. You may need to explore multiple resources to find what you need to feel safe and comfortable. Remember that there are many ways to express gender.

## ***Resources***

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association gender-affirming voice and communication change: <https://www.asha.org/public/speech/disorders/voice-and-communication-change-for-transgender-people/>

Ari Agha Key of T: <https://keyoft.com/>

Ontario Human Rights Commission Gender identity and gender expression (brochure): <https://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/gender-identity-and-gender-expression-brochure>

Schneider, S., & Courey, M. (2016, June 17). *Transgender voice and communication – vocal health and considerations*. University of California, San Francisco. <https://transcare.ucsf.edu/guidelines/vocal-health>

Trans Care BC. Changing your speech: <https://www.transcarebc.ca/explore-transition/changing-speech?term=changing%20speech>

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# Binding, tucking, padding, & packing

## **Binding**

Binding involves using tight clothing, compression garments or special tape to flatten the chest. This can help people feel more at ease in their bodies and their clothing. Binding may result in others perceiving a person's gender more accurately. One option is to use chest binders specifically designed for TTNB people.

Alternatives to chest binders include medical and/or sports compression shirts and sports bras made with Lycra. Some people prefer to bind using special tape like kinesiology tape (KT) or TransTape because it doesn't cover the entire chest and does not wrap around the ribcage. For safety information on binding, refer to the "binding safely" section in "things to consider" below.

## **Choosing a binder**

There are many different types of binders available. It is important to wear a binder that fits you properly, is not too small, and allows you to breathe freely without causing you pain or skin damage. Sizing guides should be followed carefully because sizes can vary by company.

You may be able to find binders in a local store, online, or at a TTNB clothing swap. It can be helpful to try out multiple styles to see what feels best. Clothing swaps, in person shopping, and trying on friends' binders can be ways to test out different options. You can also read or watch reviews online for more information. When buying online, check the return and exchange policies before purchasing.

## **Safer binding**

Wrapping the chest with elastic bandages, plastic wrap or tape is not recommended because they can make it difficult to breathe properly. They can also restrict blood flow, damage skin, and even lead to broken ribs. Binders are specially designed to not cause these kinds of damage when fitted properly. Kinesiology tape or TransTape can also be a safer alternative when used as directed (not wrapped around the rib cage).

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Binding can cause muscle discomfort and skin irritation. Taking steps to bind safely is important to minimize the risks of binding.

Here are few tips:

- Only wear a binder for up to 8 hours a day. Take it off if there is pain and remove it when going to sleep.
- Only put a binder on completely dry skin. Body powder can help.
- Try stretches and exercises to strengthen the back, shoulders, and chest wall. This can ease pain or tightness.
- Take a break every few days when possible.
- Take a few deep breaths and cough after removing a binder. This is a way to clear any lung fluid that may have built up.
- When binding with tape, take care when removing it to avoid damaging skin. Follow instructions to use oil to remove it safely. To further protect your skin, you can place cotton pads or Band-Aids over sensitive parts of your skin, including nipples, prior to applying tape.
- Consult a healthcare provider if you experience any of the following: pain, difficulty breathing, ongoing tingling or numbness, rash, irritation, sores, overheating, dehydration, or soreness.

### Exercising

If you are thinking about wearing a binder while you exercise, there are some additional things to consider. Most binders are not designed to move with the body and can restrict breathing, which can be uncomfortable and potentially unsafe when exercising. Choose an option that allows you to move freely and breathe deeply. The following options may be safer and more comfortable alternatives for compression during exercise:

- A sports bra: compresses the chest without restricting breathing
- Kinesiology tape or TransTape (applied correctly): provides targeted compression without squeezing your whole chest. **Important:** Make sure you follow the directions for use and don't wrap them around your ribcage.
- A binder designed for a specific form of exercise: for example, a swim binder
- A looser fitting binder

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## Care Instructions

Wash your binder regularly following the care instructions provided by the manufacturer. Hand wash binders and avoid bleaching or putting them in the dryer to help them last longer.

## Packing

Packing means having a non-flesh penis (sometimes called a packer or prosthetic penis) that is held in place with a jockstrap/harness or underwear. People may pack for many reasons, including finding the feeling of packing affirming and being able to stand to pee (using a kind of packer called an STP – “stand to pee”).

Packers can be purchased or made from materials at home, like a pair of socks. Packers that are purchased may more closely resemble a flesh penis and are available in multiple sizes, shapes, and tones. They can be cut (circumcised) or uncut and be made with or without testicles.

## Care instructions

Packers should be cleaned by following the instructions that came with the item. Packers made of silicone can be washed with mild antibacterial soap and water, then boiled for up to five minutes or put in the top rack of the dishwasher. Packers made of rubber or Cyberskin can be washed with antibacterial soap and water.

## Padding

Padding refers to using undergarments to create the appearance of larger breasts, hips, or buttocks. These options are often low-cost, comfortable, and can improve the way clothing fits. Specific products include padded panties, breast forms, and padded bras.

## Care instructions

Follow the care instructions that come with the item. Hand wash or use a gentle cycle and hang/lay flat to dry. Sweat can cause breast forms to break down, so it is a good idea to wash them using warm water and soap after each use.



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## **Tucking**

Tucking involves shifting the penis and/or testes so they are not visible in tight clothing. There are different ways to tuck, including positioning the penis and testes between the legs then pulling on an undergarment. Alternatively, the testes can be tucked inside the body.

### **Safer tucking**

If you are interested in tucking, you may want to talk with a healthcare provider about how to do this safely.

Here are a few tips:

- Go slow, trust your body and take breaks between attempts
- Switch between several ways of tucking to reduce pain
- Stop if you feel faintness, pain, or nausea
- Stay hydrated. Avoiding drinking and peeing can lead to health problems
- Apply body powder in warm creases to help to prevent skin chafing and irritation
- See a clinician if you experience any of the following:
  - aching, tingling, or numbness that continues even when one is not tucking
  - blood in urine or orgasmic fluid (ejaculate)
  - any skin irritation, rash, or sores
  - pain in your groin, in your lower abdomen/belly, or when urinating

### **Access**

In many cities, there are in-person stores that sell materials for binding, packing, padding and tucking. These items can also be purchased online. If paying with a credit card is not an option, gift cards or pre-paid credit cards may be used to purchase gender-affirming garments online.

You may also be able to find some of these items for free, such as through clothing swaps, or organizations in your area or online that support TTNB youth.

Some trans-serving organizations offer resource guides on their websites that provide information on selecting and purchasing gender gear, which can include information about price ranges, materials, and care instructions. Some Canadian organizations and companies offer binder reuse and giveaway programs.

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## Resources

Fenway Health Binding resource guide: [https://fenwayhealth.org/wp-content/uploads/Binding\\_Resource\\_Guide.pdf](https://fenwayhealth.org/wp-content/uploads/Binding_Resource_Guide.pdf)

Rainbow Health's binding and packing handout: <https://www.rainbowhealthontario.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/social-transition-tools-for-transmasculine-folks.pdf>

Rainbow Health tucking and padding handout: <https://www.rainbowhealthontario.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Transfeminine-Social-Transition-Tools-1.pdf>

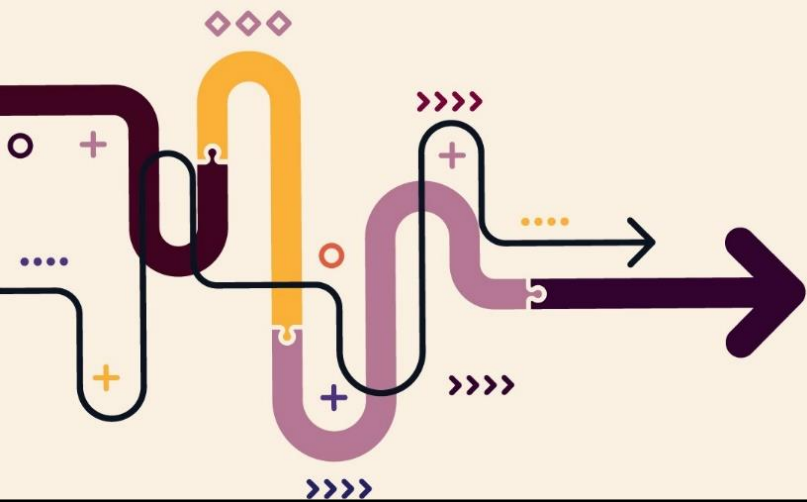
Trans Lifeline Binding Guide: <https://translifeline.org/binding-guide/>

Trans Care BC Binding handout: <https://www.transcarebc.ca/sites/default/files/2024-03/Binding-Handout.pdf>

Trans Care BC Binding, packing, tucking and padding: <https://www.transcarebc.ca/explore-transition/binding-packing-tucking-padding?term=binding>

Trans Care BC Tucking handout: <https://www.transcarebc.ca/sites/default/files/2024-03/Tucking-Handout.pdf>



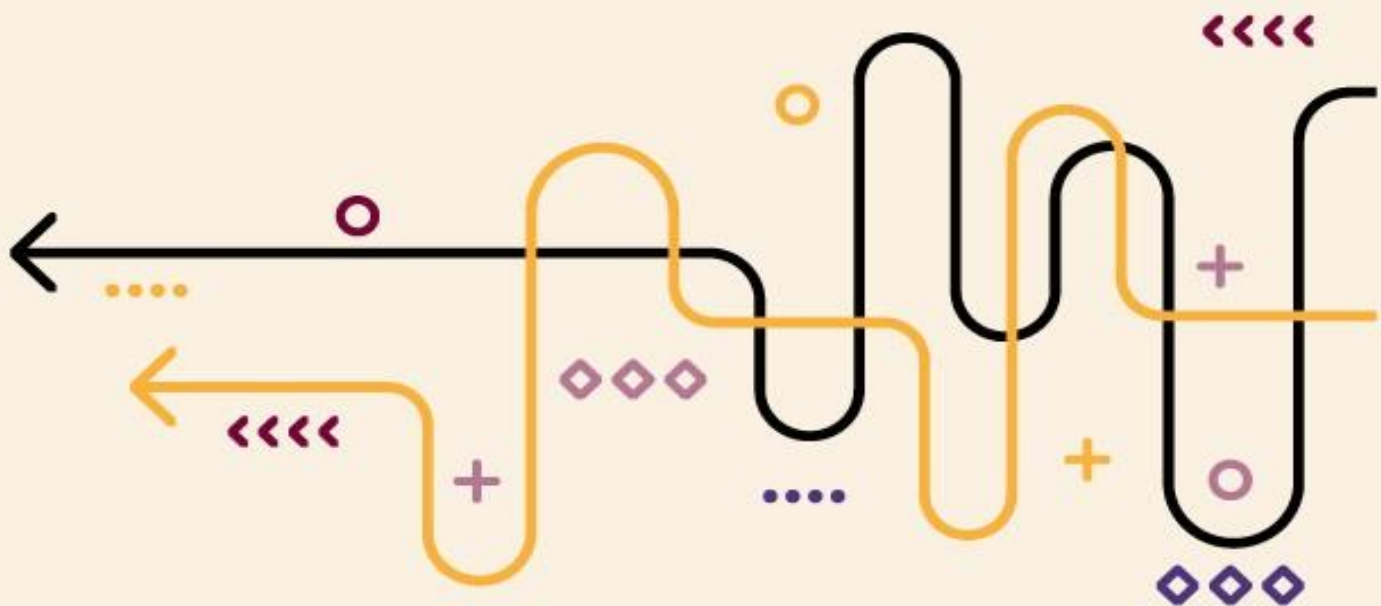


# JUST BE YOURSELF

*A Health & Wellness Guide for  
Trans, Two-Spirit, & Nonbinary  
Youth*

Part 2:

# NAVIGATING SOCIAL SPACES

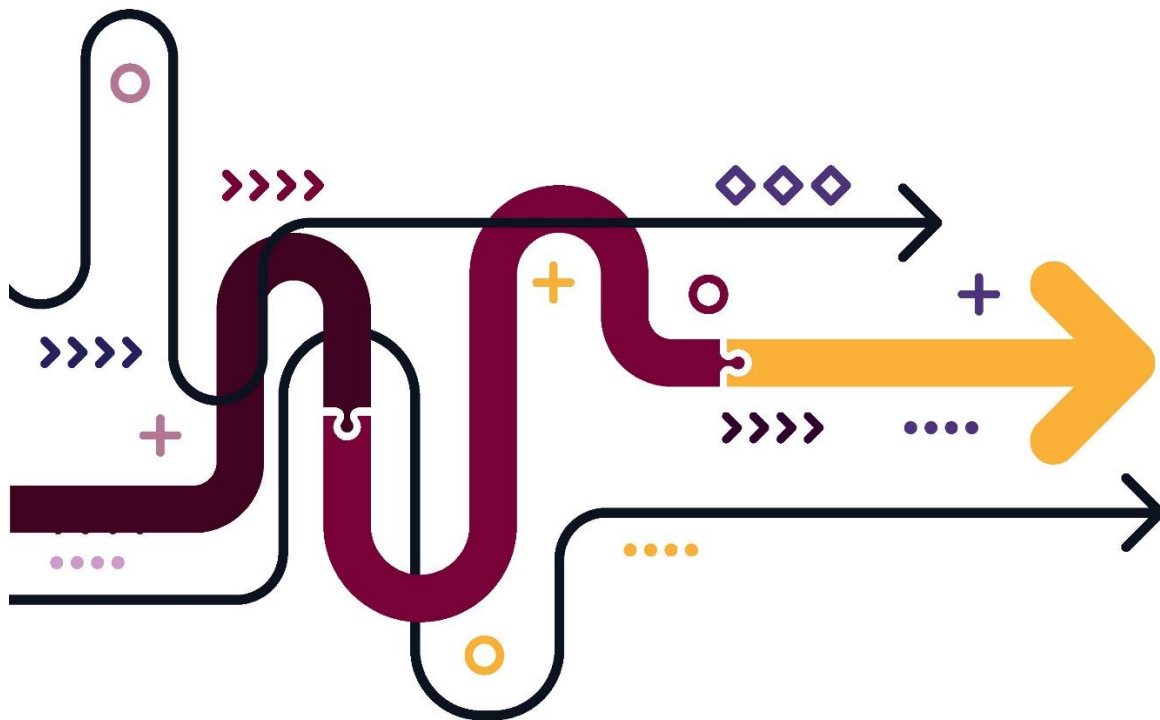


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## PART 2: Navigating Social Spaces

*Navigating Social Spaces includes information for Trans, Two-Spirit, and Nonbinary (TTNB) youth to consider related to coming out, accessing social support, safety, work, school, and travel. People may choose to come out as TTNB in some spaces and not others.*

*Seeking social support can be important for gender affirmation and navigating different life transitions. There are many things to think about regarding personal safety in different spaces and how to approach situations at work and school or when travelling. In this section, we address questions from Canadian TTNB youth about these topics.*



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## ***Coming out***

Coming out to others, or inviting people in, describes the process of sharing that you are Trans, Two-Spirit, and/or Nonbinary (TTNB). People may first experience a process of gender exploration that includes coming out to themselves. Decisions about coming out to others are personal. Not everyone who is TTNB will come out to others. Some people come out to people who are close to them, and others come out publicly. Choices about coming out may depend on many things, such as relationships, safety, and gender health goals.

You should get to choose who you come out to, when you come out, and how you share your gender with others. For some people it is important to share with a few trusted people first, before coming out at school or work or in bigger social circles. It is important to consider whether you want to tell the people you are coming out that you would like them to keep this information confidential or if you want them to share it. Letting people know what you need can help you move at your own pace in the coming out process.

## ***Coming out in relationships***

Here are some things to think about when coming out to family members, friends, partners, and others:

- Who to come out to
- When to come out
- What to say to each person
- What resources are available for yourself and others, like counseling or peer support
- How to manage feelings during coming out conversations
- What to do if a coming out conversation becomes uncomfortable
- Having a support person to talk to about how a coming out experience went
- Recognizing there may be an adjustment period
- Celebrating important steps on your gender journey

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Many TTNB people share advice about coming out through online articles and blogs. For example, some articles are about how to come out as nonbinary written by nonbinary people. Organizations like Planned Parenthood and the Trevor Project have guidebooks for youth on how to come out.

Another option for support is from a counsellor. A counsellor can also help you navigate old and new relationships while coming out. Please see the Mental and Spiritual care section for information on how to find a counsellor.

Please see the Work and School sections of this guide for more information on navigating coming out in these settings.

### **Coming out to providers**

When it comes to healthcare providers, it is up to you to decide if, when, how, and to whom you would like to come out. However, if you choose to access gender-affirming medical interventions, you may need to disclose your gender to healthcare providers who are supporting you.

Youth may choose to share their gender with healthcare providers when:

- They are asking a healthcare provider to use new names or pronouns
- They are seeking support related to gender
- It feels like the most authentic choice for them

Some youth may choose not to share their gender with their providers because:

- They are concerned about privacy and confidentiality
- They are concerned about how their provider will respond
- They don't feel any need to share this with their provider

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If you decide to come out to a healthcare provider, there are some steps you can take to advocate for yourself:

- Call ahead and ask the healthcare provider's office to update your name and pronouns before your appointment
- Share with the healthcare provider and/or staff how and when you want them to use your name and pronouns, for example, using one name in private appointments, and a different name when parents are present
- Ask about policies for supporting TTNB patients
- Bring a support person to help you talk to your provider and/or clinic staff

### **Resources**

Human Rights Campaign Coming out at work: <https://www.hrc.org/resources/coming-out-at-work>

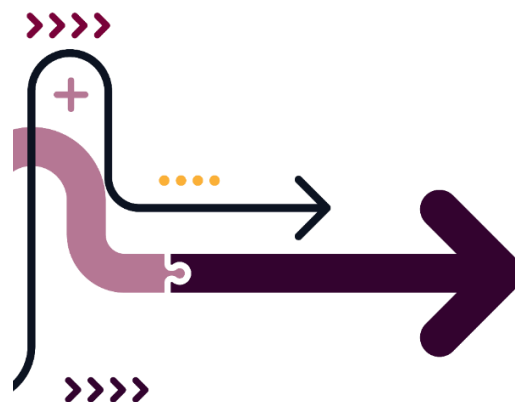
Planned Parenthood Coming out as trans and/or nonbinary:

<https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/gender-identity/transgender/coming-out-trans#:~:text=You%20may%20want%20to%20wait,with%20a%20supportive%20person%20afterwardhttps://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/gender-identity/transgender/coming-out-trans#:~:text=You%20may%20want%20to%20wait,with%20a%20supportive%20person%20afterward>.

The Trevor Project Coming out: A handbook for LGBTQ young people:

<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/resources/guide/the-coming-out-handbook/>

Trans Care BC's Coming out: <http://www.phsa.ca/transcarebc/gender-basics-education/terms-concepts/coming-out>





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## Social Support

Social support can play an important role in Trans, Two-Spirit, and Nonbinary (TTNB) youth gender journeys. Social support describes love and care you receive from important people in your life. This may include family members, friends, partners, neighbours, school staff, co-workers, mentors, or healthcare providers.

Social support from others might mean:

- Listening without judgment
- Offering practical or emotional support or advice
- Checking in to see how you are doing
- Supporting you during appointments or meetings

### *Peer support*

Peer support allows you to talk with someone who may understand your experiences and provide information and resources. Connecting with others who have similar experiences can help you feel understood and less alone. Peer support can happen in-person, over the phone, or online.

One way to find social support is to get connected to a peer support group. Some peer support groups are for youth in their teens, others are for older youth in their twenties and beyond. Some welcome family members or have separate meetings for family members. Support group sessions usually involve introductions, sharing how things are going, and discussion topics selected by a facilitator. Some groups may be able to help with transportation to and from meetings.

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### **Online peer support directories**

Some provinces have online directories that are regularly updated where you can search for support groups for TTNB youth in your community. Directories are a useful starting point, but listings are not always guaranteed. Check beforehand with a group coordinator to see if a group will meet your needs (e.g., some are for youth only, and some are for younger youth and their families).

The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) website has a ‘resources and information’ list for each provincial division through keyword search (e.g., “CMHA Alberta Division”). Each division’s site includes a list of societies, centers, alliances, and phone numbers that offer programs and services to TTNB youth.

### **TTNB youth-serving organizations**

You can browse local TTNB organization websites to learn about what services are offered. This may tell you whether they offer support groups, whether they are facilitated by someone who is TTNB, how to find group meetings, and contact information if you have more questions.

### **School-based support**

If you are a student at a secondary or post-secondary school, you may be able to find peer support through student GSAs, pride collectives, or other organizations. Some groups may offer support and others may be focused on activism and advocacy.

### **Phone support**

The Trans Lifeline provides crisis support for TTNB people by TTNB people at 877-330-6366.

The Lesbian, Gay, Bi and Trans Youthline offers free peer support for youth up to 26 years old at 1-800-268-9688.

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## ***Mentors***

Another way to access social support is by finding a mentor. A mentoring relationship, unlike a support group, is usually one-to-one and involves connecting you with a TTNB person who is prepared to provide support around things like coming out, navigating relationships, and accessing gender-affirming care.

Availability of youth mentorship programs for TTNB youth may vary depending on your location. Many youth organizations offer mentoring programs. Here are some examples:

- Mentor Canada is a coalition of organizations who provide youth mentorship
- The Trans Youth Mentorship program by the 519 (Ontario)
- The TransSupport program run by Plea Community Services (British Columbia)
- The Peer Support program and Community Coaching run by Skipping Stone (Alberta)
- The Ontario Mentoring Coalition

## ***Indigenous Youth***

Agencies that provide programs and services for trans youth and gender-affirming Indigenous organizations may provide supports for Indigenous TTNB youth. Searching online for Two-Spirit spaces in your area can be a good starting point. You can also speak with community members, check with a local First Nations administration office, Band office in your area, or school guidance counselling office.

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The following groups may help you connect with elders, spaces, and ceremony:

- *Urban Native Youth Association (UNYA)*: A Vancouver organization with a range of services that are Two-Spirit inclusive for Indigenous youth, some specifically for Two-Spirit youth (see the 2-Spirit Collective)
- *Four Feathers Society*
- *Transforming Embers* (for Coast Salish members/relatives)
- *Greater Vancouver Native Cultural Society (GVNCS)*  
social/cultural/community
- *Two-Spirit Sweatlodge Ceremonies*: Four Feathers Society or Capilano Reserve, Squamish Nation
- *Dancing to Eagle Spirit Society*: Tsleil-Waututh Two-Spirit and trans elder led ceremonies that are Trans inclusive and positive
- *The National Association of Friendship Centres*: See the website for a map of friendship centres across the country
- *The First Nations Health Authority (FNHA)*: Involved in the delivery of First Nations health programs across British Columbia and offers a list of provincial and national resources
- *The Native Youth Sexual Health Network*: Run for and by Indigenous youth, engages in advocacy and activism in issues of reproductive and sexual health across North America
- *Two Spirited People of Manitoba*: Hosts projects and resources to create safe spaces for 2SLGBTQIA+ community members, including a Two Spirit Sundance in August near Portage La Prairie, Manitoba which is open to youth
- *2 Spirits in Motion Society*: Host projects, events, and resources for 2 Spirit people
- *Edmonton 2 Spirit Society*: Resources, programs, and events for 2SLGBTQ+ people, their family and community members
- *2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations*: Greater Toronto area-based education and support for people living with or at risk for HIV and related infections

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- *Wabanaki Two Spirit Alliance*: A volunteer group aiming to provide equitable and safe environments for Two-Spirit and Indigenous 2SLGBTQ+ people
  - *Two-Spirit Michif Local*: a Manitoba Métis Federation in Winnipeg serving 2SLGBTQ+ Métis citizens

### ***Support for loved ones***

For some parents, caregivers, and loved ones, understanding and supporting a person’s gender journey may take time. Having access to trustworthy and accurate information and connecting with others who share their experiences can be helpful. Some support resources include:

#### **Online resource guides for parents and caregivers**

- “Families in Transition” is a guide for parents and caregivers of TTNB youth, developed by Central Toronto Youth Services. A free pdf is available online.
- The Family Acceptance Project is an organization that hosts videos and a resource guide on their website for parents and caregivers of 2SLGBTQ+ youth. The guide is available in English, Spanish, and Chinese, and focuses on concrete actions families can take to support a young person’s wellbeing in the context of their cultural and religious values.
- Qmunity has a [support for parents](#) resource
- Trans Care BC has a [parenting section](#) on their website
- Some websites have lists of resources for parents to learn more about parenting TTNB youth like the [online support](#) from the organization Supportive Parents.

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## In-person supports for family members and caregivers

- PFLAG Canada helps 2SLGBTQ+ people and their families through support, education, and advocacy. Their website has educational resources for parents like tips on how to support youth and themselves during the coming out process. PFLAG also connects parents of TTNB youth with other parents in the same community. Parents can be connected by finding a local chapter, becoming a PFLAG member, or becoming part of a national online community. Local chapters can be found by going to the PFLAG Canada site and navigating to the chapters or 'contact us' sections.
- The Families in Transition program is a 10-week group for parents and caregivers of TTNB youth which is offered by organizations across the country.
- Many local organizations offer regular drop-in groups for parents and caregivers. At some organizations, a drop in for TTNB youth might take place at the same time. These groups can often be found by searching online and/or reaching out to local 2SLGBTQ+ community organizations.
- Newcomer-serving agencies and organizations: Organizations that serve newcomers to Canada may have downloadable educational resources about being TTNB in multiple languages.
- Supportive healthcare or mental healthcare providers: Some families may be more comfortable getting information from a professional, like a doctor or mental healthcare provider. Supportive clinicians may be able to meet with family members to provide information, address their concerns, and emphasize the importance of supporting their youth.

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## ***Information for healthcare providers***

Healthcare providers who do not have experience supporting TTNB youth but are open to learning may benefit from online resources. These guides are useful sources of information about gender and gender-affirming care that you can share.

- The World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) Standards of Care for the Health of Transgender and Gender Diverse People (Version 8) offer guidance for healthcare providers to help patients reach their gender health goals
- The Endocrine Society publishes guidelines that cover puberty blockers and hormone therapy for TTNB people
- The Canadian Pediatric Society (CPS) has a position statement on providing gender-affirming care for TTNB youth
- Organizations such as Trans Care BC and Rainbow Health Ontario offer educational resources for healthcare providers

## ***Online gender inclusive language guides***

Many reputable organizations that serve TTNB youth offer online guides with information about why names and pronouns matter and how to use gender inclusive language. This information can help people understand the need to respect names and pronouns.

- Trans Care BC has an online guide for professionals on how to use pronouns, gender-neutral language, and honourifics in a respectful way.
- Statistics Canada offers an article on the importance of respecting personal pronouns.
- The Ontario Human Rights Commission has a Q&A section about pronouns, misgendering, and discrimination from a legal perspective.



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## ***Federal and international human rights laws and conventions***

These resources can help people understand rights and protections for TTNB youth.

- The *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, section 15, provides for equal protection under law related to sex.
- The Canadian Bar Association has a useful online toolkit on human rights in Canada.
- The *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC): Article 2 describes the right of children to be free from discrimination based on sex or ‘other statuses.’ Article 3 describes that all actions concerning children must have the best interests of the child as their primary consideration. Article 6 describes the need to ensure the child's development.

## ***Resources***

2 Spirits in Motion Society: <https://2spiritsinmotion.com/>

2-Spirited People of the 1<sup>st</sup> Nations: <https://2spirits.org/>

Canadian Bar Association. (n.d.). *Questions and answers about gender identity and pronouns*. <https://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/questions-and-answers-about-gender-identity-and-pronouns#:~:text=Is%20it%20a%20violation%20of,factor%20in%20a%20person's%20identity>

Canadian Bar Association. (n.d.). *Sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression*. <https://www.cba.org/Publications-Resources/Practice-Tools/Child-Rights-Toolkit/theChild/Sexual-Orientation-Gender-Identity-and-Gender-Expr>

Canadian Mental Health Association locator: <https://cmha.ca/find-help/find-cmha-in-your-area/>

Central Toronto Youth Services’ Families in TRANSition (FIT) program: <https://ctys.org/services-programs/pride-prejudice/families-in-transition-fit/>

Dancing to Eagle Spirit Society: <http://www.dancingtoeaglespiritsociety.org/>

Edmonton 2 Spirit Society: <https://e2s.ca/>

Four Feathers Society: <https://fourfeathers.net/>

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Government of Canada (2021, March 15). The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Department of Justice. <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/csj-sjc/rfc-dlc/ccrf-ccd1/>

Greater Vancouver Native Cultural Society's (GVNCS) Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/gvnscs78/>

Mentor Canada find a mentor: <https://mentorcanada.ca/en/take-action/find-mentor>

Native Youth Sexual Health's peer support manual: <https://www.nativeyouthsexualhealth.com/peersupportmanual>

PFLAG Canada chapter locator: <https://pflagcanada.ca/chapters/>

PLEA's TransSupport program: <https://www.plea.ca/transsupport/>

Rainbow Health Ontario (2016). *Families in transition: A resource guide for parents of trans youth*. <https://www.rainbowhealthontario.ca/resource-library/families-in-transition-a-resource-guide-for-parents-of-trans-youth/>

Skipping Stone's Peer Support and Community Coaching programs: <https://www.skippingstone.ca/programs>  
<https://www.skippingstone.ca/programs>

Statistics Canada (2023, October 18). Pronouns: They matter. <https://www.statcan.gc.ca/o1/en/plus/4762-pronouns-they-matter>

The 519's Trans Youth Mentorship program: <https://www.the519.org/programs/tymp/>

The National Association of Friendship Centres: <https://nafc.ca/friendship-centres/find-a-friendship-centre>

The Ontario Mentoring Coalition guide for mentoring LGBTTTQQIP2SA youth: <https://ontariomentoringcoalition.ca/mentoringyouthfacingbarriers/tailored-mentoring-for-youth-with-specific-needs/lgbttqqip2sa-youth/>

Trans Care BC Gender-Affirming Health Benefits for Indigenous Clients Seeking Care: [https://www.transcarebc.ca/sites/default/files/2024-03/Indigenous\\_gender-affirming\\_health\\_benefits.pdf](https://www.transcarebc.ca/sites/default/files/2024-03/Indigenous_gender-affirming_health_benefits.pdf)

Trans Care BC Two-Spirit: <https://www.transcarebc.ca/information-for/indigenous-people>

Trans Lifeline: <https://translifeline.org/>

Transforming Embers: <https://transformingembers.com/>

Two-Spirit Michif Local: <https://2smichiflocal.ca/>

Two-Spirited People of Manitoba: <https://twospiritmanitoba.ca/>

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United Nations. (1989). Convention on the Rights of the Child.

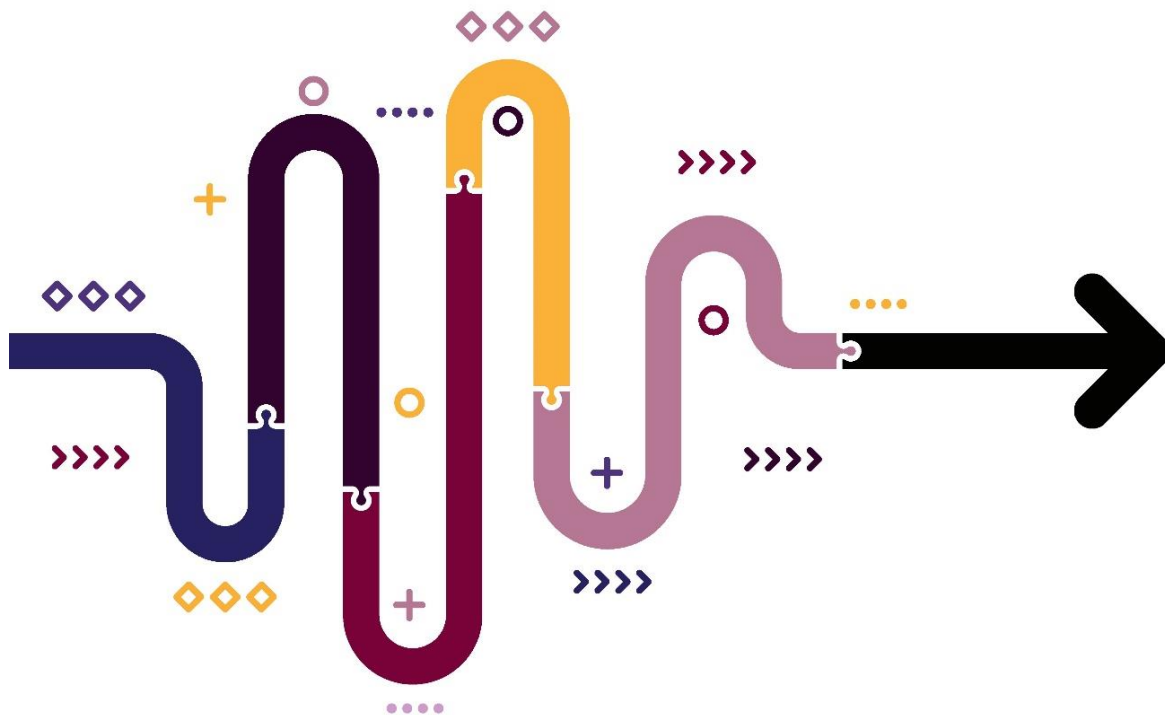
<http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

Urban Native Youth Association: <https://unya.bc.ca/>

Vandermorris, A., & Metzger, D. L. (2023, Jun20). *An affirming approach to caring for transgender and gender-diverse youth*. A position statement by the Canadian Pediatric Society. <https://cps.ca/en/documents/position/an-affirming-approach-to-caring-for-transgender-and-gender-diverse-youth>

Wabanaki Two Spirit Alliance: <http://w2sa.ca/>

Youthline: <https://www.youthline.ca/>



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# Safety

## *Public spaces*

Many public spaces are affirming of Trans, Two-Spirit, and Nonbinary (TTNB) youth. However, if you find yourself in a space or situation that feels less safe, there are things you can do to respond and protect yourself.

One important step you can take is to be aware of your surroundings. Limiting distractions (looking at a cell phone or using headphones) and traveling in well-lit areas where there are plenty of people are recommended, especially at night. If a situation makes you feel unsafe, leave as quickly and calmly as possible and get help. If your safety is threatened, go to an area where there are many people (e.g., a restaurant or mall) and find ways to draw attention (such as yelling, or shining a bright flashlight).

There are free applications like bSafe that allow you to send your location to trusted contacts or send an SoS to those contacts after a certain period. Calling a trusted friend or family member (while keeping one ear open) can also be a deterrent until you are in a safer place. Remember, discrimination, harassment, and violence are never your fault.

## *Home*

Youth may live in supportive homes or live in places that are less accepting or safe. If your home environment is unsupportive, you can try protecting your wellbeing by setting boundaries through choosing who you spend time with, how much time, and how often. You can also set boundaries by asking others in the home not to discuss topics that might be sensitive or likely to lead to dispute. This may or may not work, depending on the living situation.

According to Canadian law, there is a duty to report if a child or minor youth is being mistreated. This can be reported to local child welfare authorities, provincial ministries/departments, or local police by a youth, a healthcare provider, a teacher, or anyone else who is aware of the mistreatment. Through this process or other organizations, TTNB youth may be able to find different living situations where they will be better supported.

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## **Online**

Online spaces can be important for many TTNB youth to find information, connection, and community. However, TTNB youth may sometimes have negative experiences online. This section includes tips on how to stay safe online.

TTNB youth deserve privacy and are generally safer when they use their own devices others do not have access to. Be aware of who might have access to the devices you use and how that might affect your safety and privacy. The safest way to do this is to use a personal computer or smart phone in the home that is protected with a password or passcode. Be aware that downloading files onto a computer can leave a record on the hard drive even after the files are deleted.

To stay safe online, do not give strangers personal information like your name, date of birth, home address, phone number, identity documents, financial information (bank or credit card), or any other information that could be used to identify you, like where you go to school or work. It is safest to assume nothing shared online is private. One suggested rule is to avoid sharing any photos or information online that you would not be comfortable showing people at work or school.

Given the rise of anti-trans messaging on social media and targeted harassment like doxing (revealing the home address of a person) and SWATting (making a false report to police to activate a local SWAT team), protecting identifying information is important. One strategy is to remove the geo-location data from your photos before posting online. Many phones now have support for removing this data before photos are posted. Neutral usernames may make TTNB people less vulnerable to targeted mean-spirited or hateful comments or direct messages (DMs).

If you receive negative comments or harassment, here are some options:

- Ignore or delete the comment or DM
- Report the comment to whoever runs the service, site, or platform (e.g., forum moderator). Certain platforms have policies against hate speech and harassment of protected groups.

- 
- If the online harassment is by people you know offline (e.g., peers at school, coworker), you may choose to address this offline by reporting the harassment to an adult at school or supervisor at work.

If you are exposed to online anti-trans messaging, you can choose to:

- Ignore it: choose not to respond or “don’t feed the trolls”, as responding may lead to further anti-trans comments. You can also block specific users to prevent further engagement.
- Take a break: stepping away, taking a deep breath, engaging in relaxation or meditation exercises may be useful to buffer against negativity. Going for a walk or doing something else that is enjoyable may help you re-focus on positivity. It can also be important to reconnect with the physical world when negativity piles up online.
- Talk to a supportive person: talking through upsetting content can be helpful with a supportive friend or family member.
- Enhance privacy settings: you can adjust settings on social media apps to limit interactions to individuals you know and trust.

If you decide to respond to anti-trans messages, it is important to consider what the toll will be on you and what is to be gained. It can be difficult to allow anti-trans messages to go unchallenged, especially when directed at yourself or a loved one. Strategies to consider include seeking out support from trusted friends and taking care of your own emotional and mental well-being when encountering hateful content.

### ***Reporting a crime***

If a person is the victim of or witness to a crime, they can make a report to the police by calling 911 or visiting a police station in person. It is important to note involvement with the criminal justice system can be a long and emotionally difficult process for anyone. TTNB and racialized people are more likely to have negative experiences with police like being treated disrespectfully or not having their concerns thoroughly investigated. As a result, some individuals make the choice not to report a crime.

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If you choose to make a police report, keep detailed notes about what happened and a record of the police officer's name and badge number. You should also receive a case number for the report so you can keep track of what the follow-up is. If you are not treated respectfully or your concerns are not taken seriously, you can file a police complaint. This process will vary by jurisdiction.

## **Resources**

bSafe download: <https://www.getbsafe.com/>

Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal (n.d.). Frequently asked questions.

<https://cwrp.ca/frequently-asked-questions-faqs#:~:text=Yes.,or%20suspect%20it%20is%20occurring>

James, A. (n.d.). Transgender online safety. *Transgender Map*.

<https://www.transgendermap.com/guidance/social/safety/online/>

James, A. (n.d.). Transgender personal safety. *Transgender Map*.

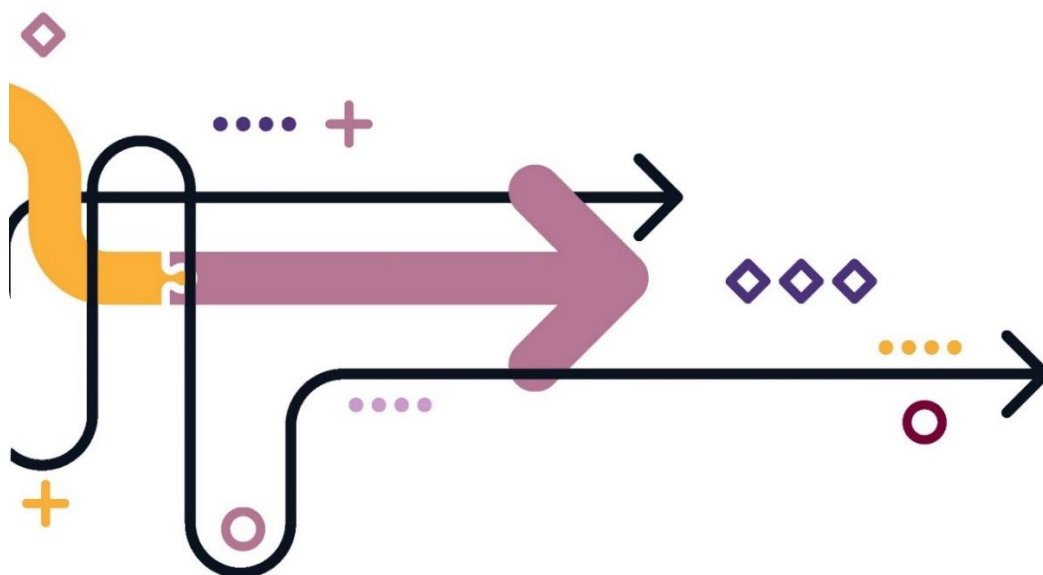
<https://www.transgendermap.com/guidance/social/safety/>

Trans Hub (n.d.). Boundaries. *Trans Vitality Toolkit*.

<https://www.transhub.org.au/vitality/boundaries>

Trans Rights BC (n.d.). Police & Prison System. <https://www.transrightsbc.ca/know-your-rights/police-prison-system/>

Transgender map blog by Andrea James: <https://www.transgendermap.com/>



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# Work

## *Coming out at work*

There are many reasons for coming out or for choosing not to come out at work. If you decide to come out at work, here are some things to consider:

- *Planning*: It can be helpful to outline goals, identify next steps and prepare to respond to questions. Preparation can be empowering. This can be done both individually and in collaboration with a trusted colleague, supervisor, or HR representative.
- *Gathering support*: You may be able to identify allies in the workplace (e.g., colleagues or HR staff). Some workplaces may have diversity committees or opportunities to connect with other 2SLGBTQ+ staff.
- *Trusting your instincts*: if it feels unsafe, you may choose to not come out in the workplace.

## *Transitioning in the workplace*

There is no one right way to transition at work. Some people transition slowly over time, and others may come out to everyone at once. How each person approaches transitioning at work should be based on their comfort levels and individual needs.

If you decide to transition at work, you can ask to meet with your supervisor or HR representative to develop a plan and identify who can support you. The plan may include things like updating workplace documentation or wearing a uniform that is gender-affirming.

If you would like to change your name, your supervisor or HR representative can also help make updates to things like internal forms, work email addresses, and ID badges. Some government forms and payroll information will have to use a person's legal name. If you legally change your name, you should inform your employer immediately to update documentation. This is important for things like making sure the name on your pay cheque matches what is on your bank account. Your employer may require proof of the legal name change.



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You have the right to take a leave from work for medical treatment related to transition. Employers do not need to know any specific details about the kind of treatment or procedure an employee is having. However, employers will need to know:

- *When* you are requesting time off
- How *long* you need to be off work;
- Whether the procedure might affect your ability to do your job, and if so, how;
- Whether you will need any accommodations when you return to work.

Healthcare providers may provide you with medical documentation for your employer outlining the required information.

*For information about rights and privacy in the workplace, please see the Rights, Advocacy, and Allies section of this guide.*

## **Resources**

Baboolall, D., Greenberg, S., Zucker, J., & Obeid, M. (2021, November 10). *Being transgender at work*. McKinsey and Company.

<https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/being-transgender-at-work>

Folx Health How to come out as trans at work:

<https://www.folxhealth.com/library/how-to-transition-at-work>

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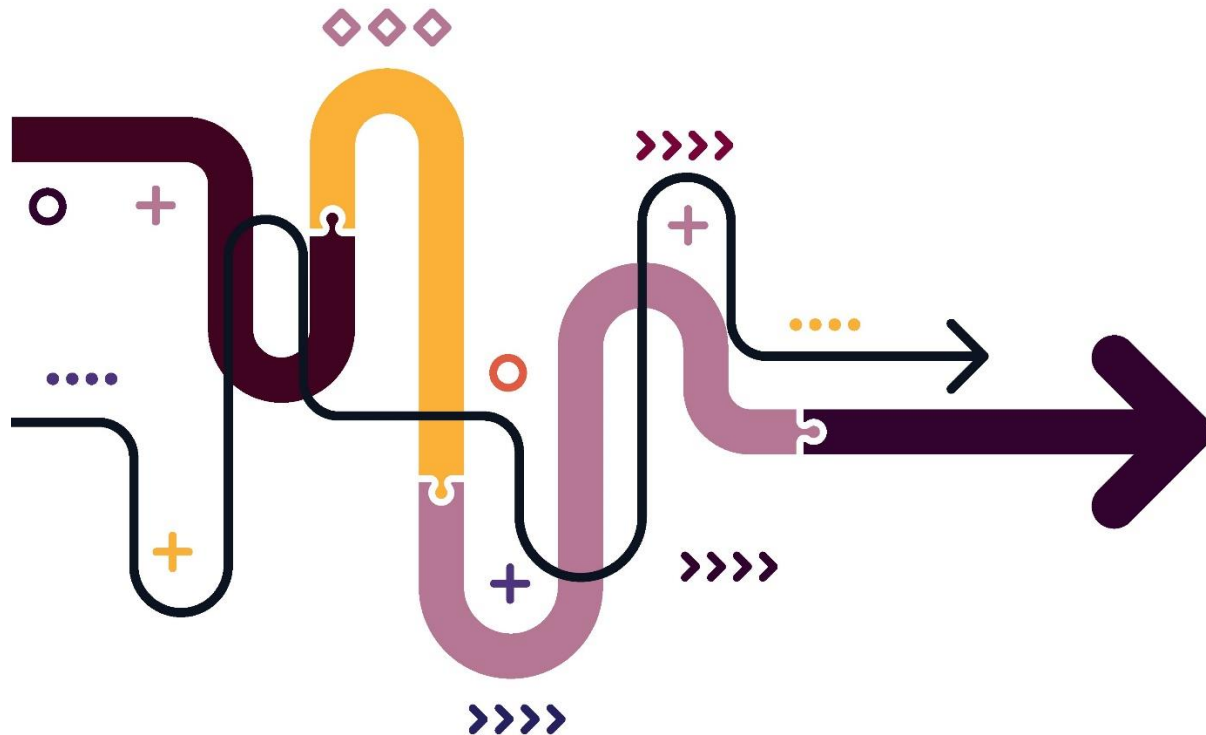
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Trans Care BC, Coming out: <https://www.transcarebc.ca/explore-transition/coming-out?term=comingout>

Trans Rights BC, Employment: <https://www.transrightsbc.ca/know-your-rights/employment/#:~:text=The%20right%20to%20equal%20access,or%20beca use%20someone%20outs%20us>



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# School

## *Coming out at school*

Some Trans, Two-Spirit, and Nonbinary (TTNB) people come out at school and others choose not to. Here are some things to consider about coming out at school:

- *Planning*: It can be helpful to outline goals, identify next steps and prepare to respond to questions. Preparation can be empowering. You can do this both individually and in collaboration with a trusted friend, family member, advocate, teacher, or healthcare provider.
- *Gathering support*: You may be able to identify allies at school. Some schools have GSAs, diversity committees, and opportunities to connect with other TTNB students.
- *Trusting your instincts*: if it feels unsafe, you may choose not to come out at school.

## *Medical leave*

Many people take time off school for medical reasons. For older TTNB youth, this can include time for transition-related medical treatment like gender-affirming surgeries. School administration and instructors do not need to know details about what procedures or medical treatment youth are accessing.

For youth in post-secondary school, there may be Academic Advisors who can help provide information about available accommodations. They can also give advice on taking time off from school for medical treatment. Depending on the length of time required, post-secondary students may choose to take formal medical leave from their studies.

For youth with government student loans, there are rules about medical leave relating to student status and loan payments. Academic or Financial Advisors on campus can provide more information on a case-by-case basis. General information can also be found online through Employment and Social Development Canada.

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## ***School administered insurance plans***

Many post-secondary institutions offer extended health insurance plans for their students. The specific details about what is covered by the plan will vary by school. Some plans may explicitly cover gender-affirming medical interventions and others may not. If gender-affirming medical interventions are not listed in the coverage, some costs may still be covered under other categories (e.g., prescription medications). You may need to speak directly to an insurance representative about your specific coverage needs.

StudentCare, a service that brokers insurance for many post-secondary students across Canada, has a gender-affirming care benefit that schools can opt into. While many student plans still do not cover gender-affirming care, institutions across Canada have begun to enroll in this benefit. If you are planning to access gender-affirming medical interventions during your studies, learning more about student health insurance plans could help you make a decision about where to study.

*For information about rights and privacy at school, please see Part 4 of this guide.*

## ***Resources***

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Employment and Social Development Canada's Student Loans: Medical and Parental leave overview: <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/education/student-aid/grants-loans/medical-parental-leave.html>

Fuller, P. (2023, November 30). Inside the fight to add gender-affirming care to university health insurance plans. *Xtra Magazine.*

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People Corporation. (2023). *Gender affirmation care.* Green Shield Canada.

<https://studentcare.ca/RTEContent/Document/GAC/Gender%20Affirmation%20EN.pdf>

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StudentCare by province at a glance:

[https://studentcare.ca/RTEContent/Document/GAC/EN\\_Gender\\_Affirmation\\_Care\\_Eligible\\_Procedures.pdf](https://studentcare.ca/RTEContent/Document/GAC/EN_Gender_Affirmation_Care_Eligible_Procedures.pdf)

Trans Rights BC Education rights: <https://www.transrightsbc.ca/know-your-rights/education/>



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# Travel

## *Safe travel*

Laws and social acceptance related to gender vary in different countries and regions. For example, some countries do not legally recognize Two Spirit, trans, and nonbinary (TTNB) people. It is always a good idea to know what your rights are within a destination country. However, knowing your rights is not a guarantee that everyone you encounter will uphold them.

Anyone traveling outside of Canada is subject to the laws of the countries they travel through, even if these laws infringe their human rights. [The Government of Canada has travel advisories on their website](#) that are regularly updated. You can review this list before making travel plans. You should also learn about a country's laws and customs before your travel there.

Some countries do not have discrimination protections for people. This means people may legally be refused service, or their gender may not be respected. In the United States, for example, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) may disregard gender markers and screen individuals based on the TSA officer's perception, or a screening machine's guess of a person's assigned sex. This affects full-body scans and pat downs at security checkpoints. To avoid being identified as TTNB, some people decide to travel with a passport sex/gender marker that aligns with how others perceive them.

In some countries there may be an increased risk of discrimination in medical settings, including being refused care due to being TTNB. You may want to get legal advice before you travel outside of Canada.

Reaching out to people who have travelled to or live in the places you plan to visit may be helpful. They may be able to share experiences related to laws and customs in specific places. Racialized youth may be at greater risk in some places. Gathering information about risks and safety tips can help you make informed decisions about where to travel and how to keep yourself as safe as possible.

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Some strategies to stay safer while travelling may include:

- Travel as part of a group.
- Be aware of your social media presence. Information made public online may be accessed by local authorities.
- Be cautious using the internet and your phone while travelling. Local police may be able to use cell phones to track your location and websites you visit.
- Consider how others may perceive your gender and whether being identified as may increase your risk of discrimination, harassment, or violence.
- Be cautious of public displays of affection that may be perceived by others as non-heterosexual.
- Be careful if connecting with people you have met online, as some people may target people using fake online profiles.

If you are a Canadian citizen or permanent resident outside Canada and need help, reach out to a consulate or the Government of Canada’s Emergency Watch and Response Centre. Consular officials may be able to help you if you have experienced harassment, violence, or inappropriate treatment. They can also help if you are arrested, detained, ill, injured, if you need to be evacuated in an emergency, or if you face an international custody problem.

### ***X gender markers***

Gender markers are displayed on most legal identification documents, including passports. The Canadian government allows you to choose an X as your gender. Federal, provincial, and territorial laws protect people in Canada from discrimination based on gender identity or expression. These laws should protect people who travel within Canada with an “X” gender marker on their identification documents, but TTNB people may still face discrimination while travelling.

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People whose passports have an “X” sex or gender marker may experience challenges when travelling to countries that do not recognize this marker. They may be denied entry or asked to provide binary sex information. You should get advice about the implications for your ability to travel outside of Canada if you have, or are considering getting, an X gender marker on your passport.

### ***Travelling with medication and medical supplies***

Some people need to travel with medications and supplies related to their gender health. Medication should be in its original container with the original prescription label. The name on the bottle should match the name on your ID and your ticket. Medications that are clearly labelled can make screening at airports easier. A doctor’s letter is not required to carry needles on a plane, though some people choose to travel with a “carry letter” from their doctor.

Some countries limit the amount of certain medications a person can bring into the country before requiring an in-country prescription. For example, Canada does not allow a person to bring more than 30 days of a controlled substance (e.g., testosterone) into the country. Individuals must get a local prescription if they have a longer stay. Some over the counter medications available in Canada are illegal in some countries. Get advice about your medications before you go.

In all instances, medications should be packed in a single bag in an easy-to-reach location for screening purposes. Medication should generally be kept with you, to protect it from theft, loss, extreme temperatures, or long travel delays that might make you miss a dose. If possible, syringes should be in checked luggage rather than with you, for example, in your carry-on luggage.

### ***Travelling to or through the United States***

When travelling by plane to the United States, there is a limit on the amount of liquids you can take through the security checkpoint, called the 3-1-1 rule. For trips routed through or arriving in the United States, liquid medications are currently exempt from the 3.4 oz (100 mL) limit but must be declared at the security checkpoint.



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The 3-1-1 Liquids Rule Exemption states that some items can be carried on a plane, as long as each item is declared and is:

1. required during your flight and/or at your travel destination;
2. not available at the airport in the sterile area (after the screening checkpoint) and/or;
3. not available at your travel destination.

The TSA Notification Card for Individuals with Disabilities and Medical Conditions (also called the blue card) is a free, downloadable and printable card for individuals whose disabilities or medical conditions may affect screening to provide information to TSA agents. This card will not prevent screening or a search. However, it can provide a way to discreetly explain medication(s) or medical equipment you are traveling with. It is recommended to use this card if you are travelling with any medical equipment that could flag a body scanner or appear suspicious in a bag scan. This includes breast forms and packers worn on the body.

## **Resources**

Government of Canada Travel and tourism (2023, February 15). *Travel and your sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics.*

<https://travel.gc.ca/travelling/health-safety/lgbt-travel>

Government of Canada Travel and tourism (2024, February 13). *Travel advice and advisories by destination.* <https://travel.gc.ca/travelling/advisories>

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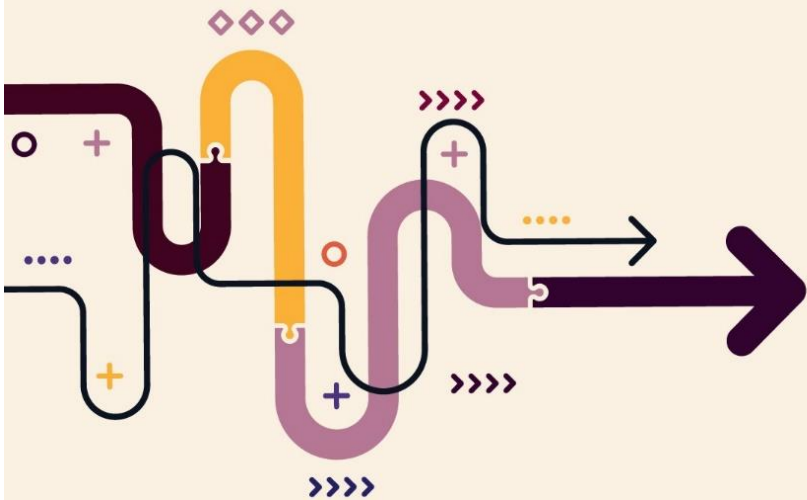
<https://www.tsa.gov/travel/travel-tips/travel-checklist#:~:text=Liquids%2C%20gels%20and%20aerosols%20packed,1%20bag%20per%20passenger>

TSA Notification Card for Individuals with Disabilities and Medical Conditions.

[https://www.tsa.gov/sites/default/files/disability\\_notification\\_card\\_508.pdf](https://www.tsa.gov/sites/default/files/disability_notification_card_508.pdf)

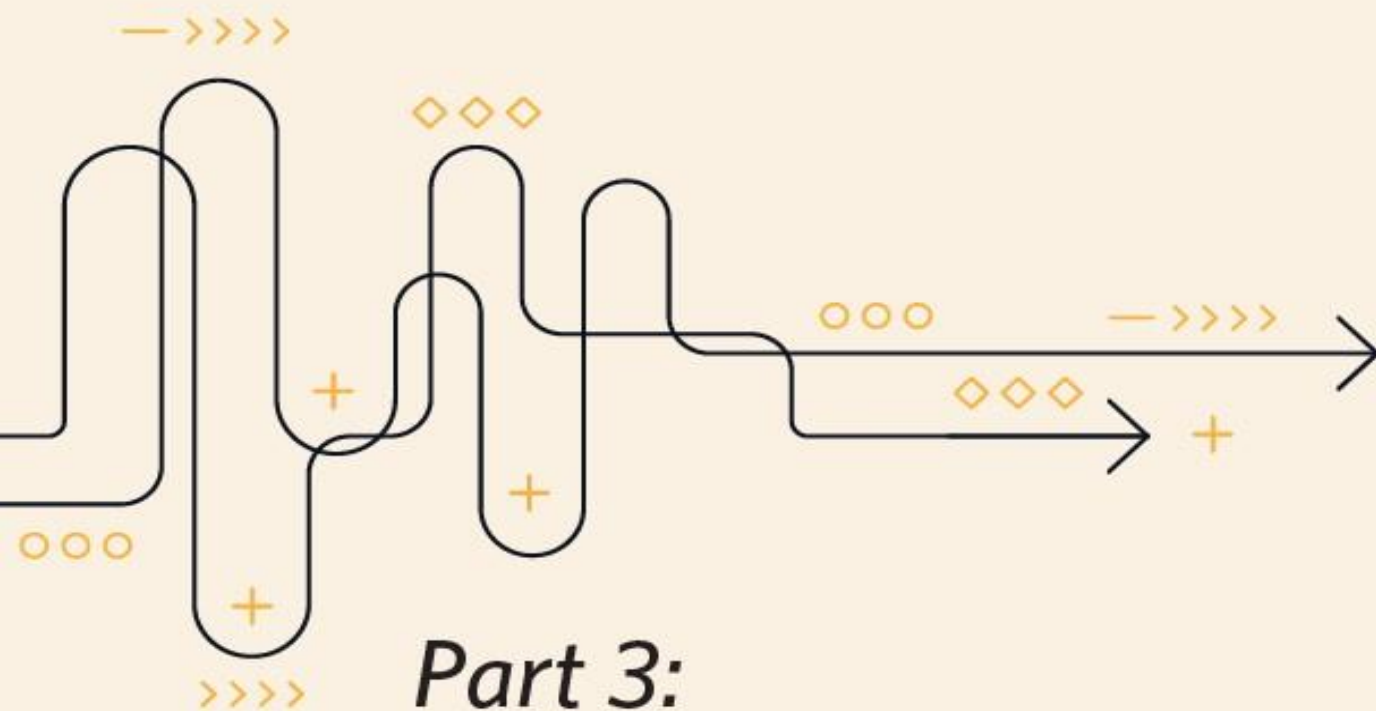
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# JUST BE YOURSELF

*A Health & Wellness Guide for  
Trans, Two-Spirit, & Nonbinary  
Youth*



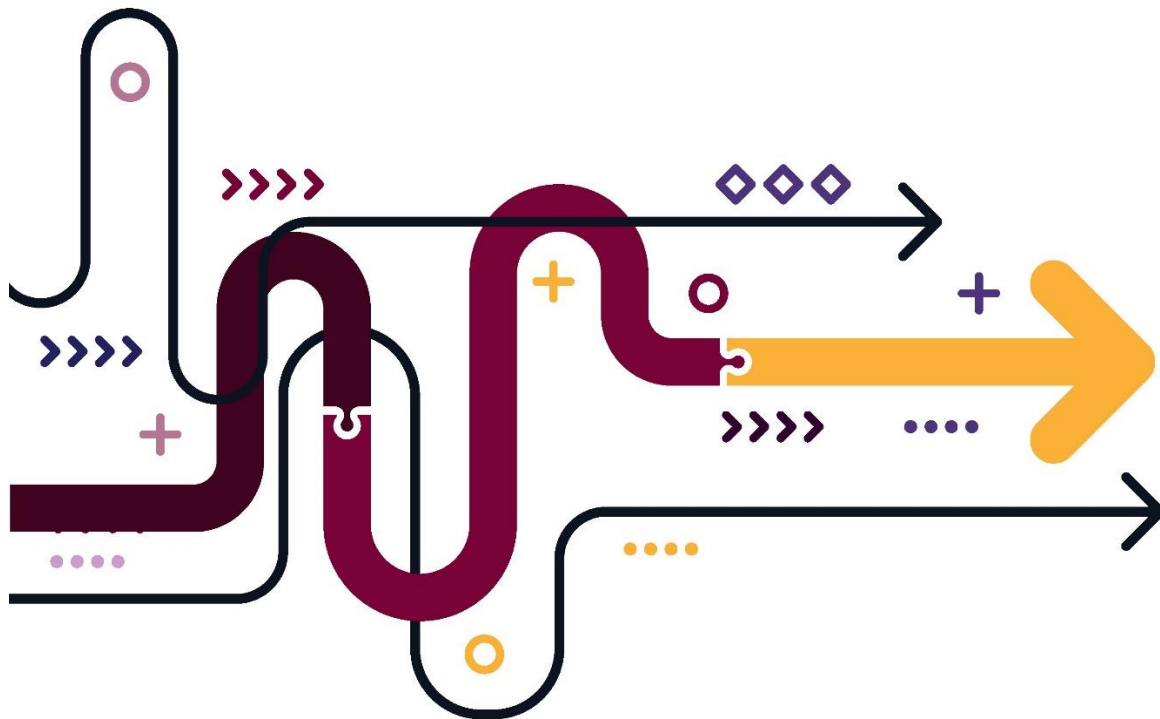
*Part 3:*

# GENDER AFFIRMING HEALTHCARE

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## PART 3: Gender-Affirming Healthcare

Welcome to the gender-affirming healthcare section of the guide. This section will cover information on primary and specialist care, mental and spiritual healthcare, puberty blockers, hormone therapy, gender-affirming surgeries, reproductive healthcare, and sexual healthcare.



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## Primary and Specialist Care

### *Primary care providers and walk-in clinics*

A primary care provider (PCP) provides health care in non-emergency situations. For example, people may see PCPs for annual checkups, when they are sick, or when they have a health question or concern. A PCP can be a family doctor, general practitioner, or nurse practitioner. People who do not have a PCP may use walk-in or virtual clinics for routine health concerns.

Some PCPs provide gender-affirming health care. This can include hormone therapy, surgery referrals and addressing other gender-related health concerns (hair loss, stopping monthly bleeding, etc.). It can sometimes be challenging to find a PCP or walk in clinic staff who are knowledgeable, experienced, and supportive in working with Trans, Two-Spirit, and Nonbinary (TTNB) youth.

Some PCPs who are not experienced with gender-affirming care may opt to refer patients to specialist clinicians, like endocrinologists. Walk-in clinics are less likely to be able to provide gender-affirming medical interventions because they do not have ongoing relationships with their patients. However, they can refer patients to providers who can address these needs.

### *Finding a safe and inclusive primary care provider*

There are online resources to help people find PCPs. The process for accessing a PCP varies by province and territory. Most provincial/territorial governments have websites to help you get matched up with a PCP (e.g., search online for “Find a primary care provider in [your province/territory]”). It may involve signing up for a waitlist where you describe your care needs. Another way to find a PCP is to search for a clinic nearby and contact their office directly to ask if they are accepting new patients.

If you are looking for a PCP to support gender-affirming medical interventions, you can ask for recommendations through online and in-person networks, read online provider reviews, or request information from local TTNB groups.

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Before visiting a new provider, you may want to learn more about their experience working with TTNB people. If you are unable to find information about the provider online or through social networks, you can contact the provider's office with questions before your visit.

Questions that may be helpful to ask:

- Does this provider have experience working with TTNB people? If yes, what is their approach to providing care?
- Does this provider have experience providing [specify type of care here] for TTNB people?

Questions about gender-affirming medical interventions include:

- Is this provider familiar with the most recent version of the WPATH Standards of Care?
- Does this clinician provide readiness assessments for gender-affirming hormone therapy and/or surgery?
- Does this provider use an informed consent approach to gender-affirming care?
- What steps are involved in accessing [hormones, referrals for surgery, etc.]?

### **Preparing for appointments**

To prepare for appointments, think ahead about what information you want to share about yourself, including names, pronouns, gender, and gender health goals. You might decide not to share any of this information if you are accessing care that is not directly related to your gender. You may decide to share information about your gender, particularly if you are looking for support accessing puberty blockers, hormones or surgery.

Since most primary care appointments are short (about 10 minutes), it may not be possible to discuss more than one topic in each appointment. Prepare a list of goals, topics or questions in advance to ensure you get the information you need. Bringing a trusted friend or adult for support, advocacy, or note-taking can be helpful.

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At your first visit, share your goals with your provider and make a plan together to address them. You can also discuss booking a series of appointments to address all of your goals.

### ***Specialist care providers***

A medical specialist has expertise in a particular area of health care (like endocrinology, plastic surgery or gynecology). You need a referral from a PCP to see a specialist.

There are generally three steps in the specialist referral process:

1. Speak with a PCP about the needed specialist service or referral
2. The PCP sends a referral to the specialist or a centralized waitlist
3. The specialist (or waitlist) contacts you or your provider with appointment details

You can help specialist referrals move forward as smoothly as possible by:

- Getting the name of the clinic and physician a referral was sent to
- Making sure a referral was sent from your provider and received by the specialist's office with no missing information
- Asking if there is anything you should do before the appointment
- Asking for an approximate timeline for when you will hear from the specialist
- Confirming the appointment when you receive the phone call, email or text

### ***Finding a provider for puberty blockers or hormone therapy***

Options for healthcare providers who can prescribe puberty blockers and hormone therapy vary depending on a person's age and where they live. Some PCPs have the necessary training to prescribe and monitor puberty blockers and hormone therapy while others may refer youth to an endocrinologist (doctor specializing in hormones). Gender clinics are available in some places, including many children's hospitals. PCPs can make referrals to these programs, and you may also be able to refer yourself.

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## ***Gender-affirming Medical Pathways***

Many people have gender health goals which can be supported by medical interventions such as puberty blockers, hormone therapy, or gender-affirming surgery. A person may access any, all, or none of these kinds of care over their lifetime.

It is important to learn about the options available to support gender embodiment. There are many ways to achieve these goals, including different doses of hormones and different types of surgery. The WPATH Standards of Care Version 8 emphasizes the importance of providers working with their patients to provide the individualized care each person needs. Each person's gender journey is unique, and gender-affirming medical interventions are some tools that may help people to comfortably embody their genders.

## ***Assessment and Care Planning***

People accessing gender-affirming medical interventions (i.e., puberty blockers, hormone therapy, gender-affirming surgery) will work with healthcare providers for assessment and care planning. Healthcare providers need to gather information about a person's overall health and gender goals. The types of questions that a healthcare provider asks depends on the type of care a person is seeking. Generally, they will ask about medical history, gender, goals, and supports.

Some questions healthcare providers may ask as part of the assessment and care planning process include:

- How would you describe your gender?
- Do you remember when you realized your gender was different from what others thought?
- Have you taken any steps to express or feel more comfortable in your gender (like names, pronouns, clothing, hairstyle, make-up, binding)? If yes, what has that been like for you?
- Are you hoping to take any other steps in the future?



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- What is your health history? Questions under health history might include but are not limited to:
    - Current and past medical and mental health conditions
    - Surgical history
    - Medications
    - Use of tobacco and cannabis
    - Allergies
    - Exercise, nutrition
    - Family history of medical and mental health conditions

### ***Making decisions about gender-affirming medical interventions***

Making decisions about gender-affirming medical interventions can be complex. It is important to have accurate information about the kind of care you are considering. Once you have general information, you can think about what it would be like for you to experience the intervention. Thinking through your options and talking with knowledgeable healthcare providers and supportive people can help you make the best decisions for your wellbeing. You might decide you are ready now or that you want to wait a while before you decide. Everyone's path is unique.

You may have a range of emotions when you think about accessing puberty blockers, hormone therapy, or gender-affirming surgery. You might feel excited about some changes and nervous or uncertain about experiencing others. As with any big decision, it is ok to have doubts. It can be important to find support people to help you navigate emotional ups and downs, such as a healthcare provider, TTNB peer, or mentor.

### ***Wait times***

It is common to be placed on a waitlist to access healthcare services in Canada. Availability of gender-affirming care providers may be limited and wait times can be frustrating. If you are referred to a specialist, it can be helpful to ask what the wait time will be, so you know what to expect. Peer support and counselling may be helpful while waiting to receive needed care.



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## ***Costs and coverage***

Coverage for gender-affirming care varies across Canada. Medically necessary services like primary care, specialist care, and hospital services in publicly funded facilities are covered through the public healthcare system. There may be out-of-pocket costs for other health services, such as counselling and prescription medications. Government-funded programs may cover the cost of prescription medications or other services, based on age, income, or disability. If you receive healthcare through an Indigenous program, such as your band or First Nations Health Authority, you can contact them to find out if certain services are covered.

Rules for out of province/territory coverage for care vary and can usually be found on each provincial/territorial government health website. Generally, medically necessary services like hospital or primary care in a publicly funded facility within Canada are covered if you present a valid provincial health insurance/services card. Sometimes you must pay and then apply for reimbursement.

Some people have coverage for gender-affirming healthcare expenses through extended health care plans. These may be covered through an employer or post-secondary school. You may be eligible for coverage under another person's extended health insurance, such as a parent, guardian or partner, depending on your age and living situation.

Some extended health care plans clearly indicate that gender-affirming care is covered, others may not. Check with the insurance provider to find out:

- What providers, services and medications are covered
- How much of the total cost will be covered
- If there is an annual or lifetime maximum
- If a referral or other documentation is required to qualify for coverage

In most cases, the primary holder of a private health insurance policy has access to information about what their insurance pays for. For example, a parent could access information about prescriptions and services covered through their plan. Youth can ask their healthcare provider what information their parents/guardians may receive or if there are alternate ways to report billing that are more discreet.

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Newcomers or refugees may access gender-affirming care covered under the Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP).

If you are an international student, you may be eligible to receive coverage for certain types of gender-affirming medical interventions under your university's health insurance plan.

You may also have access to supplementary insurance through your student union. Students are encouraged to reach out to their school and student union to see what types of care are covered.

### ***Resources for providers***

The World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) is an international organization of professionals who work in the field of TTNB health. WPATH publishes the Standards of Care, an internationally recognized guideline for healthcare providers to follow when offering gender-affirming care. As of 2022, the current version of the Standards of Care is Version 8. These standards provide recommendations related to puberty blockers and hormone therapy, gender-affirming surgeries, mental healthcare, and care for youth.

The Endocrine Society (an international organization of doctors and scientists who work in hormone science) publishes a guideline for clinicians that work with youth and adults called Endocrine Treatment of Gender-Dysphoric/Gender-Incongruent Persons

Other organizations provide resources for healthcare providers, including:

- Trans Care BC's Primary Care Toolkit and online courses
- The Center of Excellence for Transgender Health Guidelines for the Primary and Gender-Affirming Care of Transgender and Gender Non-binary People
- Sherbourne Health Centre (ON) Guidelines for the Gender-affirming Primary Care with Trans and Non-binary Patients

Some TTNB people find it helpful to review these guidelines to know what the requirements may be to access care and to be able to advocate for themselves if they find a clinician does not follow these guidelines.

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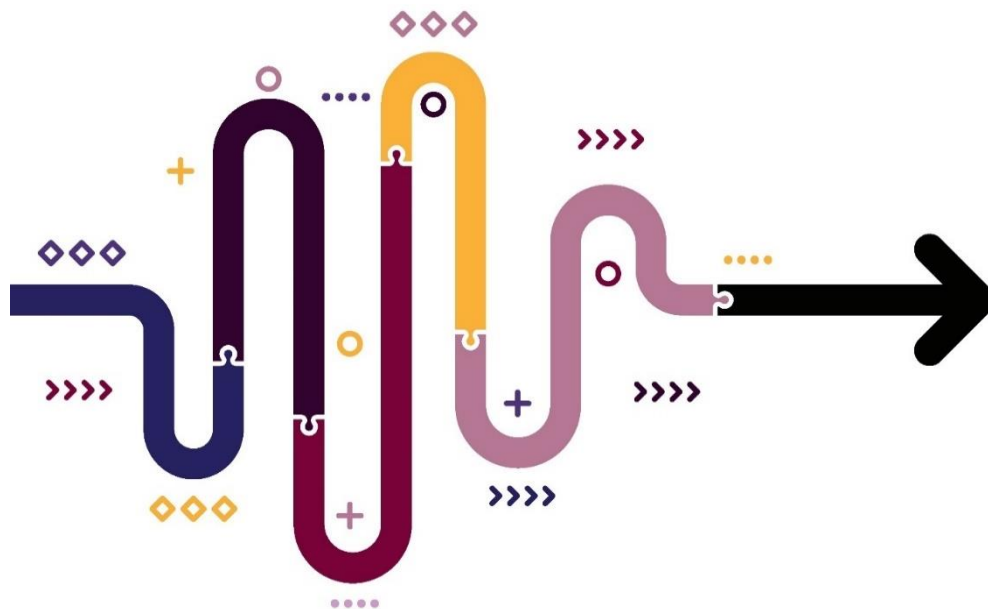
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# Mental and Spiritual Healthcare

## *Overview*

Mental and spiritual health are important parts of wellbeing. Mental healthcare can help people manage challenging experiences and emotions. Youth may seek mental health support for many reasons, including for support exploring their genders, navigating experiences of oppression, or dealing with depression or anxiety. Some mental healthcare providers support youth with social and/or medical transition, such as by conducting readiness assessments, writing letters of support, and offering education or coaching to parents or caregivers.

Spirituality can shape identities and how people see the world. It can sometimes take the form of identifying with a faith or belief system or a sense of connectedness, belonging, meaning, or transcendence. Connecting with a spiritual community or accessing spiritual healthcare services can help individuals understand or make meaning of their lives and improve mental health by helping individuals see their experiences, including their gender journeys, through a spiritual lens.

A person may seek out mental or spiritual healthcare that is long term (like seeing a counsellor weekly for several months), short term (a one-time appointment), or urgent (a crisis line or emergency room). Mental and spiritual healthcare may be available in person, online, by phone, or by text, depending on location and preference.

## *Finding mental healthcare*

Connecting with a healthcare provider who understands your needs and can provide you with support can be helpful for your overall wellbeing. Finding affordable and accessible mental health care can be challenging. When looking for a healthcare provider, ask what their credentials are and what training they have in working with Trans, Two-Spirit, and Nonbinary (TTNB) people. You can check to see what different credentials mean. Look for credentials like CCC (Canadian Certified Counsellor), RSW (Registered Social Worker), or RCSW (Registered Clinical Social Worker) to find healthcare providers with a high level of training and supervision, and who follow a professional Code of Ethics in their work.

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Here are some places to look for mental health support:

### **Community referrals**

Check with community members you know and trust for recommendations of mental and spiritual healthcare providers. TTNB organizations may provide referrals to mental healthcare providers experienced in working with TTNB youth. Religious or culturally specific organizations may suggest culturally relevant resources and/or spiritual care that aligns with their beliefs.

### **University- or Hospital-affiliated clinic for TTNB youth**

Children's hospitals that have specialized clinics for TTNB youth may have information about mental and spiritual healthcare providers within their organizations or in the community.

### **Clinician referrals**

A primary care provider or other healthcare professional may be able to refer you to a mental health provider.

### **Online directories**

Online directories of mental health providers can help you to search for a clinician who meets your needs.

- *Psychology Today* is an online directory that allows users to search for therapists based on their qualifications, approach, and areas of expertise, including knowledge of TTNB experiences. The website also has a search tool that can be used to filter based on factors like the therapist's religious identity, gender, sexual orientation, languages, and those who specialize in working with Indigenous or racialized clients.
- Each province or territory has a psychological association with a website that includes a directory of registered psychologists you can browse through.
- *The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA)* has information on mental health education resources including mental health, symptom management, and self-care. Their website can also help you find a CMHA location in your area, province-specific guides, and programs for TTNB youth.

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## **School resources**

Elementary and high school students may meet with a guidance counsellor, social worker, or psychologist through their school. A trusted adult in the school can help you learn about and access these resources.

## **Post-secondary resources**

Many universities and colleges have free counselling available for students. You can check your school's website or speak with someone you trust on campus to find out more about these resources.

## ***Finding Spiritual Healthcare***

Many areas have TTNB-friendly spiritual and religious spaces. It may be possible to connect with these groups through post-secondary schools, local TTNB community groups, or by searching online for TTNB-friendly mosques, temples, churches, or faith resource guides.

Local Indigenous communities may have groups or activities for their members who identify as TTNB. There are also Indigenous queer and TTNB groups that gather folks together across Nations.

When searching online, look for places that say they are inclusive of gender and sexual diversity and positive. You may be able to connect with spiritual healthcare providers through local organizations.

Some affirming spiritual and religious groups provide support for families of TTNB youth. These may include informational resources and in-person or virtual support groups. For some family members, connecting with other families of TTNB youth who share their religious or spiritual values may be helpful.

Spiritual counselling can follow a specific religion or be non-religious and open to everyone. Professionals who provide spiritual healthcare may or may not be certified mental health professionals. Some providers may use a combination of spiritual and clinical mental health methods in their practice. It may be helpful to talk with other TTNB people about whether a spiritual leader or spiritual healthcare provider will be gender-affirming.

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## ***Finding Crisis Support***

There are many crisis support lines you can call or text in the event of a crisis. You can search for region-specific crisis resources online.

Some resources that are available at anytime, anywhere in Canada, are:

- Trans Lifeline’s peer support hotline at 877-330-6366
- Kids Help Phone at 1-800-668-6868 or by text at 686868
- Indigenous Hope for Wellness Helpline at 1-855-242-3310 or by online chat

Anyone having a mental health crisis or at risk of hurting themselves or others can call 911 or seek care at a hospital’s emergency department.

## ***Things to Think About***

### **Costs, Coverage, and Wait Times**

Some services may be free, such as care provided through schools, hospitals, or publicly funded programs (e.g., youth mental health agencies). Other services cost money, such as seeing a private therapist. Sometimes therapists have sliding scale rates or low-cost options available that may make counselling more affordable.

You can check a healthcare provider's website or call their office to find information about wait times for services. Services that are free and publicly funded tend to have waitlists. Private services may have faster access to services but cost more. Joining waitlists for multiple organizations can help to increase your chances of receiving care as soon as possible.

### **Safety in Crisis**

Some community resources, mental health providers, and crisis support services are required to call police and/or paramedics if they believe that someone is in danger (e.g., if a youth is at risk of hurting themselves or someone else). Interactions with police and emergency services may be helpful. However, they can also carry risk, especially for TTNB and racialized people, who are disproportionately likely to experience mistreatment.

Some strategies youth can use to stay safe while seeking crisis support include:

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- Ask the person who is supporting them what their policies are about calling police and emergency services in a crisis. When might they need to make this call? What would it look like if this happened?
  - If possible, bring a trusted person who can advocate for you when visiting an emergency room or crisis service. Let the support person know in advance how they can help (correcting staff who use the wrong name and/or pronouns, getting a referral to ongoing counselling, etc.).

The Trans Lifeline does not call police or emergency services unless someone specifically requests this.

### **Finding the Right Resources**

Before meeting with a therapist, consider talking to people you know and trust who have worked with the therapist, check the therapist's website, or consult via phone to find out more about them and their approach to therapy.

Many therapists will offer a short free consultation call. This can be an opportunity to ask them about themselves, their values, their approach as a therapist, and their experiences and knowledge of working with people who have similar goals. If a therapist does not feel like the right fit, it is ok to keep looking.

### **Mental Health and Gender-Affirming Care**

Some mental healthcare providers can help support access to gender-affirming medical interventions. For example, they may be able to write a letter of support or complete hormone therapy readiness assessments. Seeking mental health support should not negatively impact a person's access to gender-affirming care.

Guidelines for accessing gender-affirming care recommend addressing the mental health concerns of people receiving gender-affirming medical treatments. Having mental health issues (like depression or anxiety) or substance use does not mean you can't access the gender-related care that you need. It is recommended that these concerns be reasonably well-managed before or during the treatment.

A healthcare provider assessing a person's readiness for a gender-affirming medical intervention will likely confirm that the person is certain about their gender, has the capacity to understand and consent to the care they are seeking,



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and will be able to complete necessary follow-up care (like taking medications as prescribed, doing post-operative care, or coming to follow up appointments).

## Resources

2-Spirited People of the 1<sup>st</sup> Nations. <https://2spirits.org/resource-guide/>

Bockting, W. O., & Cesaretti, C. (2001). Spirituality, transgender Identity, and coming out. *Journal of Sex Education and Therapy*, 26(4), 291-300.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01614576.2001.11074435>

Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) find a social worker: <https://www.casw-acts.ca/en/find-social-worker>

Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (CCPA) find a certified counsellor: <https://www.ccpa-accp.ca/find-a-canadian-certified-counsellor/>

ENAGB Indigenous Youth Agency. <https://enagb-iyaa.ca/>

Indigenous Hope for Wellness Helpline: <https://www.hopeforwellness.ca/>

Kaufman, C. C., Mohr, O., & Olezeski, C. L. (2023). Spirituality, religion, and transgender and gender nonconforming affirmative care with youth and families: Guidelines and recommendations. *Journal of Clinical Psychology in Medical Settings*, 30(2), 318-329. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10880-022-09892-7>

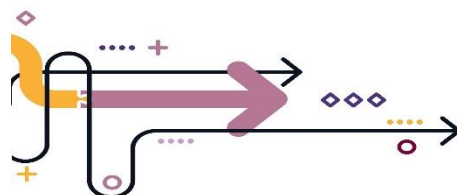
Kids Help Phone: <https://kidshelpphone.ca/>

Lekwauwa, R., Funaro, M. C., & Doolittle, B. (2023). Systematic review: The relationship between religion, spirituality and mental health in adolescents who identify as transgender. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health*, 27(4), 421-438.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/19359705.2022.2107592>

Native Youth Sexual Health Network has many resources on culture, including “You Are Made of Medicine: A Mental Health Peer Support Manual for Indigiqueer, Two-Spirit, LGBTQ+, and Gender-Non Conforming Indigenous Youth”:  
<https://www.nativeyouthsexualhealth.com/toolkits>

Trans Care BC (n.d.). *Finding a counsellor*. <https://www.transcarebc.ca/how-to-get-care/finding-counsellor>

Trans Lifeline. <https://translifeline.org/hotline/>



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# Puberty Blockers

## *Overview*

Puberty blockers are medications that are used to pause puberty. They can give Trans, Two-Spirit, and Nonbinary (TTNB) youth more time to explore their gender goals without experiencing unwanted changes to the body.

Once puberty blockers are stopped, a person will restart puberty in 3 to 6 months. People may choose to start hormone therapy after stopping or while taking puberty blockers, depending on their embodiment goals.

Puberty blockers cannot undo any changes that have already occurred, but can prevent further changes. Access to puberty blockers can improve mental health and may reduce the need for some gender-affirming surgeries in the future, like masculinizing chest surgery.

## *Purpose*

For youth assigned male at birth, puberty blockers will stop or limit:

- Growth of facial and body hair
- Deepening of the voice
- Broadening of the shoulders
- Growth of the Adam's apple
- Growth of gonads (testes) and erectile tissue (penis)

For youth assigned female at birth, puberty blockers will stop or limit:

- Breast/chest tissue development
- Broadening of the hips
- Monthly bleeding

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For all youth, puberty blockers will temporarily stop or slow:

- Growth in height
- Development of the sex drive
- Fertility
- Accumulation of calcium in the bones

### ***Safety & Side Effects***

Puberty blockers are used to treat a variety of conditions and are considered safe overall. As with all medications, side effects are possible. These include:

- Hot flashes
- Headaches
- Fatigue
- Muscle aches
- Weight gain
- Changes in mood

Research shows that there are significant mental health and gender embodiment benefits for TTNB youth accessing puberty blockers. With support from their care team, youth taking puberty blockers can effectively manage side effects.

### **Bone Health**

During puberty, the increase in sex hormones helps people build stronger bones. Youth taking puberty blockers will not build up calcium in their bones as quickly as youth going through puberty. Once youth start puberty, by stopping puberty blockers and/or starting hormone therapy, youth will begin to build stronger bones.

Youth can proactively support their bone health by taking calcium and vitamin D, and doing weight-bearing exercise as recommended by their healthcare provider. Some providers may ask youth taking puberty blockers to get bone density scans to monitor bone health.

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## ***How to access puberty blockers***

### **Eligibility**

Puberty blockers are prescribed to youth who are experiencing gender incongruence/dysphoria. They may be a good option when distress related to gender worsens as puberty starts. When starting puberty blockers, healthcare providers will ensure that medical and mental health issues are also addressed.

There are five stages of puberty, called the Tanner stages. Tanner Stage 1 is pre-puberty (childhood) and Tanner Stage 5 is when puberty has finished (adulthood). People move through these stages at different rates and ages. Puberty blockers can be taken while puberty is in progress, starting at Tanner Stage 2.

Youth in later stages of puberty (Tanner Stage 3 or 4) can take puberty blockers, too. Youth in these stages may also find other medications to be helpful. For example, progestin-only medications can stop monthly bleedings (periods). Antiandrogens (also called testosterone blockers) can reduce the effects of testosterone.

The length of time a person takes puberty blockers varies depending on their gender goals, Tanner Stage, and bone health. Healthcare providers work with youth to develop care plans that fit their gender goals.

### **Assessment and care planning**

A readiness assessment is needed prior to starting puberty blockers. This process is an opportunity to explore gender, goals, health needs, and capacity to consent to starting puberty blockers. Sometimes, primary care providers can complete a readiness assessment. Other times, this is done with a specialist, such as a psychologist.

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Some questions that healthcare providers may ask include:

- How would you describe your gender?
- Do you remember when you realized your gender was different from what others thought?
- Have you taken any steps to express or feel more comfortable in your gender (e.g., names, pronouns, clothing, hairstyle, make-up, binding)? If yes, what has that been like for you?
- When did you start thinking about taking puberty blockers?
- What do you anticipate the main benefits of puberty blockers will be for you?
- Do you anticipate any challenges?

Care planning for puberty blockers includes talking with a healthcare provider (like a primary care provider or endocrinologist) about a youth's health history.

Sometimes a physical exam will be needed. A physical exam typically includes checking vital signs, listening to the heart and lungs, gently palpating (touching) the abdomen, and the neck (to check the thyroid). Sometimes a brief examination of the groin and genital area or chest area is recommended to confirm what Tanner stage of puberty someone is in. Healthcare providers should work with youth to do this exam in a sensitive and respectful manner.

Depending on an individual's health history and needs, additional tests, exams, or bloodwork may be requested. Since hormone therapy (sometimes used after starting puberty blockers) can affect fertility, your provider might talk to you about options for creating families and fertility preservation.

Health care providers follow guidelines for prescribing puberty blockers and work with youth to create care plans that fit their gender goals, health needs, and budget. A care plan may include hormone blockers, hormone therapy, or a combination of both. Healthcare providers may recommend taking puberty blockers first before deciding whether to start hormone therapy. Other times, hormone therapy may be recommended without taking puberty blockers first.

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Care plans are updated as needed. For example, the length of time a person takes puberty blockers and hormone therapy can be changed to best meet each person's needs.

### **Administration**

Puberty blockers are prescribed by an endocrinologist, family doctor, or nurse practitioner with training in how to provide this type of gender-affirming care. In Canada, puberty blockers are given by intramuscular injection either monthly or every three months. Following the schedule prescribed helps ensure puberty does not restart.

Signs of puberty may increase after the first injection. However, this should stop after two months of taking the medication. If signs of puberty continue, the dose or timing may need to be adjusted.

Puberty blocking implants are available in some countries, but in Canada, puberty blockers are currently only given by injection.

### **Follow-up care**

Monitoring may be provided by an endocrinologist, family doctor, or nurse practitioner. This usually includes regular blood tests. It may also include bone density scans.

### ***Things to think about***

#### **Cost**

The puberty blocker used most in Canada is called Lupron Depot. It costs around \$400 a month. Some insurance plans cover all or part of this cost.

#### **Pregnancy**

Puberty blockers can suppress monthly bleeding (periods) but they are not a method of birth control and do not prevent sexually transmitted infections. Non-hormonal forms of contraception (like condoms) are recommended if sexual activity could result in pregnancy. If a pregnancy occurs while taking puberty blockers-your health care provider should be notified right away.

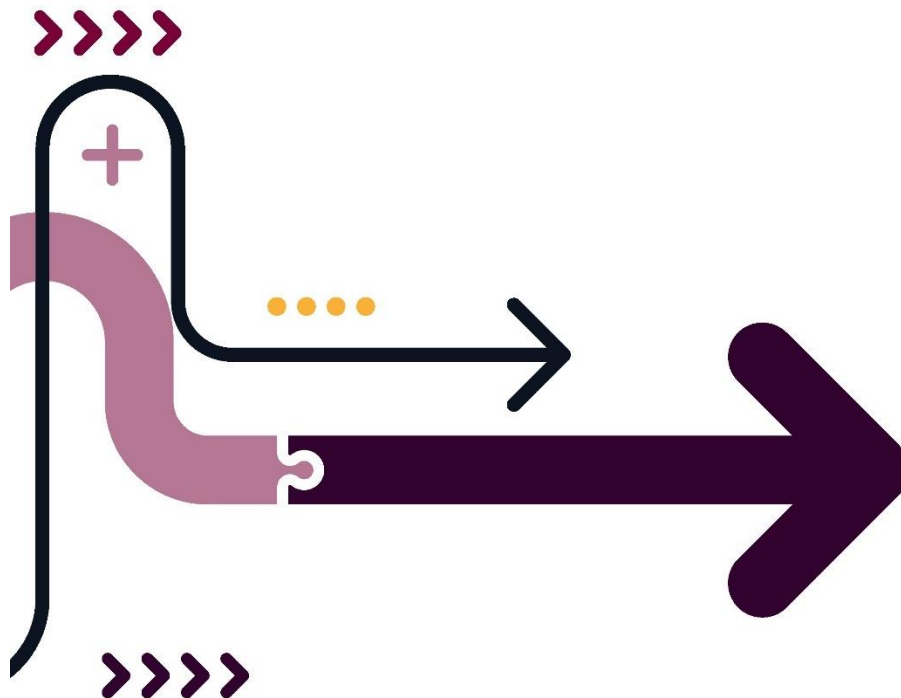
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## Resources

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- de Vries, A. L. C., McGuire, J. K., Steensma, T. D., Wagenaar, E. C. F., Doreleijers, T. A. H., & Cohen-Kettenis, P. T. (2014). Young adult psychological outcome after puberty suppression and gender reassignment. *Pediatrics*, *134*(4), 696–704. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2013-2958>
- Doernbecher Children's Hospital. *About puberty blockers*. Oregon Health & Science University. <https://www.ohsu.edu/sites/default/files/2020-12/Gender-Clinic-Puberty-Blockers-Handout.pdf>
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- Lupron depot. *Important safety information*. <https://www.lupron.com/isi.html>
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- Trans Care BC. *Information for Indigenous people*. <https://www.transcarebc.ca/information-for/indigenous-people>
- Trans Care BC. *Primary Care Toolkit*. <https://transcarebcprod.prod.acquia-sites.com/sites/default/files/2024-03/Primary-Care-Toolkit.pdf>

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<https://doi.org/10.1210/clinem/dgac571>





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# Hormone Therapy

## *Overview*

Hormone therapy is used to change a person's physical appearance to better align with their gender. Hormone therapy can improve emotional wellbeing, relieve gender-related distress, and help people feel more at ease in their bodies. Trans, Two-Spirit, and Nonbinary (TTNB) people may choose to take hormone therapy long-term, short-term, or take breaks, depending on what is right for them. Treatment plans, including dosages, can be customized for different gender goals.

Estrogen therapies (sometimes including a testosterone blocker) and testosterone therapies are used to induce different secondary sex characteristics (e.g., breast growth, facial hair). Some of the effects of hormone therapy are permanent, and others will reverse if the medication is stopped.

## *Purpose*

The results of hormone therapy can be different for everyone. The effects listed below are common changes based on maximum hormone therapy dosing. Timeframes and effects will vary based on the individual and the amount of medications taken.

## Estrogen Therapy

### **Breast development:**

- Usually starts in 3 to 6 months
- Breasts reach full size in 2 to 5 years
- Size varies; A or B cup size is typical
- A permanent change

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### **Body fat redistribution**

- Usually starts in 3 to 6 months
- Reaches maximum effect in 2 to 5 years
- Less fat on abdomen; more fat on buttocks, hips, and thighs
- Not a permanent change if hormones are stopped

### **Reduced muscle mass and strength**

- Usually starts in 3 to 6 months
- Reaches maximum effect in 1 to 2 years
- Reduced muscle and strength in upper body
- Not a permanent change if hormones are stopped

### **Softening of skin**

- Usually starts in 3 to 6 months
- Skin will be softer and less oily
- Not a permanent change if hormones are stopped

### **Thinning of facial and body hair**

- Usually starts in 6 to 12 months
- Maximum effect in more than 3 years
- Body hair will appear less noticeable and grow more slowly
- Facial hair may grow more slowly and appear less noticeable, but will not go away
- If there is scalp hair loss, it may slow down; hair that has already been lost will not grow back
- Not a permanent change if hormones are stopped

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## Reduced sex drive

- Varies by individual
- Usually starts in 1 to 3 months
- Reaches maximum effect in 1 to 2 years
- Less spontaneous physical arousal (erections)
- Not a permanent change if hormones are stopped

## Fertility

- Timeline varies
- Sperm may no longer reach maturity
- Won't produce as much semen
- May not be able to have erections for penetrative sex
- It is possible to become permanently unable to make someone pregnant (but birth control and condom use is still recommended since this is not the case for everyone)

## Smaller erogenous tissue (penis) and gonads (testes)

- Usually starts in 3 to 6 months
- Erogenous tissue may get smaller
- Gonads may shrink down to half their initial size
- May or may not be a permanent change if hormones are stopped

## Emotional changes

- Overall emotional state may or may not change; this varies from person to person
- May experience a narrower or wider range of emotions or feelings
- Not a permanent change

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## Testosterone Therapy

### Body fat redistribution

- Usually starts in 1 to 6 months
- Maximum effect in 2 to 5 years
- More abdominal fat
- Less fat around buttocks, hips, and thighs
- Not a permanent change if testosterone is stopped

### Increased muscle mass and strength

- Usually starts in 6 to 12 months
- Maximum effect in 2 to 5 years
- Not a permanent change if testosterone is stopped

### Oily skin and acne

- Usually starts in 1 to 6 months
- Often improves in 1 to 2 years
- There are medications that can be taken to minimize this
- Not a permanent change if testosterone is stopped

### More facial & body hair

- Usually starts in 6 to 12 months
- Maximum effect in 5 years or more
- Gradual growth of facial hair
- More hair and thicker and coarser hairs on abdomen, arms, chest, back and legs
- It is likely a permanent change and hair will continue to grow, even if taking testosterone is stopped

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### **Scalp hair loss**

- Usually starts in less than 12 months
- Hair loss at temples and along the crown of head
- Possibility of becoming completely bald but will vary depending on one's genes, like cisgender men
- A permanent change, even if testosterone is stopped
- There are medications that can be taken to minimize this

### **Deepened voice**

- Usually starts in 1 to 6 months
- Maximum effect in 1 to 2 years
- Voice may deepen but other aspects of the way one speaks may not be perceived as typically male; it is possible to work with a speech language pathologist to achieve this as desired
- A permanent change

### **Increased sex drive**

- Usually starts in 1 to 3 months
- This change is usually temporary as hormone levels balance, and reversible when the treatment is stopped

### **Monthly bleeding stops**

- Usually happens within 1 to 6 months
- May require a change in dose or additional medications (e.g., progesterone) to fully stop monthly bleeding
- Pregnancy may still be possible even when monthly bleeding stops (note: it is not safe to take testosterone while pregnant)
- Reversible change if testosterone is taken intermittently or stopped

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### **Bigger erectile tissue (clitoris)**

- Usually starts in 1 to 6 months
- Reaches full size in 1 to 2 years
- Size typically ranges from 1 to 3 cm
- A permanent change, even if taking testosterone stops

### **Changes to lining of internal genitals (vagina)**

- Usually starts in 1 to 6 months
- Maximum effect in 1 to 2 years
- Thinning and drying of the lining of the internal genitals (vagina)
- May make penetration uncomfortable (treatments are available)

### **Emotional changes**

- Overall emotional state may or may not change; this varies from person to person
- Many people experience positive mood changes
- May experience a narrower range of emotions or feelings
- May become irritable, frustrated, or angry more easily

### ***Safety and side effects***

Hormone therapy is considered safe and effective for youth and the overall risk is low. As with all medications, side effects are possible, including:

- Weight gain
- Acne (with testosterone)
- Mood changes, may be positive or negative
- Fertility changes
- Possible increased risk of blood clots (with estrogen) and high blood pressure

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## How to access hormone therapy

### ***Eligibility***

Hormone therapy can be prescribed for TTNB youth who have started puberty and are experiencing gender incongruence/dysphoria. When starting hormone therapy, healthcare providers will make sure medical and mental health issues are addressed. The length of time a person takes hormone therapy varies depending on their gender goals. It can range from a few weeks or months to the rest of the person's life. Healthcare providers work with youth to develop care plans that fit their gender goals.

### ***Assessment and care planning***

A readiness assessment is needed prior to starting hormone therapy. This process is an opportunity to explore gender, goals, health needs, and capacity to consent to hormone therapy. Sometimes primary care providers can complete readiness assessments and care planning. Other times this is done with a specialist, such as a psychologist.

Some questions that healthcare providers may include:

- How would you describe your gender?
- Do you remember when you realized your gender was different from what others thought?
- Have you taken any steps to express or feel more comfortable in your gender (e.g., names, pronouns, clothing, hairstyle, make-up, binding)? If yes, what has that been like for you?
- What is your health history (current and past medical and mental health conditions, surgical history, medications, tobacco and cannabis use, allergies, exercise, nutrition, family history, etc.)?
- When did you start thinking about taking hormone therapy?
- What do you anticipate the main benefits of puberty blockers/hormone therapy will be for you?
- Do you anticipate any challenges?

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Care planning for hormone therapy will include talking with a healthcare provider about health history. Sometimes a physical exam and bloodwork tests will be required. Guidelines for starting hormone therapy recommend addressing mental health concerns. Having mental health issues (like depression or anxiety) or addiction does not mean you can't access hormone therapy. It is recommended that these concerns be reasonably well-managed before or during the treatment. Since hormone therapy can affect reproduction, providers will discuss options for creating families and preserving fertility.

The dosage, duration, and types of hormone therapy can be customized to fit gender goals, health needs, and budget. For example, doses can be customized for individuals who are seeking slower or more subtle changes. Care plans are updated as needed.

### ***Administration***

Hormone therapy is prescribed by an endocrinologist, family doctor, or nurse practitioner with training in gender-affirming care. Both estrogen and testosterone therapies are available in different forms.

- Testosterone is often administered as a weekly or bi-weekly injection. It is also available as a gel or pill taken daily.
- Estrogen is often taken daily as a pill. It is also available as a patch or injection. Testosterone blockers are also available as a pill and can be taken with estrogen.

Injectable hormones can be administered with intramuscular or subcutaneous injections. They are both safe and effective techniques. An intramuscular injection uses a longer needle to go directly into the muscle. The medication is absorbed quickly into the bloodstream with this method. A subcutaneous injection uses a shorter needle in the layer of tissue directly under the skin. The medication is absorbed more slowly into the bloodstream with this method. For more information about how to safely inject hormones, you can consult the injection guides from Trans Care BC or Fenway Health.



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People whose hormones are administered by gel, patch, or pill may experience a slower onset of changes compared to injections, although the same effects happen eventually. Hormone levels are often more stable on gel, patches, or pills since the hormones are administered every day. Some people using injections may experience changes in mood due to fluctuating hormone levels between doses. A healthcare provider might suggest switching to more frequent injections or a type of hormone taken daily.

Healthcare providers will work with you to determine the best type of hormone therapy based on your gender goals, health needs, and budget.

### ***Follow-up care***

Monitoring may be provided by an endocrinologist, family doctor, or nurse practitioner. This usually includes regular blood tests.

Youth who have anxiety related to needles may opt for a type of hormone therapy that does not require injection, but needles will be used for blood tests. If you are afraid of needles, speak with your care provider to get support managing and/or overcoming this fear.

When a person decides to stop or take a break from hormone therapy, their healthcare provider may recommend slowly lowering the dose of hormone medication over a few weeks. This can minimize the side effects of changing hormone levels. If hormone therapy is stopped for individuals who no longer have ovaries or testes (the parts of the body that produce hormones), additional measures may be taken to support physical wellbeing (e.g., taking different hormone medications).

It is important to discuss any change to hormone therapy with a healthcare provider. Hormones impact a person's overall health and healthcare providers can provide advice on how to adjust care plans to meet a person's needs.

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## ***Things to think about***

### **Supplies**

Injection supplies (e.g. needles, syringes) are available for purchase at many pharmacies and medical supply stores. Sharps containers are often available at pharmacies free of charge. Harm reduction sites or needle exchanges may also supply hormone therapy injection supplies free of charge.

Community organizations or care providers may have further information about where to access injection supplies in a youth's region.

### **Recalls**

Drug recalls remove malfunctioning medications from the market and inform users of their potential risk. If there is a recall on hormone medication, Health Canada is responsible for tracking and informing the public.

There is a database that contains recall information on the Health Canada website. Additionally, it is possible to sign up for a free email notification service called MedEffect. This tool sends alerts to subscribers whenever a new advisory or recall is issued by Health Canada.

### **Shortages**

Drug shortages can happen when there is not enough supply of a medication to fill everyone's prescription in a specific region. Although shortages can happen with any medication, injectable testosterone is the hormone medication that has most often been in short supply recently.

For concerns about a shortage, you can:

1. Check with your usual pharmacy to see if they have the prescription in stock or if they can locate it at another site
2. Call different local pharmacies to ask about the availability of a prescription. It may be especially helpful to try smaller pharmacies (as opposed to large chain pharmacies)

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3. Consider a temporary switch to another form (different brand or method of administration) of your medication, if possible. If your usual medication cannot be found, your pharmacist may contact your prescriber to approve a temporary change
  4. Contact your healthcare provider to discuss the situation. They may be able to prescribe a different form of your medication until the usual medication is available

### **Hormones obtained without a prescription**

Some people use hormones that have not been prescribed to them. There are health risks associated with buying or borrowing hormone medications rather than getting a prescription from a health care provider. Two potential issues are the quality and dosage of the product. Unlike medications from a pharmacy, medications from other sources may be diluted or mixed with unknown substances. A person using non-prescribed hormones will not have dosage and health risks monitored by a healthcare provider through regular bloodwork. When possible, it is recommended to access prescribed hormone therapy through a healthcare provider.

### **Cost**

The price of hormone therapy medications varies depending on the type of hormone a youth is prescribed. Testosterone can range from about \$10/month for injections to \$130/month for pills or gel. Estrogen can range from about \$20/month for pills or patches to \$140/month for injections. The costs of these medications may be covered by private (extended), government (pharmacare), or other health plans. Some people pay for hormone prescriptions out of pocket.

### **Fertility and pregnancy**

Hormone therapy can impact fertility and ability to reproduce. However, hormone therapy is not a form of birth control. Pregnancy is possible while taking hormones.

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It is not safe to continue testosterone therapy while pregnant as it can cause harm to the fetus. It is important to use contraception when having sex that could result in pregnancy. Hormonal contraception methods containing estrogen can be taken at the same time as testosterone. The two medications will not impact each other. Non-hormonal contraception, like condoms or copper IUDs, are also an option.

When people taking hormone therapy are interested in having a family, there are many options. See the *Reproductive Health* section for more information.

### **Customizing Hormone Therapy**

Hormone therapy produces many changes. A person may find some effects affirming while not desiring others. Unfortunately, it is not possible to fully customize the effects of hormones. If youth are concerned about some hormones' effects or start to experience discomfort while taking them, they should speak to their provider about their concerns and the available options.

Some options may include:

- Taking a lower dose of hormones so that changes happen more slowly
- Taking hormones for a short time until certain desired permanent effects have been achieved (e.g., lowered voice, breast growth) and then stopping
- Stopping hormones. Youth can stop and start hormones multiple times. If changes are beginning to cause discomfort, stopping hormones can allow youth take time to re-evaluate. There is always an option to restart hormones in the future if desired
- Taking other medications to for specific effects (e.g., Finasteride to limit hair loss)
- Taking a combination of different hormone therapies

Youth should speak with their healthcare provider about their embodiment goals and what options make most sense for them. Youth may also wish to do their own research by seeking information online from trusted organizations and speaking with other TTNB people.

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## Resources

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# Gender-affirming Surgeries

## *Overview*

Gender-affirming surgeries change physical characteristics to support a person's gender embodiment goals. Older Trans, Two-Spirit, and Nonbinary (TTNB) youth may choose to have gender-affirming surgeries as part of gender transition or affirmation. Surgeries are not part of everyone's gender embodiment goals, and many people choose not to have surgery.

## *Purpose*

Gender-affirming surgeries can help TTNB people feel more comfortable in their bodies and may help them be perceived by others in ways that are affirming. Having certain surgeries may allow people to stop binding, packing, padding, or tucking. There are many types of surgeries and procedures available.

## Upper Body Surgeries

### *Breast construction*

Surgeries that create, enlarge, or shape one's breasts. These surgeries are performed when the breast growth from hormone therapy is less than desired.

### *Chest reduction/construction*

Surgeries that remove or reduce chest tissue. It may involve changing the size or position of the nipples, or removing the nipples. There are two options:

- Chest construction surgery (bilateral mastectomy with contouring) involves the removal and sculpting of chest tissue to create a flatter and/or more sculpted chest
- Chest reduction surgery is a procedure to reduce the amount of chest tissue present

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## Lower Body Surgeries

### ***Orchiectomy***

Surgery to remove the gonads (testes) and spermatic cord. It can be done with or without scrotoectomy (removal of scrotal sac).

### ***Hysterectomy with bilateral salpingo-oophorectomy***

Surgery to remove the uterus, fallopian tubes, and ovaries. One or both ovaries can be left in place.

### ***Vaginoplasty and vulvoplasty***

Surgery to remove the penis, scrotum, and testes and create a vulva (including mons, labia, clitoris, and urethral opening) and vagina. Vulvoplasty refers to the same outcomes without the creation of a vaginal opening.

### ***Erectile tissue release***

Procedure that involves cutting ligaments around the erectile tissue (sometimes called a clitoris) to release it and give it more length (2 to 4 cm).

### ***Metoidioplasty***

This procedure also involves cutting ligaments around the erectile tissue to release and lengthen it. Skin from the external genitals (sometimes called labia or outer labia) is then wrapped around the penis to add girth. As part of this procedure, one may opt for urethral lengthening, vaginectomy (removal of the vagina) and/or scrotoplasty (creation of a scrotum).

### ***Phalloplasty***

Surgery to create a penis from tissue grafted from another part of the body, often the forearm or thigh. It is common, but not necessary, to undergo urethral lengthening, vaginectomy (removal of the vagina), and scrotoplasty (creation of a scrotum).



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### ***Testicular implants***

Implants can be inserted following a scrotoplasty. This is done in a separate surgery, months later.

### ***Penile implant***

A device that can be implanted following phalloplasty to allow for erections. This is done in a separate surgery, months later.

## **Additional Procedures**

### ***Facial procedures***

This refers to a variety of plastic surgeries including face lifts, procedures to reduce the Adam's apple, changes to the nose or facial bones, and rejuvenation of the eyelids.

### ***Hair reconstruction or rejuvenation***

These are procedures involving medications and surgeries to change hairlines and patterns.

### ***Liposuction or lipofilling***

These procedures involve moving or removing fat to change body contours.

### ***Voice Surgery***

These are procedures that change the length, tightness, or size of the vocal cords to produce a higher pitched voice.

## **Eligibility**

Gender-affirming surgeries are available for TTNB people experiencing gender incongruence/dysphoria. When assessing readiness and care planning, healthcare providers will ask questions about a person's gender, health history, health issues that could affect surgery outcomes, and ensure the person has the capacity to consent to the surgery.

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Guidelines for accessing surgery recommend addressing mental health concerns. Having mental health issues (like depression or anxiety) or addiction does not mean you can't access surgery. It is recommended that these concerns be reasonably well-managed before or over the course of treatment. This can help people prepare for the procedure and heal safely afterwards.

The WPATH Standards of Care Version 8 recommend 6 months of hormone therapy prior to undergoing lower surgeries, unless hormone therapy is inconsistent with the patient's gender goals and identity. Specific surgeons may have additional criteria.

Chest construction or reduction may be accessed by youth under the age of 18, but in Canada, other gender-affirming surgeries are typically only available to those over the age of majority (age 18 and older).

### ***Safety and risks***

As with all surgeries, gender-affirming surgeries have potential benefits and risks. Surgical teams will take a wide variety of steps to minimize risks and respond to any complications appropriately.

Depending on the surgery, potential risks include:

- Negative reactions to anesthesia
- Infections
- Cardiovascular complications (blood loss, blood clots, and artery blockages)
- Hematomas (blood collects at the surgery site)
- Seromas (fluid accumulation at the surgical site)
- Nipple necrosis (when the nipple, or part of it, comes off)
- Injury to the nerves or muscles
- Urological complications (bladder or pathway through which urine flows)
- Implant complications
- Loss of sensation
- Dissatisfaction (for example, size, shape, asymmetry, visible scarring)

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It is important to discuss these risks in detail with their surgeon and learn how to minimize risk throughout the preparation and recovery processes.

## How to access surgery

### ***Surgical readiness assessment***

Before a surgical consultation with a specialist, one or more surgical readiness assessments may be required. These readiness assessments can be completed during a surgical care planning appointment with a qualified healthcare provider.

During a readiness assessment, the healthcare provider will likely ask about gender, gender goals, health history, expectations for the surgery, and aftercare plans. Examples of questions include:

- Have you taken any steps to live more fully in your gender?
- Why are you interested in this surgery?
- What is your understanding of the surgical procedure, risks, and post-operative healing process?
- How do you think having surgery will impact you socially, emotionally, and financially?
- Who is in your support network?
- What is your surgical aftercare plan?

Once the readiness assessment is completed, the assessor will provide a letter of recommendation and a referral can be made to a surgeon for consultation.

### ***Referral for surgical consultation***

Depending on availability and funding, patients may be able to request one or more consultations with specific surgeons. Primary care providers can refer patients to the type of surgeon trained in the surgery they seek.

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Examples of types of surgeons include:

- A urologist for orchiectomy
- A gynecologist for hysterectomy and salpingo-oophorectomy
- A plastic surgeon for chest reduction/construction or breast construction
- Gender surgery programs for genital surgeries

### ***Surgical consultation***

Surgical consultation is a great opportunity to get a better understanding of what to expect and prepare for based on the surgeon's specific practice. The consultation will help determine what procedure would be possible and best for a person's body type, embodiment goals, and health needs. In addition to a physical exam, consultations may include discussion about:

- Different surgical techniques available and outcomes
- Advantages and disadvantages of different techniques
- Possible risks and complications of the various techniques
- What to do before surgery (e.g., blood work, pick up prescriptions)
- Aftercare and recovery from surgery (e.g., expected recovery time, length of hospital stay, what type of support one may need from family and friends following the procedure)

The surgery date may be booked at the consultation, or the surgeon's office might call later to schedule a surgery date.

If you are uncomfortable with the surgeon or would prefer a different provider, you can request a new referral.

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## Preparing for surgery

There are steps you can take to prepare for surgery and create a plan for recovery after surgery.

### *Preparing emotionally*

Gender-affirming surgery can bring up a wide range of emotions. It can be helpful to:

- Lean on family and friends for support
- Gather materials for wellness activities (like journaling, arts, ceremonial practice, etc.)
- Connect with others who have had gender-affirming surgery through peer support groups or online networks
- Talk to a mental or spiritual healthcare provider prior to surgery and during recovery

### *Preparing physically*

Preparing physically for surgery can help improve surgical outcomes and promote healing later. Eating a well-balanced diet, staying active, and getting enough rest will help support a smooth recovery. Doctors may also recommend or require quitting smoking and vaping, as substances that irritate the lungs can interfere with the body's ability to heal and increase the chances of complications following anesthesia and surgery.

### *Preparing financially*

If you have a job, you will likely need to arrange time off work for recovery. A letter from your primary care provider or surgeon may be required to request leave. This letter does not need to specify details about the procedure. Depending on the kind of work you do, you may need to request temporary accommodations or a gradual return to work.

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If you do not live near a surgical centre, you will need to prepare for travel costs as well accommodation, meals, and parking.

If you need support covering costs, the following resources may be applicable:

- Paid leave (e.g. short-term disability, sick time, or vacation time) may be used during time off work to recover; speak with your employer or Human Resources department to see what options are available
- Employment Insurance (EI) Sickness Benefits may be an option for individuals working and meeting the eligibility criteria
- Check with your healthcare provider about travel assistance programs, including Hope Air
- Fundraisers online or in-person may be an option to cover surgery related costs

### ***Preparing at home***

Here are some steps you can take to prepare your home:

- Do laundry ahead of time so bedding and clothing are clean after surgery
- Acquire loose-fitting, comfortable, and easy-to-slip on clothes
- Stock up on groceries
- Prepare and freeze meals
- Collect the medical supplies the surgeon recommends
- Place essential items on low and easy to access shelves to avoid stretching or strain following surgery

### ***Preparing a support system***

As you heal, you may be tired, sore, have limited mobility, and experience emotional ups and downs. It is a good idea to think about how others can best support you after surgery. You will be required to have someone pick you up from the hospital. If you live alone, consider having someone stay with you or speak to your provider about community nursing supports that may be available to help for the first couple of days after surgery.

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Supports to plan:

- Meal preparation
- Regular chores (cleaning, taking out the garbage)
- Caring for children or pets
- Connecting socially

## Initial follow-up care

### ***Post-operative care plan***

The recovery process can be different for different people and procedures. The length of hospital stays will depend on the post-operative plan and surgical site. Some procedures, including chest reduction/construction and breast construction, may be completed as a day-surgery. Other surgeries may require overnight stays in the hospital.

Providers will go over a detailed post-operative care plan which may include:

- Scheduling follow-up appointments
- Information about what to expect during the healing process and what to look out for
- Taking prescriptions including painkillers and antibiotics
- Instructions about when and how to remove or change surgical dressings
- For lower surgeries, aftercare may include genital care, catheter care, and dilation (for vaginoplasty)
- Activities to avoid while healing (heavy lifting, exercise, sexual activity, etc.)
- Information about when you can return to your usual activities

The surgeon should be available for support for aftercare and any complications that arise.

### ***Pain management***

It is recommended to follow the pain medication schedule recommended by your surgeon or PCP. This helps control post-operative pain and facilitate healing.

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If you want to avoid the use of narcotic painkillers, healthcare providers can recommend alternative pain medications. Depending on the procedure, you may be able to manage pain with over-the-counter medications like acetaminophen (Tylenol) and ibuprofen (Advil).

### **Tips to promote healing**

Consider the following strategies to promote healing during the early stages of recovery:

- Get lots of rest: Following surgery one's body needs extra rest to heal. Take naps or breaks throughout the day. This will let the body focus on healing and building up strength again.
- Wash hands frequently: Especially before and after changing wound dressing, keeping up with hand washing will help prevent infection.
- Walk: Walking can help relieve pain, improve blood flow and have a positive impact on mood. Start with short, slow-paced walks. After genital surgeries, some people find using a mobility aid, like a cane or a walker, to be helpful at first.
- Enjoy foods that help with wound healing: Foods that are high in protein, zinc, vitamin A and vitamin C are good options to promote healing.
- Drink lots of water: Especially following lower surgeries, drinking lots of water and emptying the bladder regularly can help prevent urinary tract infections.
- Wear a high quality mask when seeing people, limit visits while you are recovering, and ask your visitors to mask as well: This can help you avoid getting a respiratory infection that could slow your recovery.

### **Longer term aftercare**

#### **Physiotherapy**

Physiotherapy can be helpful for some people after gender-affirming surgery. Treatments can help with pain and scar management, monitoring healing, and improving range of motion. For gonadectomies and genital surgeries, physical therapy can help strengthen pelvic floor muscles.



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If you are interested in physiotherapy to support post-operative care, speak to your surgeon about when it would be safe to start treatments. Healthcare providers may be able to recommend or refer to physiotherapists with experience in gender-affirming surgery aftercare.

### **Scar care**

Some gender-affirming surgeries will result in visible scarring. Surgeons will provide advice during the initial recovery to promote healing and prevent severe scarring (e.g., limit movement, avoid heavy lifting). They can also provide instructions for scar care in the months after surgery, including when it is safe to start.

There are steps one can take to minimize the appearance of scars overtime, including:

- Avoid getting direct sun on scars for up to a year, to help prevent color changes on the scar tissue
- Follow the surgeon's instructions for regular scar massage
- Follow the surgeon's instructions for using silicone products, such as scar tape

### **Complications**

It is unlikely any new complications will occur after the initial healing process concludes. For example, there are unlikely to be any age-related complications later in life connected to having gender-affirming surgeries.

### **Revisions**

In some cases, a surgical revision may be needed following gender-affirming surgery. You can speak with your surgeon about whether a surgical revision is appropriate. It is important to note that even if the initial procedure was covered by a provincial or territorial health program, revisions may not be. However, if the surgeon determines a revision is medically necessary, they may be able to apply for provincial funding.

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## **Things to think about**

### **Variations of procedures**

There may be individually customized surgery options that would best fit your gender embodiment goals and health needs. For example, a person may opt for:

- Chest reduction
- Chest construction without nipple grafts
- Vaginoplasty using a section of one's intestine to create neovagina (this option may not be available at every surgical centre)
- Orchiectomy and penectomy without vaginoplasty
- Hysterectomy without bilateral salpingo-oophorectomy (one or both ovaries are not removed)

### **Ongoing hormone therapy**

Sex hormones are important for overall wellbeing and especially for bone and cardiovascular health. Following gonadectomy (i.e., removal of ovaries or testes) most people need to take ongoing hormone therapy (e.g., estrogen, testosterone).

### **Results**

There are various online community spaces where TTNB people share their surgery results with other community members. People share photos throughout the recovery process so others can see how the body may change as it heals. These groups can be found on online social platforms like Facebook, Reddit, Discord, or on websites focused on specific procedures. Sometimes surgeons have before and after photos available on their websites.

It is important to note that no two bodies are the same and everyone's surgery outcomes will be unique to them. However, looking at photos of several types of procedures can give you an idea of what results you could expect and help you determine what procedure you would prefer. You can bring pictures of results you like to a surgical consultation to help communicate desired outcomes to your surgeon. Surgeons may have photos available to share at the surgical consultation.

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## Sexual health and fertility

Lower gender-affirming surgeries can have a direct impact on reproductive capabilities. Primary care providers and surgeons can provide more information about how specific surgeries will affect fertility.

While research shows that gender-affirming surgeries can result in a more satisfying sex life, genital surgeries can have an impact on sexual function. Outcomes vary depending on the type of surgery, technique used, customizations chosen, and individual outcomes.

Following lower surgery, it may take time to recover and experience erections or orgasms. Nerve regeneration begins after surgery, but the timeframe to regain sensation varies from person to person. It may take over a year for nerves to finish regenerating. Sensation may be different than what someone was used to prior to surgery and some areas may not regain sensation. Some people report experiencing pain or a tingling sensation as nerves regenerate.

Depending on the procedure, erections may or may not be possible. After phalloplasty, erections will only be possible with an erectile implant. This typically involves a separate surgery to implant the device once the initial healing has completed. For metoidioplasty and erectile tissue release, erections are possible without the assistance of an implant but may not enable sexual penetration.

During the surgery consultation, patients may want to speak to their surgeon about their goals, the possible results for each option, and what options would be available if they have difficulty with sexual function after surgery. This may help inform a person's decision about the right surgery for their goals.

## Cost

Most Canadian provinces and territories have programs to cover some or all the cost of specific gender-affirming surgeries. Each program is unique in terms of the covered costs. Extended healthcare programs may also cover some gender-affirming surgeries and procedures. For those paying privately, procedures often cost thousands of dollars. The total costs depend on the type of surgery, technique used, surgeon's rate, and travel expenses.

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## Surgeries performed outside of Canada

Some people travel outside of Canada to access a specific gender-affirming surgery or receive care from a specific surgeon.

Most government programs do not cover the cost of surgeries outside of Canada; however, sometimes there are exceptions, for example, when a procedure cannot be accessed in Canada.

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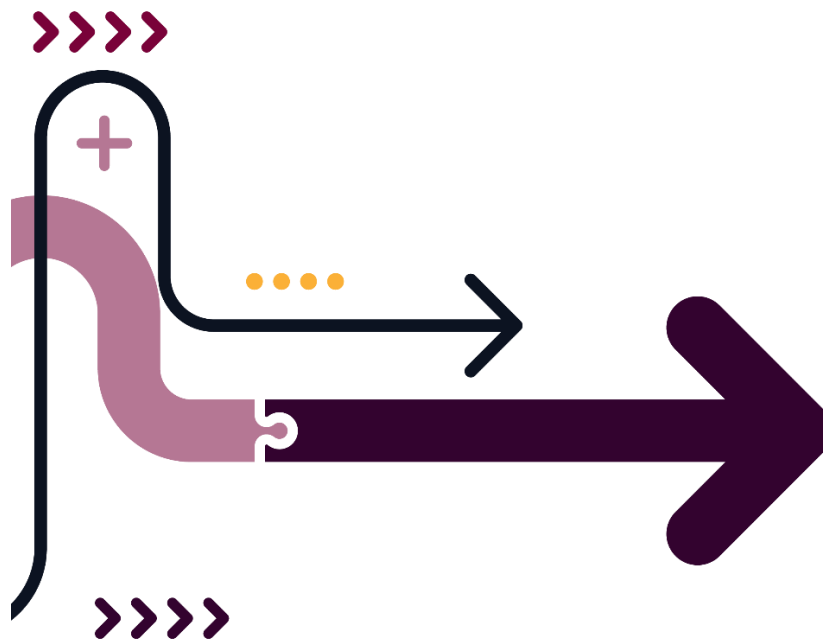
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## Reproductive Healthcare

### **Overview**

Trans, Two-Spirit, and Nonbinary (TTNB) people may have unique reproductive healthcare needs. Support from gender-affirming reproductive healthcare providers can help TTNB people make informed decisions about things like family creation, pregnancy, and fertility preservation. Primary care providers can answer many questions about reproductive healthcare, such as those related to cervical screening, STIs and pregnancy prevention. Other needs, such as fertility preservation, may require more specialized care.

### **Family Creation**

Many TTNB people are interested in creating families. It is important to think about what options you want to keep open when considering gender-affirming medical interventions. There are many ways to create families, including:

#### **Pregnancy**

TTNB people may be able to become pregnant, even if they have taken hormone therapy or had some gender-affirming surgeries.

#### **Surrogacy**

Surrogacy is the process of gestating a child on behalf of another person, couple, or family. This often is supported through intrauterine insemination or in-vitro fertilization.

#### **Adoption**

Adoption is the process of becoming a permanent, legal guardian (parent) of a child.

#### **Fostering**

Fostering involves temporarily caring for a child.

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## ***Fertility preservation***

Some gender-affirming medical interventions can impact fertility and future family creation options. Healthcare providers will discuss potential fertility risks before starting treatment, for example, hormone therapy or gender-affirming lower surgeries.

Gender-affirming care planning meetings often include the topic of fertility preservation. Healthcare providers can explain how fertility may be affected by different medications or procedures. They can also provide information about what options are available to youth interested in fertility preservation.

It may be possible to preserve (freeze) gametes (sperm or eggs) before or after starting hormone therapy. For surgeries that remove ovaries or testes, preservation must be done before surgery. These gametes can later be used to support pregnancy through intrauterine insemination (IUI) or in-vitro fertilization (IVF). IUI involves sperm being put directly inside the uterus, making it easier to fertilize an egg. IVF is a procedure in which a healthcare provider implants a fertilized egg into a uterus to induce pregnancy.

Youth who are interested in fertility preservation can speak to their primary care provider for a referral to a fertility specialist. When choosing a fertility clinic, TTNB youth may want to ask their provider about the clinic's experience with TTNB patients. Youth may also want to ask for recommendations for a fertility clinic or specialist from TTNB people who have undergone the process.

## ***Costs and coverage***

Fertility preservation and fertility treatment are distinct procedures with different purposes. IVF and IUI are for those who are ready to become pregnant. Gamete (sperm or egg) preservation is for future pregnancies.

The processing fee to preserve sperm is about \$200, and the storage costs are about \$200 per year. The process of preserving eggs is more complex and expensive. Prior to the procedure, people need to have injections twice a day for 10 to 14 days. The procedure to retrieve the eggs costs about \$8,000.

Additionally, the medications cost about \$3,000. Eggs can stay frozen for years, which may require payment of ongoing storage fees.

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IVF fertility treatment can cost about \$10,000 to \$15,000 per cycle, but there might be additional costs for testing and medication that could increase costs. Before having IUI, a person may be prescribed fertility medications to stimulate ovulation. IUI costs can range from \$300 to \$1,000.

Extended health care plans through an employer may cover some of the cost of fertility preservation. Government health plan coverage for fertility treatment varies by province and territory. Coverage is usually in the form of a tax credit with a maximum that is based on the total cost of treatment (within a limit) or a subsidy program that a person must apply for.

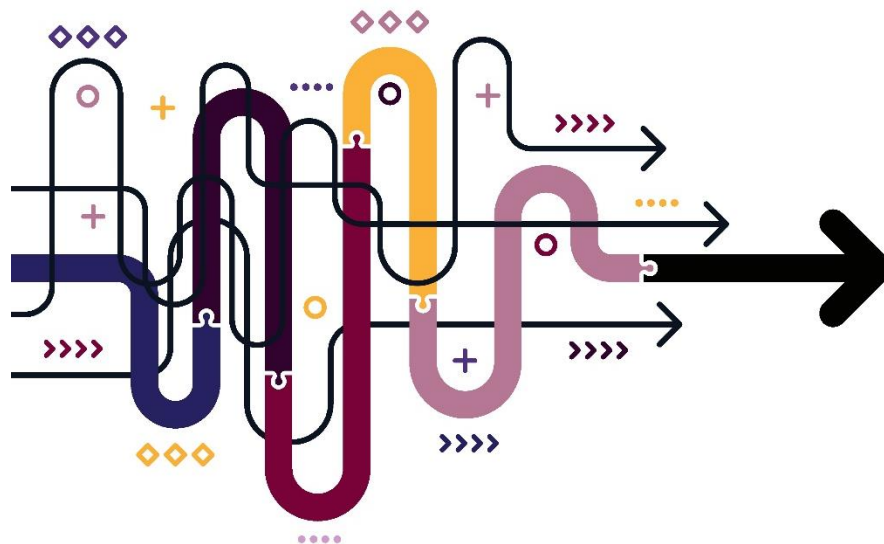
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# Sexual Healthcare

## *Safer sex practices*

Safer sex practices are actions that help to prevent pregnancy and/or lower the chances of getting or passing a sexually transmitted infection (STI). Safer sex practices include using barriers (such as external, internal condoms or oral dams), lubricant, contraception, emergency contraception, STI screening, cervical or HPV screening, vaccines, and HIV Pre- and Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (HIV PrEP and HIV PEP).

This section of the guide covers some additional considerations for safer sex that may be relevant for trans, Two-Spirit, and nonbinary (TTNB) people. For example, gender-affirming hormone therapy and puberty blockers do not prevent pregnancy or reduce the chances of getting an STI.

## *Educational Resources*

Educational resources about practicing safer sex can be found on websites for agencies that provide information for cisgender individuals (like Planned Parenthood). Some organizations like Rainbow Health Ontario and the 519 produce safer sex guides specifically for TTNB people. For example:

- The Gay Men’s Sexual Health Alliance has an online sexual health resource called "the Sex you Want" for guys who are into guys, including trans guys
- The 519 has a booklet called “Brazen 2.0: Trans Women’s Safer Sex Guide”
- CATIE.ca is a website with lots of information about STIs and safer sex
- The Trans Care BC website has information specific to safer sex after surgery and other resources about sexual health

## *Barriers*

Barriers can significantly reduce the chance of getting or passing an STI and of becoming pregnant or getting another person pregnant. This category of safer sex supplies are items that prevent the genital and/or oral fluids of the people having sex from coming in to contact with each other’s mucous membranes.

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Barriers include condoms (external and internal) and oral dams. Medical gloves or finger cots can be used as well. Barriers can be made of different types of effective materials, including latex and polyurethane. If you have allergies, be sure to check the materials used in a product before using it.

It is helpful to review instructions on how to use each barrier type correctly. Each barrier method is more effective when lubricant is used, because lubricant reduces friction, which lowers the chances of the barrier tearing. It is important to use the right kind of lubricant, because some lubricants can weaken the barrier (like an oil-based lube on a latex barrier). Water based lubricant is safe for all types of barriers.

There are some additional reasons why barriers are important for TTNB people who are on hormone therapy or who have had genital surgeries. Testosterone can lead to thinning of the tissue that lines the internal genitals/vagina. Thinner tissue tears more easily, making someone more vulnerable to infection.

Hormone therapy (testosterone; estrogen and testosterone blockers) are not effective methods of contraception. This means someone can still get pregnant on testosterone (even if they have stopped monthly bleeding) or get another person pregnant, even if on estrogen. Barriers can help prevent pregnancy.

After vaginoplasty surgery, the vaginal tissue can also tear from friction associated with dilation or sex play, or there may be some open or sensitive spots inside the vagina. Using barriers and lubricant reduces the chances of tearing, and of getting or passing an STI.

### ***Lubricant***

Lubricant (lube) is a safer sex product that is important for everyone no matter what their hormone or surgical status is. Anal and genital tissues are delicate and can tear easily, which makes people more vulnerable to sexually transmitted infections (STIs), because tears provide an entrance into the bloodstream. Lubricant reduces friction, which reduces the amount of tiny tears that happen during sex play.

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There are different types of lubricant available. Be sure to use one that is safe for the type of barrier you are using (if you are using one). Water based lubricant is safe for all types of barriers and is safe to use after genital surgery.

There are some additional reasons why lubricant is important to use for trans people who are on hormone therapy or have had genital surgeries. Testosterone can lead to thinning of the tissue that lines the internal genitals/vagina. Thinner tissue tears more easily, making someone more vulnerable to infection. Using lubricant reduces friction, which reduces the chances of tearing (genital tissue, anal tissue and barriers), which reduces the chances of getting or passing an STI.

### ***Accessing safer sex supplies***

In addition to being available for purchase at any pharmacy or drugstore, safer sex supplies are often available free of charge at various organizations, including:

- Sexual health clinics
- Youth clinics
- Community health centres
- Harm reduction centres
- School guidance counsellor
- Campus wellness centers
- TTNB organizations or events

### ***Contraception***

Hormone therapy is not an effective form of contraception.

A person on testosterone can still get pregnant, even if they are no longer having monthly bleeding (periods). A person on estrogen and testosterone blockers can still get another person pregnant, even if the volume of their genital fluid (ejaculate) is reduced. When used correctly, barrier methods (external or internal condoms) are very effective at reducing the chances of pregnancy.

People taking testosterone can use any form of birth control, including hormonal types like the pill, IUDs, the implant, and the shot. Hormonal contraception will not interfere with the effectiveness of testosterone therapy.

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Youth taking puberty blockers should use a non-hormonal method, like the copper IUD or barrier methods like condoms.

The types of birth control that require a prescription can be accessed through primary care providers, walk-in clinics, youth clinics and sexual health clinics. Also, pharmacists can prescribe contraceptives in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador.

If someone has had a gonadectomy (e.g., hysterectomy, bilateral oophorectomy, or orchiectomy), they cannot become pregnant or get another person pregnant. If you have not had a gonadectomy, there is still a risk of pregnancy if genital/vaginal tissue is coming in to contact with ejaculate, even if you and/or your partner are on hormone therapy.

### ***Emergency contraception***

Emergency contraception can be used after sex when a condom was not used, or broke, and there is risk of pregnancy. There are different types of emergency contraceptives, including pills (can be taken up to 5 days after sex) and the copper IUD (inserted up to 7 days after sex). The faster it is accessed, the more effective it will be.

Sometimes people will have an emergency contraceptive pill “in advance of need”, meaning they have it at home in case they need it. Always check that the pill has not expired when using this method. People taking testosterone can use any form of emergency contraception and it will not interfere with the effectiveness of their hormone therapy.

The emergency contraception pill can be purchased at pharmacies in Canada without a prescription. Emergency contraception pills can also be accessed through primary care providers, walk-in clinics, youth clinics and sexual health clinics.

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## ***STI screening***

It is recommended that youth who are sexually active have sexually transmitted infection (STI) testing. Depending on the type of test, this may involve a swab, urine test, blood test, and visual exam. You can access STI testing without a visual or physical exam. You can ask to do the swabs yourself or have help from a clinician.

It is recommended to screen any parts of your body that are coming in contact with another person's genital fluids for chlamydia and gonorrhea. This includes the genitals (done by urine sample or a swab), the anus (done by swab), and the throat (done by swab). Blood tests for HIV and syphilis are also recommended for anyone who is sexually active. Sometimes bloodwork for Hepatitis A and Hepatitis C may be recommended as well.

STI screening is recommended for TTNB people who are sexually active, or who have been sexually active in the past. It is safe to have STI screening if you have had genital surgery.

Free and confidential testing can be completed by primary care providers, at sexual health clinics, youth clinics or walk-in clinics.

Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights has a resource to help find sexual health services. Educational resources on STIs and testing can be found on the Government of Canada's website.

## ***Cervix (Pap) or HPV screening***

A Pap test is a screening exam that checks for abnormal cell growth in the cells of the cervix (the area at the back of the internal genitals/vagina). The abnormal cell growth is caused by the human papilloma virus and is not visible to the naked eye. A Pap test is done during a pelvic exam, when cells are gently taken from the cervix and then sent to a lab to be examined under a microscope.

Different provinces and territories have different cervical screening guidelines- some start at age 21 and others at age 25. Pap tests are recommended for TTNB people who have a cervix, whether or not someone is on testosterone therapy. Pap tests are not recommended for TTNB people who have had vaginoplasty.

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Some provinces and territories are switching from Pap tests (which involve a pelvic exam) to HPV screening (which involves a genital swab and can be self-collected). If you aren't sure whether you need a Pap test, you can speak with a healthcare provider. Pap tests and HPV screening can be provided by primary care providers, youth clinics, walk-in clinics and some sexual health clinics.

## ***Vaccines***

Vaccines are biological medications that help the body to create anti-bodies to a specific bacteria or virus to help protect against infection in the future. Vaccines need to be given before exposure to the virus or bacteria to be effective. There are vaccines for some sexually transmitted infections and respiratory infections that can be transmitted during sex, including the ones below. Many of these vaccines are available for free through publicly funded programs.

- Hepatitis A
- Hepatitis B
- HPV
- MPox
- Covid-19
- Flu

Most of these vaccines can be accessed through youth clinics, public health clinics, sexual health clinics and some primary care providers. Pharmacists can also provide some vaccines without a prescription.

## ***HIV Pre Exposure Prophylaxis (HIV PrEP)***

HIV Pre Exposure Prophylaxis (HIV PrEP) is a daily pill that can help reduce a person's chances of getting HIV (it does not prevent other sexually transmitted infections). HIV PrEP works by interfering with HIV's ability to copy itself. HIV PrEP can be taken by anyone who is HIV-negative and whose sexual activities put them at a higher risk for getting HIV.

If taken every day, HIV PrEP is highly effective at preventing HIV infection, even after exposure. It is important to know, however, that HIV PrEP is not 100% effective, so it is recommended to use barrier methods as well (e.g., condoms).

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HIV PrEP needs to be prescribed by a doctor or nurse practitioner and requires regular follow-up visits. It can be provided by some primary care providers and at some sexual health and youth clinics.

While there is less research about the effectiveness of HIV PrEP in TTNB people than in cisgender people, HIV PrEP is a good option for TTNB people at high risk for getting HIV.

There are additional considerations for some TTNB people with HIV PrEP:

- For transmasculine people, it can be helpful to know that the tissue of the internal genitals/vagina takes longer to respond to HIV PrEP than rectal tissues. As such, it is recommended to take HIV PrEP consistently for three weeks before having genital/vaginal sex. Additionally, HIV PrEP needs to be taken almost perfectly (daily with very few missed doses) to effectively prevent against HIV during genital/vaginal sex. For people on testosterone, HIV PrEP does not interfere with hormone levels.
- HIV PrEP does not interfere with hormone levels for people taking estrogen therapy. People on estrogen may need to take HIV PrEP almost perfectly (daily with very few missed doses) to effectively prevent HIV. For TTNB people who have had vaginoplasty, there is no data on the effectiveness of HIV PrEP in vaginal tissue.

### ***HIV Post Exposure Prophylaxis (HIV PEP)***

HIV Post Exposure Prophylaxis (HIV PEP) is when an HIV negative person takes medications within 72 hours after a potential HIV exposure to reduce the chances of an HIV infection. While there is less research about the effectiveness of HIV PEP in TTNB people than in cisgender people, HIV PEP is a good option for TTNB people who had a potential exposure to HIV.

HIV PEP needs to be prescribed by a doctor or nurse practitioner and requires regular follow-up visits. It can be provided by some urgent and primary care providers, and at some emergency rooms, sexual health clinics and youth clinics. Regular follow-up will always be needed, even if you get it in an emergency room).

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## ***Sexual assault***

Sexual assault is any unwanted sexual contact or behavior that happens without consent. If you or someone you know has experienced sexual assault, it's important to know that help and support are available. You can reach out to trusted adults, school counselors, or a local sexual violence support centre.

Many communities have organizations that provide confidential support, counseling, and medical care. Many of these organizations are trans-inclusive, but it can be helpful to double-check.

Remember, sexual assault is not your fault, and you don't have to go through it alone. The organization Forge Forward has excellent self-help resources one can use while healing from difficult experiences.

## ***Sex therapy***

Sex therapy is a type of counselling that addresses issues a person may experience related to sex and sexuality. Examples of these issues include sexual anxiety, questions about sex drive, body image and relationship issues. A therapist may be able to offer support to work through challenges and help people to have satisfying relationships and pleasurable sex.

## ***Resources***

Action Canada for Sexual Health & Rights Find Sexual Health Services Near You:

<https://www.actioncanadashr.org/resources/services>

Canadian Partnership Against Cancer Cervical cancer screening guidelines (2021/2022):

<https://www.partnershipagainstcancer.ca/topics/cervical-cancer-screening-in-canada-2021-2022/programs/guidelines/#:~:text=Provinces%20and%20territories%20recommend%20that,every%20two%20to%20three%20years.>

Canadian Pharmacists Association (2023). *Pharmacist contraceptive prescribing across Canada*. <https://www.pharmacists.ca/cpha-ca/assets/File/cpha-on-the-issues/Contraception-Infographic.pdf>

CATIE. *Canada's source for HIV and hepatitis C information*.

<https://www.catie.ca/catieca>



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Forge Forward. *Self-help resources for healing.* <https://forge-forward.org/collections/self-help/>

Gay Men’s Sexual Health Alliance (2024). *The sex you want.* <https://thesexyouwant.ca/>

Government of Canada. *Getting tested for sexually transmitted infections (STI).* <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/sexual-health/getting-tested-sexually-transmitted-infections.html>

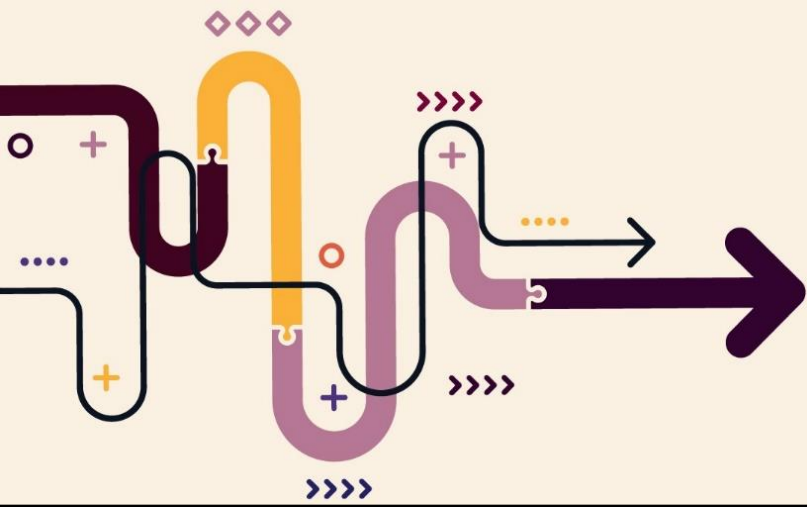
Planned Parenthood. *What do I need to know about sexual health as a trans or nonbinary person?* <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/gender-identity/transgender/sexual-health-trans-nonbinary>

Planned Parenthood of Greater Washington and North Idaho. *Safer sex for trans bodies.* <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/planned-parenthood-greater-washington-north-idaho/get-care/our-services/transgender-and-gender-affirming-health-care/safer-sex-for-trans-bodies>

The 519. *Brazen 2.0: Trans women’s safer sex guide.* <https://www.the519.org/resources/brazen/>

Trans Care BC. *Health and wellbeing.* <https://www.transcarebc.ca/health-wellbeing>





# JUST BE YOURSELF

*A Health & Wellness Guide for  
Trans, Two-Spirit, & Nonbinary  
Youth*

Part 4:

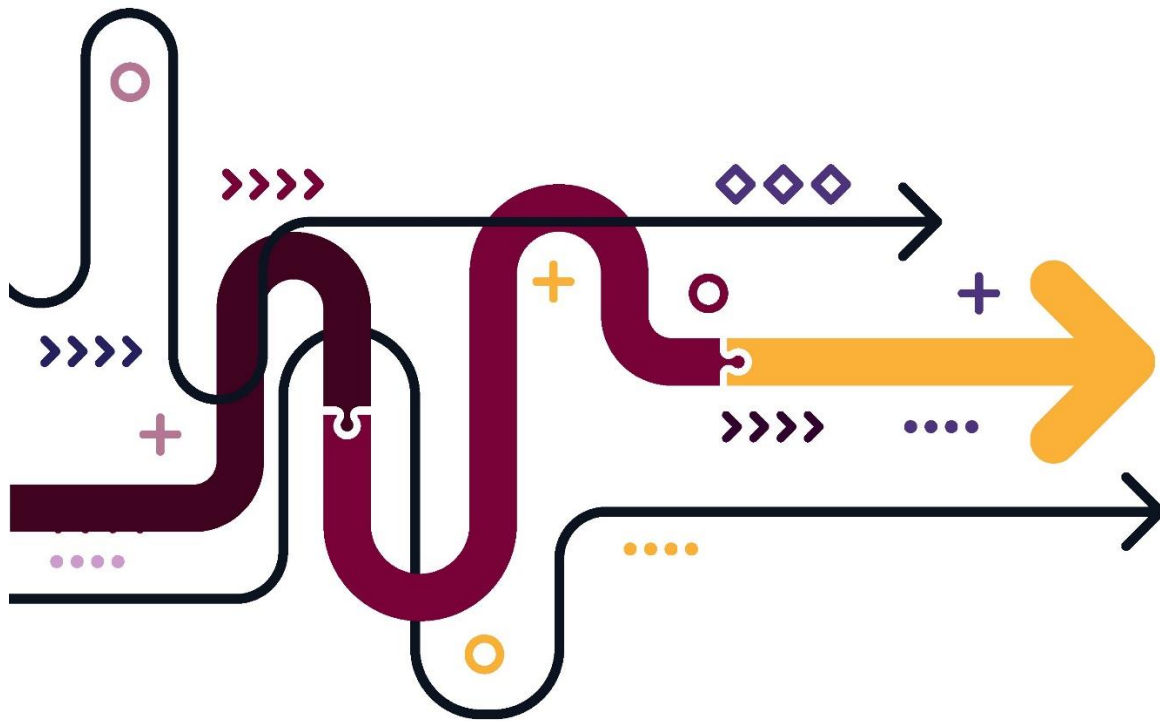
# RIGHTS, ADVOCACY, & ALLIES



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## PART 4: Rights, Advocacy & Allies

*Trans, Two-Spirit and Nonbinary (TTNB) youth have rights in Canada when accessing healthcare, workplaces, schools, and other places. This section includes information about rights, ideas for self-advocacy and ways to be an ally to TTNB youth.*



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# Rights

## Human Rights in Canada

Trans, Two-Spirit and Nonbinary (TTNB) youth, like all other Canadians, have the right to live their lives free from discrimination, harassment, and violence. Human Rights legislation in every Canadian jurisdiction covers discrimination on the basis of gender identity or expression.

Provincial and territorial human rights laws cover things like education, healthcare, and access to stores or community services:

- Alberta: [Human Rights Act](#)
- British Columbia: [Human Rights Code](#)
- Manitoba: [Human Rights Code](#)
- Newfoundland and Labrador: [Human Rights Act](#)
- New Brunswick: [Human Rights Act](#)
- Northwest Territories: [Human Rights Act](#)
- Nova Scotia: [Human Rights Act](#)
- Nunavut: [Human Rights Act](#)
- Ontario: [Human Rights Code](#)
- Prince Edward Island: [Human Rights Act](#)
- Quebec: [Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms](#)
- Saskatchewan: [Human Rights Code](#)
- Yukon: [Human Rights Act](#)

The [Canadian Human Rights Act](#) covers federally regulated enterprises, like the military, the post office, and airports.

Human rights agencies have resources that explain discrimination and what you can do if someone discriminates against you. Becoming familiar with human rights laws and resources can help you uphold the rights of others and know when you can file a complaint with the human rights agency in your province or territory.

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## Healthcare Rights

TTNB youth have the right to be treated with dignity and respect when accessing healthcare. This right is enshrined in provincial and territorial human rights legislation.

All people accessing healthcare are entitled to have their rights respected. This means a healthcare provider should not refuse to care for someone because they are TTNB or based on any other part of their identity protected under the human rights code, such as:

- citizenship
- race
- national or ethnic origin
- disability
- age
- sex
- marital status
- sexual orientation
- gender identity or expression

Healthcare providers may decline to provide care if it is outside their expertise. This means that refusing to provide a specific form of care for someone who is disabled, TTNB, or pregnant may be allowed.

Since healthcare is regulated by the provinces and territories, rights vary slightly depending on where a person lives or is accessing care.

In this section, general information about healthcare rights is provided. To find out more about your specific rights, search for information on healthcare rights in your province or territory from reputable organizations.

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## ***Privacy and Confidentiality***

Privacy is the right of an individual to choose whether to share their personal information. For example, you may be uncomfortable answering some questions asked by a healthcare provider and can choose to keep that information private.

Healthcare providers should only ask for information they need to know to provide care. You can ask a healthcare provider to explain why the information is necessary and how it will be used. You can decide what information to share and what to keep private.

Confidentiality refers to a responsibility of professionals, like healthcare providers, not to share information, including personal health information, without your permission. There are some exceptions to confidentiality, including:

- If someone's safety is at risk
- If someone discloses information that providers are required to report (like child or elder abuse)
- If records are requested through a court order

A healthcare provider should not share confidential information without a patient's consent. There is no way to take information back once it has been shared.

If you are concerned about confidentiality, especially about information being shared with your parents/guardians, it is a good idea to clarify confidentiality policies in advance with your healthcare provider.

If your information has been shared without your consent, you can address this in two ways. You may decide to approach your clinician directly with your concern and/or file a formal complaint with the healthcare provider's employer, regulatory body and/or the Privacy Commissioner in the province or territory where it happened. In some circumstances, it may be possible to sue the person who disclosed personal information, if the patient can prove damages.

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## ***Medical Records***

Medical records must be stored securely so that only the people who need them to provide or bill for care can access them. Patients need to give permission for their medical records to be shared. Healthcare providers are generally required to store patients' medical records for between five and sixteen years (depending on the province or territory) after they stop providing care to that patients, or two to ten years after the patient becomes an adult.

Your healthcare records belong to you. Patients have the right to request a copy of their medical records, either to review themselves or to be transferred to another provider. Healthcare providers can only legally refuse to share information from a medical record with a patient if they believe that it will cause significant harm to the patient or another person.

The costs of accessing or transferring medical records are not covered by provincial health insurance, and healthcare providers may charge a “reasonable” fee for this service.

In some places, there is a policy stating how long physicians can take to provide access to or transfer a medical record. For example, in Ontario, the limit is 30 days. Patient requests for medical records should be responded to in a timely manner, and a healthcare provider’s college (like the College of Physicians and Surgeons of their province or territory) can be contacted if there is a delay.

Personal information that could identify you, but which is not necessarily about your health, is also protected by privacy laws. Generally, you have a right to know why your information is collected, what it will be used for, what information an organization has about you, and who to contact to answer your questions about your information.

Organizations that hold your information have a legal obligation to keep accurate records. This includes the obligation to update changes to your name and gender marker. Complaints about how your personal information is collected, used, or shared go to the Privacy Commissioner in the province or territory where an issue occurred. In some circumstances, it may be possible to sue the person who disclosed personal information, if the patient can prove damages.



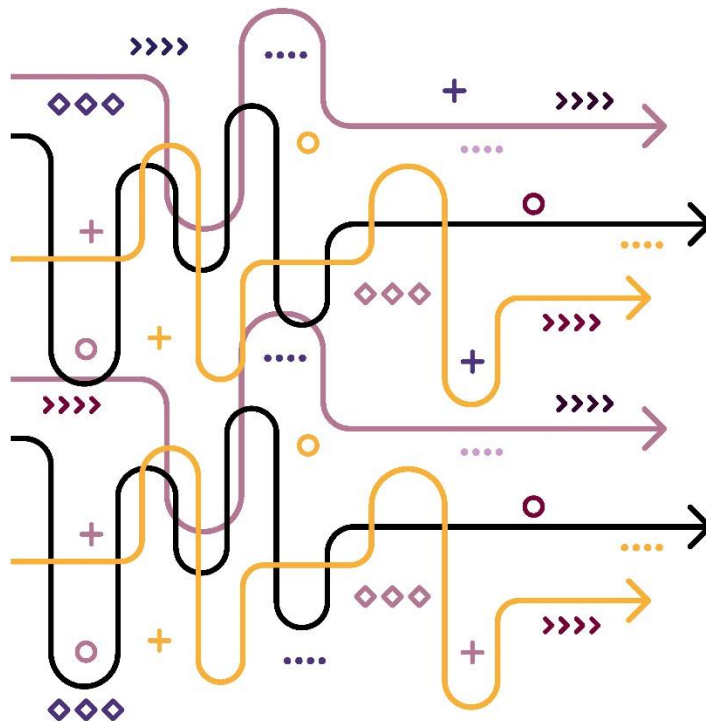
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## ***Names, Pronouns and Gender Markers***

All people have the right to be referred to by the correct name and pronouns when accessing healthcare resources, services, and spaces. These rights are protected for people of all ages, including youth. Youth who use a name that does not match their legal name can request that providers include this information in their file, for example, in an electronic medical record. Legal names and sex/gender markers may be required for billing health insurance plans.

Sometimes mistakes may happen. If the wrong name or pronouns are being used, you can advocate for yourself by:

- Reminding clinicians or staff of your correct name and pronouns
- Expressing why it is important for staff and clinicians to use the correct name and pronouns (like avoiding outing clients in waiting rooms)
- Reminding staff or clinicians of their human rights obligations, including treating TTNB clients respectfully and appropriately





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## ***Consent, Capacity and Assent***

Healthcare providers are required to obtain consent (permission) before providing medical treatment. There are some exceptions, for example, when someone is unconscious and requires emergency treatment.

Consent for any kind of non-emergency healthcare, including gender-affirming care, must be given by someone who is:

- Has capacity, meaning they are capable of making a decision about a specific medical intervention (for example, hormone therapy, blood test, surgery)
- Informed about the risks, benefits, and alternatives to the medical intervention
- Making the decision voluntarily (without coercion)

Capacity is evaluated based on a person's ability to:

- Understand the treatment, including risks, benefits, and alternatives
- Apply this information to their own life
- Reason about the treatment options
- Clearly communicate their choice

Adults are generally assumed to have capacity to make their own healthcare decisions. A court could decide that a person has lost capacity, for example, because of a medical or mental health condition.

Young people develop the capacity to make decisions about healthcare over time. Some people have the capacity to make decisions about some medical interventions but not others. For example, a person may be able to consent to some health care decisions (like getting a vaccine), but not others (like having surgery). It is up to the healthcare provider treating the patient to determine whether a person has capacity to make a specific decision about their own healthcare.

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Laws about when minors can make their own healthcare decisions and keep health information confidential from their parents/guardians vary by province and territory. If the legal requirements regarding age and capacity to consent are met, the youth is the person who legally consents to treatment.

Some specific provincial and territorial requirements include:

- A healthcare provider may need to determine if a youth under certain age has the capacity to consent to the healthcare decision (in BC, AB, SK, MB, NB, and NL, as of 2018)
- The treating healthcare professional needs to ensure that the healthcare is in the best interest of the youth in BC (as of 2024)
- In Quebec, parental consent must be given for all health care decisions for youth under the age of 14. Youth who are 14 and older can make their own decisions about care that is necessary for their health. Parental consent is required if the treatment involves a serious risk to health (QC, as of 2018)

If a minor youth does not have capacity to consent, consent must be given by a proxy decision maker, such as a parent or legal guardian. In these situations, the youth must give their assent (permission) for the treatment.

Support from parents/guardians may be helpful when accessing gender-affirming medical interventions. The WPATH Standards of Care, Version 8, recommend “parent(s)/guardian(s) [are involved] in the assessment and treatment process, unless their involvement is determined to be harmful to the adolescent or not feasible.” Many clinicians in Canada follow this recommendation, which means they generally involve parents or guardians in the care they provide.

If you are concerned about having your parents/guardians involved in your care, discuss this with your healthcare provider. You may wish to discuss your concerns before disclosing your gender to your provider. For example, you could say “I have something that I’d like to discuss with you that I am not comfortable having shared with my parent(s). What is your policy about this?”

Youth can have capacity to make a healthcare decision and to decide who gets to know about the care they receive. Parents do not have an automatic right to know everything about a youth’s health. Youth do not have to share their health

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information with a parent or guardian if they can consent to the healthcare and want to keep it private. This is true for all healthcare, including record-keeping about gender-affirming care.

### ***Refusal (Denial) of Care***

Sometimes a healthcare provider will not have the necessary education or training to provide certain services, including gender-affirming medical interventions. There are many healthcare providers who are open to learning more about gender-affirming care. However, healthcare providers can decline to provide interventions they do not feel knowledgeable enough about to provide adequately or safely. Healthcare providers should offer a referral to another clinician if they cannot provide the care you need.

Sometimes TTNB people are discriminated against on the basis of their gender identity or expression when trying to access healthcare. If you are refused any kind of healthcare because you are TTNB, you may want to get advice about your human rights or file a complaint with the healthcare facility or the college that regulates the healthcare provider.

Some healthcare providers may offer gender-affirming care but not follow established clinical guidelines. For example, they may have more requirements people need to complete to access care than guidelines recommend. This is not illegal, but patients can advocate for themselves by asking that their healthcare provider follow the WPATH Standards of Care (Version 8) or requesting a referral to another healthcare provider who follows these guidelines.

It is important to note that conscientious objection policies may allow healthcare providers to refuse to provide medical treatment if it goes against their religious or moral beliefs. For example, some healthcare providers refuse to offer abortion services or medical assistance in dying. Youth who encounter healthcare providers who use these policies to refuse gender-affirming medical interventions may need to seek out a new healthcare provider. In these circumstances the healthcare provider should be able to refer you to another person who can provide that care.

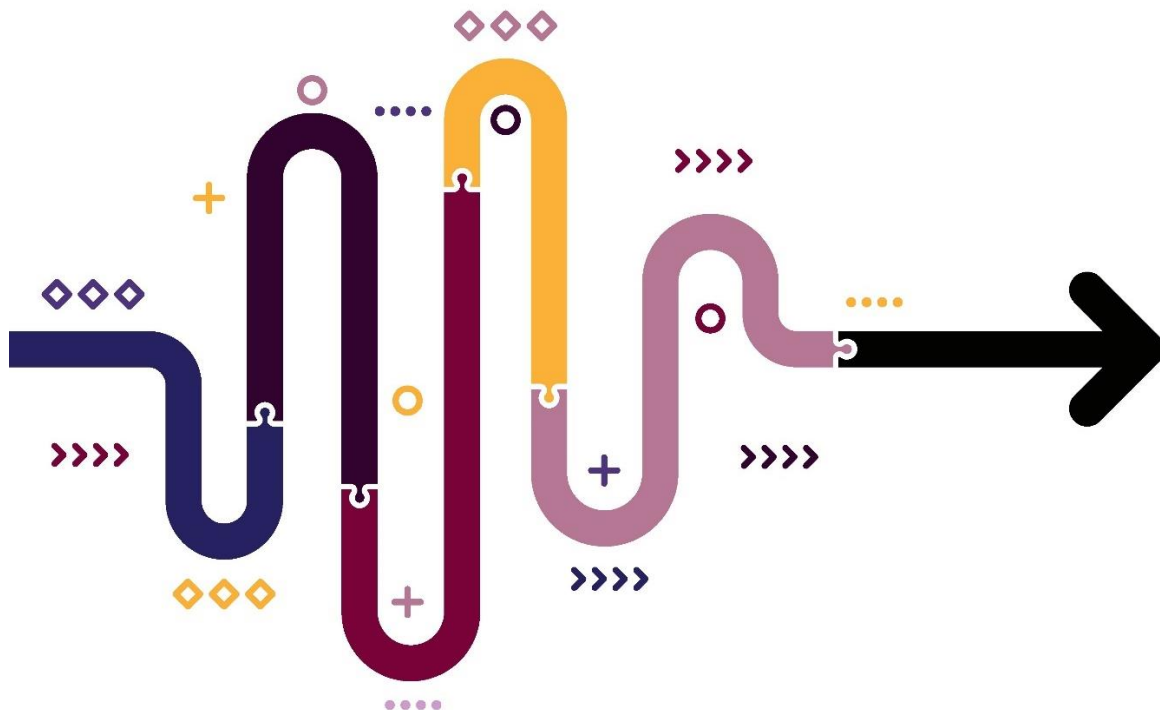
*Please see the Part 4 for information on filing formal complaints.*

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## ***Bringing a Support Person***

You are generally allowed to bring a support person to appointments. This person may be able to remain with you throughout an appointment and provide support by taking notes, asking questions, and or/advocating for your needs. There may be times when a support person is not allowed, such as if that person is sick. Accessibility laws, such as the [AODA in Ontario](#), may provide additional protection for people with disabilities who require a support person for accessibility reasons.

Bringing a support person can make accessing healthcare safer, easier, and more comfortable for many people. If you are interested in bringing a support person with you to an appointment, you can contact the health care provider's office before the appointment to say you would like to bring a support person with you, and to find out if there are any parts of your appointment when your support person will not be allowed to stay with you.



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## Workplace Rights

TTNB youth have the right to be treated with dignity and respect at work. This right is enshrined in provincial and territorial human rights legislation.

Every workplace in Canada is covered by human rights legislation which should protect you from discrimination on the basis of sex, gender identity or gender expression, sexual orientation, and many other grounds. Human rights protection is for everyone, not just permanent residents of Canada or Canadian citizens.

For TTNB workers in Canada, this means you have a right to wear clothes and to use the bathroom or changeroom that fits with your gender. You have a legal right to use your chosen name and pronouns at work. Nobody should be allowed to call you names or treat you differently because you are TTNB.

You can put the name you use on a job application and your resume (regardless of whether it is your legal name), and you have a right to decide what name to use at work. However, your legal name is usually required for payroll once you are hired. If your legal name is different from the name you use, an employer may learn that you are TTNB. This information is personal and should remain confidential.

There are many TTNB-inclusive employers across Canada. Finding the right employer might mean being proactive by learning about policies and practices before applying for jobs. You can choose what details you disclose about your gender during the application or interview process depending on your comfort level.

People at work should not out you or reveal anything personal about you unless it is required for a valid reason (for example, to pay you).

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## ***Fair treatment***

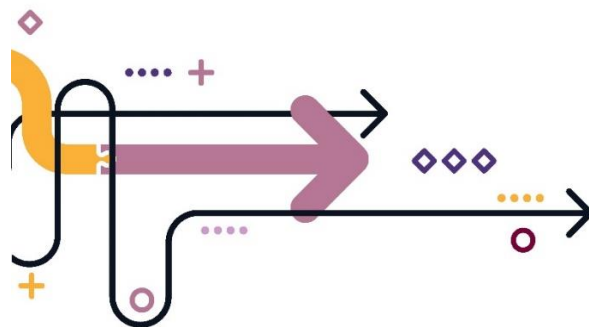
In addition to legal rights, employers often have policies about harassment and discrimination. These policies generally define harassment and discrimination, outline roles and responsibilities of staff, and provide information about steps to take if discrimination occurs in the workplace. Workplaces may share information about their policies during the onboarding process for a new position. You may also be able to request these policies from your supervisor, manager, or human resources department.

Some workers in Canada are protected by a union contract called a collective agreement. This sets out additional protections that might apply to you. It is important to know if you are in a union. You are entitled to have a copy of the collective agreement that covers you and to know how to contact your union. It is illegal to prevent workers from talking about or joining a union. For information about union rights, contact the federation of labour in your province or territory.

If you experience unfair or discriminatory treatment in the workplace, there are various steps you can take:

- If it feels safe, you can speak to the person causing the problem and try to advocate for yourself
- You can bring up the issue with your supervisor or human resources manager
- If the position is unionized, you should contact your union steward for help
- You can reach out to a community service organization that stands up for worker rights

Keep careful records of any incident immediately after it happens, including the facts, the date and place, and the names of people who were present. You might need this information later.



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## Rights in School

TTNB youth have the right to be treated with dignity and respect at school. This right is enshrined in provincial and territorial human rights legislation.

Students have the right to be addressed by the name and pronouns they choose, to use washrooms and change rooms in which they feel most comfortable (boys, girls, gender neutral), and to play on sports teams which align with their gender. Youth cannot be required to use a separate room away from other students but may choose to do so if that is where they feel most comfortable.

Specific laws and policies about privacy in primary and secondary school vary by province, territory, and school board. For example, some provinces, territories and school boards may have policies that prevent school staff from disclosing information about students' sexual orientation and/or gender identity without their consent, including to parents and guardians. Some do not. In some provinces, new laws have been proposed that restrict TTNB youth rights in schools. Some school boards or individual schools may have rules against having certain books in school libraries or student groups, such as gender-sexuality alliances (GSAs). These are probably illegal because they conflict with human rights and rights under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Advocacy groups are working to challenge laws that discriminate against TTNB students, but until they do, it is important to be aware of the current laws where you live and know what your rights are.

Guidance counsellors and other support people in schools should be able to tell you what confidentiality policies are in place. You can ask for information about what things are confidential, and what might be shared with parents or guardians. You may be able to find more information about the laws and policies that affect your school by researching laws in your province/territory or the policies of your specific school board. A trusted adult at school or a local organization that supports 2SLGBTQ+ youth may be able to provide information.

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## ***Standing up for your rights***

TTNB youth can advocate for their rights in school. This may include standing up against discrimination, bullying, harassment, and violence. It may be helpful to find allies within or outside of the school to help you advocate for your rights. For example, some schools or school districts may have a person designated to support TTNB students. Trusted teachers, counsellors, or other supportive staff may be able to support TTNB youth who have been mistreated. Tell an adult that you trust about what is happening to you.

For elementary and secondary students, some issues may be dealt with within the school. For example, if you are being bullied, or a teacher is not respecting your names or pronouns, there are a variety of options to address this issue. Depending on your comfort level, you may choose to speak to the teacher, a guidance counsellor, or principal directly or reach out to a trusted ally within the school for support to discuss the problem with administration. If the principal and school do not address the issue and you wish to pursue a complaint against the school, often the next steps are to speak with the school Superintendent and elected School Board Trustee.

If you are a post-secondary student, you may be able to get support from an instructor, TTNB student group, student union, school ombudsperson, and equity and inclusion offices. If you continue to experience discrimination, you should get advice about filing a Human Rights Complaint.

## ***Resources***

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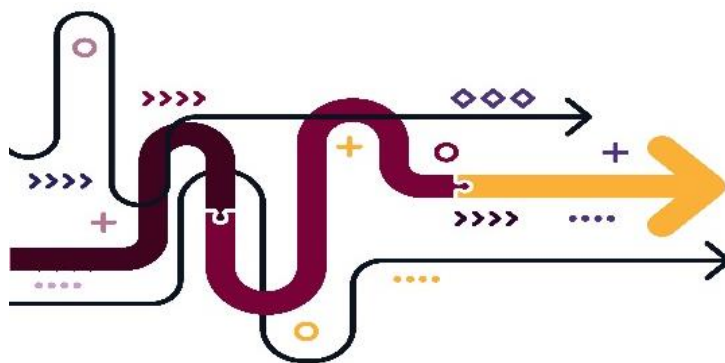
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# Advocacy and Allies

## Healthcare Advocacy

Healthcare advocacy involves helping people access services. Self-advocacy is about speaking up for ourselves. This involves figuring out what supports we need and communicating this to others. Self-advocacy can be challenging but it is an important and useful skill.

### *Self-advocacy*

The following are self-advocacy ideas for youth accessing healthcare services.

#### **Communication**

- An effective advocate communicates calmly and clearly. You may feel more confident in your communication if you develop a plan in advance.

#### **Planning for an appointment**

- Outline your goals for the appointment and write a list of questions you want to ask
- Call the office in advance to make sure they have your correct name and pronouns
- Think about how to respond if someone treats you in ways that are not gender-affirming, for example, using the wrong name or not taking your requests seriously

#### **At an appointment**

- Take notes
- If you are referred to another provider, ask how soon you should expect to be contacted

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## Managing barriers

- If someone is unable to provide the care you need, you can:
  - Ask for clarification about why they cannot provide the care themselves
  - Ask for a referral to a provider who can provide the care
  - Request that this be documented in your medical record.
  - Seek out another clinician who can provide the care you need
- If the healthcare provider is open to learning more about gender-affirming care, suggest credible resources like:
  - Trans Care BC
  - Rainbow Health Ontario
  - Endocrine Society
  - World Professional Association for Transgender Health
- If you are waiting longer than expected for a referral or a follow-up appointment, you can call the office to follow-up
- You can ask a supportive person, such as a parent, guardian, friend, or mentor to help advocate at appointments
- You can also ask another supportive professional, such as a youth worker, for support in talking with a provider or to give you a letter of support

## TTNB-friendly spaces

Some youth advocate for changes in the healthcare settings they visit to make them more TTNB friendly. As a youth advocate, you can speak with your healthcare provider or their staff to:

- Provide suggestions about how to make the space more welcoming, such as adding posters or having all-gender washrooms available
- Encourage staff to greet people without gendered language
- Suggest online or printed resources with tips for healthcare providers and staff

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## Unfair treatment

If you are treated unfairly when accessing healthcare services, you can file a complaint. Some options are:

- **Patient advocate or quality care office:** Hospitals or large health organizations may have a patient ombudsperson or advocate whose role is to help patients advocate for themselves. Some provinces and territories have someone that patients can contact about care received. For example, in Ontario, this is the Patient Ombudsman.
- **College Complaint:** Regulated professions, like physicians, surgeons, nurses, and social workers, have a college that oversees their work in each province and most territories. You can make a complaint to the provider's college.
- **Human Rights complaint:** If you are being discriminated against based on a protected ground, like gender identity, gender expression, disability, or race, you can file a human rights complaint with a provincial or territorial Human Rights Commission or Tribunal in the province or territory where it happened.

When considering your options and deciding whether or how to raise your concern or to file a complaint, consider what outcome you are seeking from the process. For example, you may wish to get support, to keep it from happening again, or to hold a healthcare provider accountable for what they did.

Understanding what you want out of the process can help you figure out what steps to take. It may be helpful to talk to someone from legal aid to better understand your options.

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## ***Healthcare Allies***

This section is for people assisting TTNB youth in accessing healthcare. Having support from an adult, particularly a parent or caregiver, can improve the health and wellbeing of TTNB youth. Support from caring adults may also help TTNB youth access gender-affirming medical interventions more quickly and easily.

Allies and advocates can provide support in many ways. If a youth needs an advocate to help them access healthcare, start by asking how they would like you to help. For example, you could ask about:

- Assisting with scheduling appointments
- Helping to fill out forms
- Setting goals for appointments and practicing what to say
- Assisting with transportation to appointments
- Offering emotional support before, during, and/or after appointments
- Taking notes and witnessing what happens in appointments
- Supporting healthcare decision making

The following are tips for allies who provide healthcare advocacy:

- **Know the role:** As an advocate, you should see both the big picture and the details of a situation. You should understand what you are advocating for and what your role is. You should know a system's rules and who makes decisions. You should understand a person's rights and who to call when help is needed.
- **Be organized:** You can provide organizational support through notetaking during appointments, keeping track of paperwork and correspondence, storing information safely, and staying on top of deadlines and timelines.
- **Strategize:** You should realize that a 'one-size-fits-all' approach may not work. Effective advocates are patient and good listeners. You should be ready to adapt as needed when a plan is not working and offer ideas to solve problems.
- **Communicate:** You should communicate in a clear, calm, and professional manner and recognize that confrontation may not be effective.

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## Work and School Advocacy

Everyone can play a role in creating more inclusive and accepting environments for TTNB youth in workplaces and schools.

Here are some tips for creating more TTNB-inclusive workplaces and schools:

- Respect the language and pronouns used by TTNB employees and students
- Be someone TTNB youth feel safe approaching when they need help
- Be careful about confidentiality, for example, do not disclose information a person's gender or their private life without permission
- Challenge anti-TTNB remarks or jokes in public spaces
- Speak out in support of TTNB rights and inclusion
- Start a school club to promote understanding of gender diversity
- Develop trans-inclusive nondiscrimination policies
- Adopt inclusive school curricula which includes topics related to gender and sexual diversity
- Require routine and ongoing training for staff on topics such as TTNB-inclusive policies, gender neutral language, implicit bias, human rights obligations, and allyship

Advocating can be challenging. You can find resources that can provide more information about advocacy through TTNB organizations, such as the Catherine White Holman Wellness Centre, Egale Canada, Qmunity, Trans Care BC, Trans Rights BC, Rainbow Health Ontario, and Justice Trans, as well as organizations at colleges and universities.

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## Resources

Trans Care BC, Speaking with your provider: <https://www.transcarebc.ca/how-to-get-care/speaking-with-provider?term=advocate>

Trans Care BC, Support for you (for parents): <https://www.transcarebc.ca/parents-families/parents-trans-kids/support-for-you?term=advocate>

Trans Care BC, Understanding referrals: <https://www.transcarebc.ca/how-to-get-care/understanding-referrals?term=advocate>

Trans Care BC, Working with schools: <https://www.transcarebc.ca/parents-families/parents-trans-kids/working-with-schools?term=advocate>

Trans Rights BC Self-Advocacy Guide: <https://www.transrightsbc.ca/take-action/self-advocacy-guide/>

Transgender Law Center. Peeing in Peace: A Resource Guide for Transgender Activists and Allies. <https://transgenderlawcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/94930982-PIP-Resource-Guide.pdf>



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## Thank you

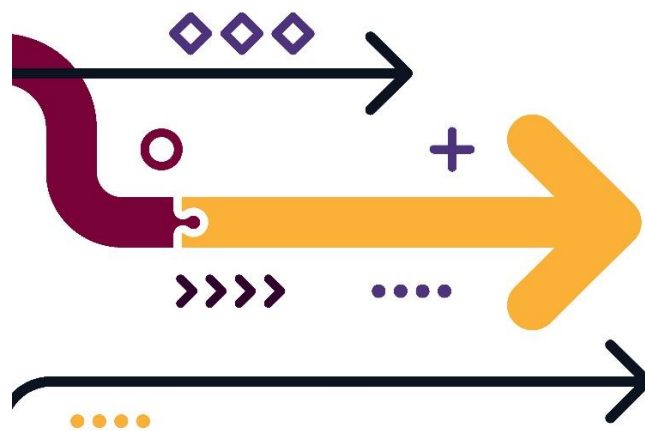
First, we offer our sincere gratitude to all youth who generously shared their time and expertise by serving on the Youth Advisory Team, participating in a focus group, and taking time to complete the online survey. This project was developed for youth, by youth. We are so proud of all you have accomplished.

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Thank you to all the members of our research team who contributed to creating this guide and to Hannah Sullivan Facknitz for graphic design and web design.

Finally, thank YOU for taking time to explore this guide. We hope you have found answers to some of your questions. We invite you to share this guide with others who have questions about health and wellness for trans, Two-Spirit, and nonbinary (TTNB) youth. We want all youth to be able to just be themselves as they move through their gender journeys.





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# More Resources

## *Info Sheets*

Finding Healthcare Providers

Healthcare Coverage & Costs

Self-Advocacy

Tips for Allies

## *Report*

Just Be Yourself: The Community Report



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