BEING HEALTHY

Although there have been significant improvements in human rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex and queer 2SLGBTQIA+ people, their needs are sometimes overlooked in our health and social service systems. We all deserve to be healthy, regardless of our age, race, income, ability, sexual orientation, gender expression or gender identity.

Being healthy means taking care of our physical, emotional, sexual, psychological and spiritual needs.

GETTING GOOD HEALTH CARE

For lesbians and other women who have sex with women, getting good health care can sometimes be a challenge. Health care providers may be homophobic/transphobic or they may not know much about your health concerns. This can make it tough to come out to your health care provider. But it is important for everyone to go for regular check-ups and to get professional and proactive care. Here are some suggestions to improve the quality of your health care:

- Ask other 2SLGBTQIA+ people about their health care providers and who they recommend, or check prideHealth’s directory of health and wellness providers.
- Check out the office space and look for 2SLGBTQIA+-friendly posters, brochures, magazines or other signs of a 2SLGBTQIA+-positive environment. If the office does not have any 2SLGBTQIA+ positive resources, encourage office staff to connect with prideHealth.
- Listen for how the provider speaks with you and whether you are encouraged to talk about your concerns in a culturally sensitive and nonjudgmental manner.
- If you feel safe, come out to your provider so that you can be open about discussing the issues that are of concern to you and they can better understand how to help you stay healthy or get better.
- If you do not feel comfortable with a provider, look for another so that you can get the best health care possible.
- prideHealth can help support you to communicate and work effectively with your health care providers.

References for this content can be obtained by contacting prideHealth.

HEALTH & WELLNESS RESOURCES

prideHealth
902-487-0470
pridehealth@nshealth.ca
www.pridehealth.ca
www.facebook.com/pridehealthHFX

The Youth Project
902-429-5429
www.youthproject.ns.ca

The Elderberries
Elderberries.scofia2@gmail.com
www.facebook.com/NSElderberries

Canadian Cancer Society
Smokers’ Helpline - 1-877-513-5333
Cancer Screening: www.cancer.ca/getscreened
www.clear-the-air.ca

Rainbow Health Ontario
www.rainbowhealthontario.ca

South House
www.southhousehalifax.ca

PFLAG - Halifax NS
Contact: Cyndi Sweeney
1-888-530-6777 ext 574
halifaxns@pflagcanada.ca
www.facebook.com/PFLAGHalifax

Halifax Sexual Health Centre
www.hshc.ca

References for this content can be obtained by contacting prideHealth.

CONTACT US:

prideHealth
prideHealth@nshealth.ca
902-487-0470

To learn more, please visit: www.prideHealth.ca

FOLLOW US:

Facebook
www.facebook.com/prideHealthHFX

Rainbow Health Ontario
Santé arc-en-ciel Ontario

ABOUT LESBIAN HEALTH

HEALTH INFORMATION FOR LESBIANS AND OTHER WOMEN WHO HAVE SEX WITH WOMEN TO WHOM THIS MAY APPLY

USED WITH PERMISSION FROM RAINBOW HEALTH ONTARIO, FUNDED BY SHERBOURNE HEALTH CENTRE AND THE PROVINCE OF ONTARIO.
Lesbians and women who have sex with women have many of the same health care needs as the general population, but may also have specific health care needs. Lesbians and women who have sex with women may also experience negative attitudes and discrimination when seeking health care. It can be difficult to find knowledgeable and respectful health care services, but things are improving as prideHealth works with providers to increase capacity to deliver quality care. This brochure outlines some of the health issues that are of concern to lesbians and other women who have sex with women.

**EMOTIONAL & MENTAL HEALTH**

Mental health is shaped by a sense of self-worth, the level of stress to which people are subjected, and the inclusiveness of their workplace and community.

- Lesbians and women who have sex with women experience higher rates of depression, anxiety, and suicide than the general population.
- This can be due to internalized, societal and institutional homo/bi/transphobia.
- These stresses can profoundly affect self-esteem, identity, and self-acceptance.
- Violence and micro-aggressions can further contribute to mental distress and challenges with coming out to friends, family and society.

Finding support and help:

- You might want to talk to family and friends or others in a peer support group. prideHealth can help connect you with programs and supports in the community.
- Explore various coping strategies to deal with stresses and manage self-care such as meditation, physical activity and making time for activities you enjoy.

Please contact the Mental Health Mobile Crisis team if you are in need of urgent care at 902-429-8167 or 1-888-429-8167.

**TOBACCO USE AND SMOKING**

Research indicates that 2SLGBTQIA+ communities use tobacco at rates that are two to three times higher than those of the general population. Reasons for this include:

- Used as a coping mechanism for high levels of stress.
- Tobacco industry marketing specifically to 2SLGBTQIA+ communities.
- Desire to belong to a group.
- 2SLGBTQIA+ people might not see themselves represented in mainstream anti-smoking campaigns.

If you have thought about quitting or reducing your tobacco use, there are free resources and programs provided by stop smoking services as part of the Nova Scotia Mental Health and Addictions program.

https://www.nshealth.ca/mental-health-addictions

For LGBTIQ+ specific information and resources go to: www.clear-the-air.ca

**CANCER**

Cancer screening rates are low among 2SLGBTQIA+ communities. Screening means getting checked for cancer before you have any symptoms. Screening can stop cancer before it starts or if found, treat it early so that intervention works.

- Anyone with breast tissue is at risk for breast cancer, and should be screened according to guidelines.
- Smoking increases the risk for lung cancer, and increases the risk of other types of cancer.
- Anyone with a cervix should get regular pap tests to screen for cervical cancer.
- People who have anal sex are at higher risk for contracting HPV, which can lead to anal cancer.
- LGBTQ women have higher risk factors for colon and breast cancer, so it’s important to get screened regularly for these.

Speak to your family physician or primary care provider about cancer screening. You have the right to receive screening that is appropriate for you. If you don’t have a family physician or primary health care provider, there are some screenings that are available without a referral. prideHealth can help connect you with services you need.

**BODY IMAGE**

- Healthy bodies come in all shapes and sizes.
- 2SLGBTQIA+ people may diet or exercise excessively in order to achieve community standards of physical beauty.
- Nutrition and weight concerns can become unhealthy if they make you feel depressed or cause physical harm.
- For more information please contact Eating Disorders Nova Scotia by e-mail: info@eatingdisordersns.ca, or phone 902-229-8436.

**RELATIONSHIP HEALTH**

Intimate partner violence does occur in 2SLGBTQIA+ relationships. Your health care provider may not ask you about your relationship(s), but you can speak to them if you have any concerns about your interactions with your partner(s).

Signs of intimate partner violence may include:

- Your partner gets jealous; makes fun of you; threatens to “out” you or harm you; misgenders you; tries to control your activities, finances, or other relationships; withholds access to medication; pressures or forces you to have sex; is physically violent; or acts in other ways that make you feel unsafe.
- Your partner uses one or more parts of your identity (like your gender identity, sexual orientation, race, class, age, culture, religion, spirituality, immigration status, HIV status, body size, appearance, etc.) to manipulate, control, or shame you.
- You feel depressed, anxious, angry, afraid, guilty, ashamed or suicidal.

Signs of a healthy relationship may include:

- Regular, open communication about the needs and desires of all partners.
- Enthusiastic consent in sexual relations and other aspects of the relationship(s).
- Respect for each partner’s independence and identities.
- You feel joy and happiness, and supported and loved.

You can seek support from a health care provider, a counsellor, a crisis line. If there is any possibility that your partner(s) would access the same support services (e.g. a shelter) as you, especially in a small community, let the staff know.

Please visit the Nova Scotia Domestic Violence Resource Centre website for more information: www.nsdomesticviolence.ca

**SEXUAL HEALTH**

A person’s risk of exposure to sexually transmitted and blood borne infections (STBBI) depends on the body parts and fluids involved in sexual activity with another person, NOT a person’s identity. When discussing your sexual health with a health care provider, make sure to describe your sexual behaviour and ask about the risks of specific sex acts in order to avoid any assumptions. Because of the common perception that lesbians and women who have sex with women are at no or low risk, you may also have to advocate for tests that you may need.

To reduce your risk of STBBI:

- Negotiate safety with your partner(s), and what are the acceptable levels of risk for all persons involved.
- Use barriers such as gloves, dams and condoms with body parts and sex toys - many sexual health clinics and other health care facilities offer these free of charge.
- Clean sex toys before sharing with a partner.
- Be aware that the use of alcohol and drugs before or during sex, sharing needles, a few BDSM/kink activities, and some sex work may involve a greater level of risk and need to include negotiation.
- Get vaccinated against Hepatitis A and B.
- If you are HIV negative, ask your health care provider whether PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) or PEP (post-exposure prophylaxis) would be helpful for you for HIV prevention.

Some trans people taking hormones may still be able to get pregnant or inseminate their partner. To reduce the risk of unplanned pregnancy, use a condom or other barrier method, or speak to your health care provider.