BEING HEALTHY

Although there have been significant improvements in human rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans 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. For trans people, this can be a challenge given the stress of dealing with prejudice and discrimination. But being trans is a wonderful, positive experience for many people; gender expression and gender identity can be a source of pride and celebration.

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

FLY (First Love Yourself) - Transgender Peer Support for Adults in Nova Scotia
transnfx@gmail.com

PFLAG - Halifax NS
Contact: Cyndi Sweeney
1-888-530-8777 ext 574
halifaxns@pflagcanada.ca
www.facebook.com/PFLAGHalifax

TRANS Pulse
www.transpulse.ca

South House
www.southhousehalifax.ca

The Elderberries
Elderberries.scotia2@gmail.com
www.facebook.com/NSElderberries

GETTING GOOD HEALTH CARE

For trans people, getting good health care can be hard. Health care providers may be transphobic or they may not know much about your health concerns. This can make it tough to come out about your gender or medical history to your health care provider, and some trans and non-binary people may avoid seeking health care altogether. It is important to go for regular check-ups and to get professional help when something is wrong. Here are some suggestions to improve the quality of your health care:

- Ask other trans people about their health care providers and who they recommend, or check prideHealth’s directory of health and wellness providers
- Visit potential providers and ask questions about their training and experience with trans and non-binary health issues
- 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+ resources, encourage office staff to contact prideHealth.
- Notice whether the in-take form asks for lived name/ pronouns
- 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 or disclose 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
- prideHealth can support you in communicating and working effectively with your health care providers
- Call your health care provider in advance of your visit to ensure they are trans informed.

References for this content can be obtained by contacting prideHealth.
Trans and masculine-spectrum people have many of the same health care needs as the general population, but may also have specific health care needs. If your health care needs include hormones and/or surgery, then you may also face a distinct set of issues that need to be addressed. Trans people 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 trans people.

**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. You are entitled to the type of STBBI testing that you want.

To reduce your risk of STBBI:

- Negotiate safely with your partner(s), and what are 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(s)
- 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 needs to include negotiation
- Get vaccinated against Hepatitis A and B
- If you are HIV negative, ask your health care provider whether PEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) or PEP (post-exposure prophylaxis) would be helpful for you for HIV prevention

Some 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.

**EMOTIONAL & MENTAL HEALTH**

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

- Trans men experience higher rates of depression, anxiety, and suicide than the general population
- This can be due to internalized, societal and institutional transphobia
- These stresses can profoundly affect self-esteem, identity and self-acceptance
- Violence and micro-aggression can further contribute to mental distress and challenges with coming out to friends, family and society
- Transition itself can be stressful with many barriers to overcome - studies show that trans and non-binary people are most vulnerable from the time they decide to transition until they begin their process

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 physical activity, meditation, 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 & 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:

- Using as a coping mechanism for high levels of stress
- Tobacco industry marketing specifically to 2SLGBTQIA+ communities
- Desire to belong to a group
- Mainstream anti-smoking campaigns may not resonate with 2SLGBTQIA+ people

It’s important to know that:

- Smoking increases the risk of heart disease in testosterone dominant bodies
- Smoking slows down healing after surgery and increases the risk of complications

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

https://www.nshealth.ca/service-details/Stop%20Smoking%20Services

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
- Anyone with a cervix should get regular pap tests to screen for cervical cancer
- People who have and sex are at higher risk for contracting HPV, which can lead to anal cancer
- Trans men and people who take testosterone may be at higher risk for polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) which is a hormonal condition that can cause cysts to grow in ovaries
- Trans men and people with PCOS may be at a higher risk for endometrial cancer and breast cancer
- Smoking increases the risk for lung cancer and may add risk for other types of cancer

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 care provider, there are some screenings that are available without a referral. prideHealth can help you connect with the health services you need.

**RELATIONSHIP HEALTH**

Intimate partner violence does occur in 2SLGBTQIA+ relationships. Your health care provider may not ask you about your relationship(s), but you deserve a space to speak about doubt and interactions with your partner(s).

Signs of intimate partner violence may include:

- ‘Your partner(s) 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 both 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 counselor, or 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 for more information: www.nsdomesticviolence.ca

**ALCOHOL & DRUG USE**

- People sometimes use alcohol and drugs to cope with transphobia, discrimination and depression
- If you use drugs, learning about the effects and side effects can help make your use safer
- Ask yourself whether your drug use is affecting your health, relationships, job, studies or finances
- Consider whether your use is leading you to take risks, sexual or otherwise, that you wouldn’t take if you were sober

There are many types of harm reduction programs and your health care provider can help you choose one that’s right for you. prideHealth can help connect you with Mental Health and Addictions programs and providers in the community.

**BODY IMAGE**

- Healthy bodies come in all shapes and sizes
- Many trans people have a negative body image due to discomfort with their physical bodies
- Some trans people may excessively diet or exercise to make physical changes to achieve their desired gender expression
- Trans people who take hormones often gain weight and this may also lead to dieting or other changes in behaviour
- 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@eatingdisorders.ns.ca, or phone 902-229-8436