

Improving Gender-Inclusive Healthcare Practices in Newfoundland & Labrador

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NL Gender-Affirming Care Toolkit



Purpose

Small Changes, Big Impact: Improving Gender-Inclusive Healthcare Practices in Newfoundland & Labrador is part of Trans Support NL's **Gender-Affirming Care Toolkit**.

This resource supports healthcare and social service providers in building understanding and confidence when working with gender-diverse people. It offers an overview of gender diversity and identities, along with practical tips for creating more welcoming and inclusive spaces. It also provides guidance on how to respectfully support someone through their social and/or legal transition.



The goal is to help all care settings become places where everyone feels seen, respected, and safe.

Acknowledgements

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Women and Gender
Equality Canada

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des genres Canada

Canada

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Introduction to Gender Diversity

Gender is a core part of who we are, but it's often misunderstood. Many people grow up thinking gender is just about physiology, or that there are only two: male and female. In reality, gender is much more complex. It's shaped by personal identity, culture, history, and lived experience, not just our bodies.

This section introduces key ideas to help us move beyond assumptions and better support all patients, especially those who are Two Spirit, trans, non-binary, intersex and gender-diverse. It covers sex assigned at birth, how gender roles influence our lives, and how gender has always existed in many forms across cultures.

Why This Matters in Healthcare

Every person deserves to feel seen, respected, and safe when they walk into a healthcare setting. For gender-diverse people, that isn't always the reality. Many face misgendering, invasive questions, or outright denial of care—experiences that can lead people to delay or avoid medical care altogether. As a provider or administrator your language, your presence, and your care makes all the difference.

Affirming care is about more than clinical knowledge. It's about listening with respect, using someone's name and pronouns, and creating a space where people don't have to brace themselves before every appointment. When patients feel recognized and affirmed in their identities, they're more likely to return for care, follow through with treatment, and build a trusting relationship with their provider¹.

You don't need to be an expert in gender—you just need to bring curiosity, compassion, and a willingness to learn. These small acts of respect can transform healthcare into a place of healing, not harm.

“

A TSNL survey found that 69% of respondents felt providers need more training on general knowledge of gender diversity²

Gender Diversity in Canada & NL

Gender-diverse people represent a significant population in the Canadian healthcare system³.

~**1-in-300** people aged 15+ identify as trans or non-binary.

~**1-in-200** Millennials (born 1981-1996) identify as trans or non-binary.

~**1-in-100** Gen Z (born 1997-2012) identify as trans or non-binary.

These numbers do not suggest gender-diversity is a “new” phenomenon. Rather they reflect a growing visibility and acceptance in Canada.

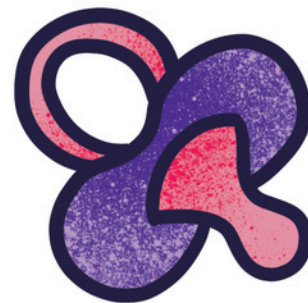
Gender-Diverse Youth (ages 15-34) in NL

For Newfoundland & Labrador youth, these numbers are even higher, with St. John’s ranking as the 10th most gender-diverse Canadian urban centre, ahead of Vancouver, Toronto, and Montreal.



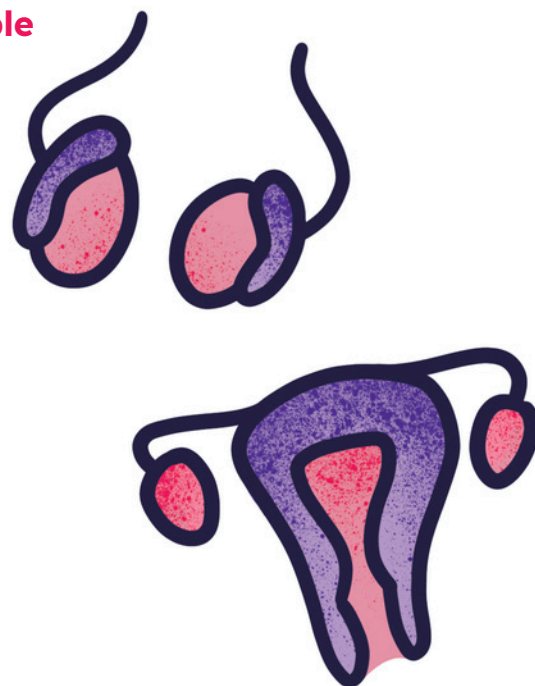
What is Sex Assigned at Birth?

Sex Assigned at Birth (SAAB) is the label—male, female—given to a baby based on their genitals. This label is recorded on documents like birth certificates and is often assumed to define a person's gender for life. But a person's physical sex is much more than what's visible at birth. It includes chromosomes, hormones, internal organs, and body changes that happen throughout life, all of which together shape a person's physical traits.



People who are AFAB (assigned female at birth) or AMAB (assigned male at birth) get their label based on this initial classification. However, not everyone's body fits into the typical “male” or “female” categories. Differences of Sex Development means that some people are born with bodies that don't match common definitions of male or female anatomy. **Around 1.7% of people have DSDs**, some of these differences are obvious at birth, while others may only be noticed later in life⁴.

While one's SAAB is a medical label, many systems, like schools, healthcare, and government ID, treat it as permanent and use it to decide someone's gender. This can cause real challenges gender-diverse people when it comes to getting respectful healthcare, accurate IDs, and being seen and accepted for who they truly are.





Gender Roles and Expectations

From childhood, we're all taught messages about what it means to be a "boy" or a "girl." These messages shape how we're expected to dress, act, speak, and even what kinds of jobs or emotions are "acceptable." These are known as gender roles and expectations, and they affect everyone.

For gender-diverse people, these expectations can be especially harmful. Pressure to conform to gender norms that don't match one's identity can lead to exclusion, discrimination, or unsafe environments in school, at work, or even in healthcare⁵.

Things like gendered dress codes, assumptions about pronouns, or questions based on someone's appearance can all make a space feel unwelcoming. But when we challenge rigid gender rules, we create more freedom for everyone to express themselves without shame or fear.



Gender Roles in Healthcare

Of course, gender impacts many aspects of healthcare as well. Women's pain and experience with chronic conditions tend to be underestimated, and men's mental health is often overlooked by both patient and provider^{6, 7}. For gender-diverse patients, negative experiences in medical settings is a common factor in medical avoidance, while those who do seek medical care face **"Trans Broken Arm Syndrome"**: when unrelated healthcare needs are falsely attributed to a patient's gender transition⁸.

Applying a gendered lens to your practice helps counteract these biases.



Gender Around the World and Through Time

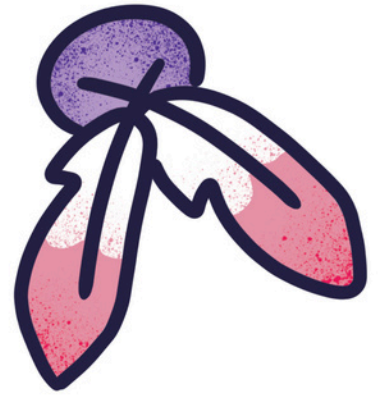
Gender diversity is not new—it's been part of human history across every continent.

Gender has never looked just one way. Across different cultures and throughout history, people have understood and expressed gender in many diverse ways.

Many Indigenous nations across Turtle Island (North America) have long recognized **Two-Spirit** people, who hold important spiritual and community roles. In South Asia, **hijras** are recognized as a third gender and have a long history of cultural significance. In Samoa, **fa'afafine**, and in Hawai'i, **māhū**, are respected gender-diverse identities with deep roots.

Even in Europe, before strict gender norms were enforced, people with diverse gender expressions existed in many communities. Colonialism and Western medical systems play a major role in erasing these rich traditions and replacing them with a narrow, binary view of gender.

Understanding gender as diverse and deeply rooted in history helps us unlearn the myth that it's “new” or “unnatural.”



Gender Identity and Expression

Gender identity is a person's innate, internal sense of their gender, for example, as a man, woman, both, neither, or another identity. It may or may not align with the sex assigned at birth.

Gender expression refers to the external and social ways people present their gender. This includes aspects like clothing, hairstyle, voice, name, pronouns, facial hair, body language, and more. Gender expression is shaped by personal choice, culture, context, and safety—and may change over time or in different environments. It doesn't necessarily reflect a person's gender identity.

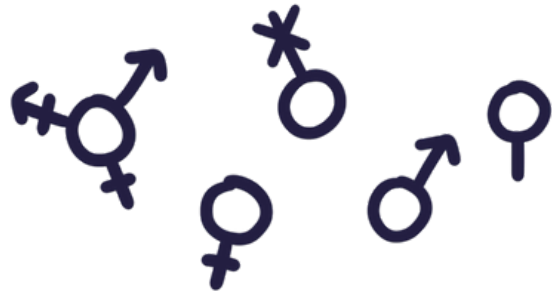


Understanding and respecting someone's gender identity and gender expression is essential to providing affirming, person-centered care. This includes using correct names and pronouns, avoiding assumptions based on appearance, and supporting access to appropriate interventions like hormone therapy or legal document changes.

For example, a person with a traditionally masculine presentation may identify as non-binary and use they/them pronouns, asking their name and pronouns lead fosters trust, reduces the risk of misgendering, and encourages ongoing engagement in care. Affirming care improves comfort, supports accurate clinical decision-making, and helps create a safer, more welcoming healthcare environment.



Gender Identities



There are many ways people identify and express their gender. Below are some common gender identity terms that can help build understanding, this list isn't exhaustive, but it's a starting point for respectful and informed care.

Cisgender (cis): A person whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth. Knowing this term helps recognize that everyone has a gender identity, cisgender isn't the "default," but one identity among many. This helps create more respectful and inclusive conversations about gender.

Transgender (trans): A person whose gender identity is different from the sex they were assigned at birth. This can include people who identify as men, women, non-binary, or in other ways. Being transgender is about knowing who you are, it's not defined by whether someone has pursued medical transition or changed legal documents.

Non-binary: A person whose gender identity doesn't fit within the categories of "man" or "woman." They may identify as both, neither, or somewhere in between. This reflects the understanding that gender is a spectrum, not a binary.

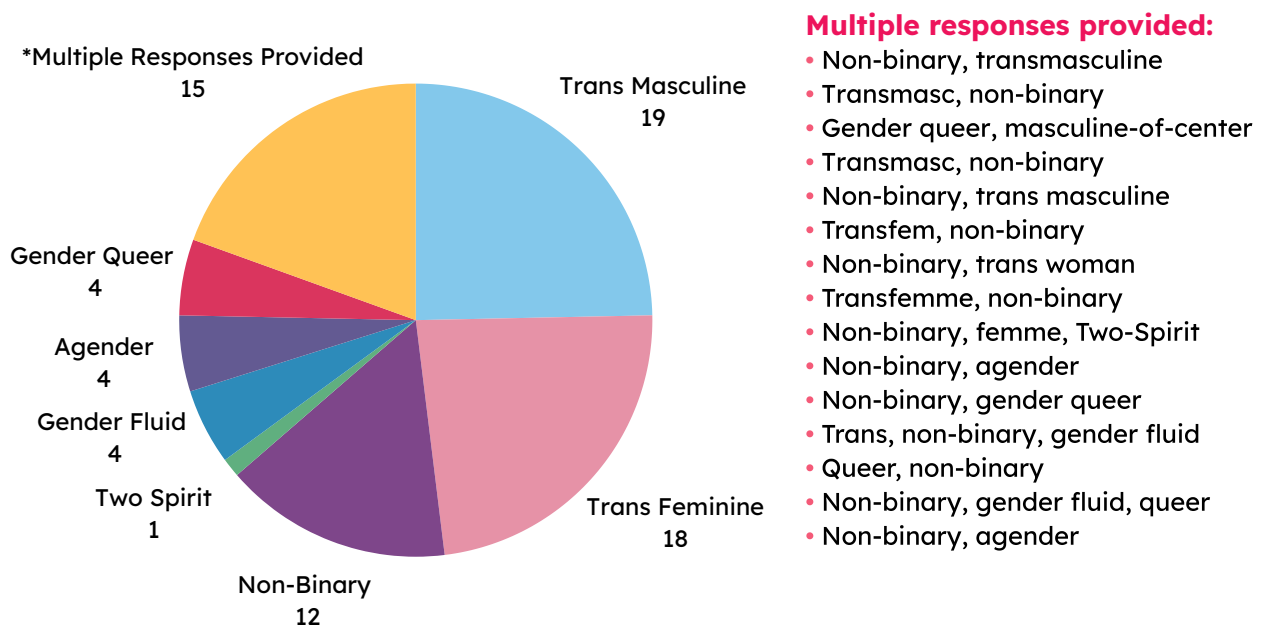
A person can have many gender identities, like "nonbinary women" or "two-spirit transmasculine".



Two Spirit: Two-Spirit is a term that was created in 1990 during the Indigenous LGBTQ+ North American Gathering as a way to honour and bring together different Indigenous understandings of gender, sexuality, and spiritual roles. It's used by some Indigenous people to describe identities that blend masculine and feminine qualities or represent a gender variation within their communities. It's important to know that not all Two Spirit people identify as transgender, and not all indigenous transgender people identify as Two Spirit.

TSNL Survey: Gender Identities in NL²

To understand local experiences of gender identity, a TSNL survey² invited participants in Newfoundland and Labrador to self-identify their gender. As seen in the figure below, many respondents used multiple terms to describe their identity, emphasizing that gender is not fixed but personal and evolving. These findings highlight the need for a more flexible and inclusive approach to healthcare, one that provides affirming, patient-centered care reflecting the diversity of gender experiences.



Gender Identity – Narratives

Every person's transition journey is unique and will engage with healthcare systems differently. Below are examples of different people with their own approaches and experience to gender and healthcare.

Ava (Trans Woman, She/Her)

Ava knew she was different but didn't have the words until her late 20s. Starting HRT was life-changing, helping her feel more like herself. She legally changed her name and gender marker, easing daily life. Now, she's seeking bottom surgery but faces barriers and long waitlists. Therapy and community keep her grounded as she keeps pushing forward.

Leo (Trans Man, He/Him)

Leo came out in high school but started testosterone at 19, feeling joy as his body changed. After top surgery, he felt comfortable in his skin for the first time. He's undecided about bottom surgery and values a doctor who listens without pressure. His focus is now on living fully as himself.

Elijah (Two-Spirit, They/He)

Elijah grew up in a traditional community with limited gender talks. Meeting other Two-Spirit people helped them embrace their identity, blending masculine and feminine energies. Their journey is deeply tied to culture, and they are navigating rural healthcare challenges while feeling pride in their role and community support.



River (Non-Binary, They/Them)

River didn't fit into male or female roles and found clarity in the non-binary identity. Their transition focuses on expression, fashion, makeup, and low-dose HRT. Navigating coverage and finding understanding providers has been hard, but community support and having "X" on their passport bring strength.

Jules (Genderqueer, They/She)

Jules rejects choosing "male" or "female" and embraces fluidity, mixing masculine and feminine styles. They've faced assumptions from providers but are happy where they are, using both "they" and "she" pronouns. Queer spaces and supportive friends have been essential.

Sam (Trans Femme, She/Her)

Sam embraces femininity on her own terms and started estrogen a year ago. For her, transition is about safety and being seen, not just hormones. Makeup and dresses bring joy, and therapy helps unlearn shame. She's focused on enjoying the journey at her own pace.



Ash (Genderfluid, They/She/He)

Ash experiences gender as fluid, shifting between feminine, masculine, and in-between. Understanding this wasn't a phase was freeing. Without medical transition, Ash finds affirmation through changing pronouns and expression. Community that embraces fluidity has been life-changing.

Jordan (Trans Masc, He/Him)

Jordan came out in his late 20s and recently started testosterone. Transition, for him, is about feeling at home in his body and moving through the world with more ease. Small milestones like voice changes and facial hair bring joy. Binders, name changes, journaling, and community support help him stay grounded as he navigates dysphoria—one step at a time.

Pronouns



Pronouns, like she/her, he/him, they/them, or xe/xem, are words we use in place of names.

We use pronouns all the time, it's just a part of the English language structure. Using personal pronouns makes language flow more easily without repeating a person's name over and over. Some language, like Turkish, Estonian, and Innu-aimun, don't use gendered personal pronouns. Other languages use gendered personal pronouns but also gender nouns and adjectives for inanimate objects, like French and Spanish.

Since language shapes how we think about the world, having gendered or gender-neutral structures influences how people perceive gender. Understanding these differences highlights why respecting pronouns is about more than just language, it's about affirming people's identities, challenging assumptions, and creating inclusive ways of communicating.

Sharing, using, and asking about pronouns

When we share our pronouns and use others' correctly, we help build a culture of respect and inclusion. It's a simple but meaningful way to show that everyone belongs. Whether in conversation, on name tags, or in email signatures, normalizing pronouns supports safer spaces for gender-diverse people to be seen and respected.



What to Do If You Make a Mistake



Acknowledge and Correct: If you catch yourself using the wrong name or misgendering someone, simply correct yourself and continue.

She—sorry—they have an appointment.

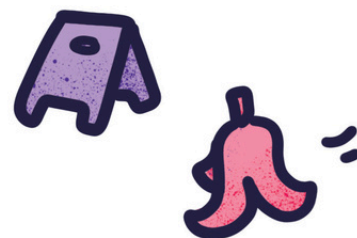
Correct Others Respectfully: If you notice a colleague using the wrong name or pronoun for someone, you can gently correct them without creating an uncomfortable situation.

Actually, Jordan uses she/they pronouns.

Apologize, But Don't Overdo It: If someone corrects you, acknowledge the mistake and move on. Over-apologizing can make the situation uncomfortable for the individual by putting the focus on your feelings rather than their dignity.

Thank you for correcting me. I'll work to get it right.

Avoid Excuses: Statements like “I’m just not used to it” or “This is hard for me” shift responsibility onto the individual. Instead, focus on making the necessary adjustments.



Commit to Improve: If you make frequent mistakes, take steps to practice using the correct name and pronouns.

- Repeat the name and pronouns in your head.
- Mutually support and remind those around you.
- Write affirmations like, “Xi’s pronouns are he/him”.





Welcoming Spaces

Navigating public spaces can be unpredictable, and sometimes unsafe, for gender diverse people. From misgendering at the front desk to gendered restrooms that don't fit, small moments can have a big impact.

In healthcare, where people are already vulnerable, feeling unsafe or unseen can lead to avoidance, mistrust, and poorer health outcomes. Often, it's not just about the care itself, but the environment in which it's offered.

For those with past negative experiences, even small gestures of respect help build trust.

This chapter offers simple, tangible ways to help make sure your space is gender inclusive. These steps may seem trivial at first, but a little goes a long way.

From Avoidance to Inclusion

Newfoundland & Labrador is widely known for its welcoming, warm hospitality. Though for gender-diverse patients, feeling welcomed and safe can be a challenge: experiences or fears of being misgendered, outed, judged, or misunderstood pose significant barriers to care and are major sources of medical avoidance.

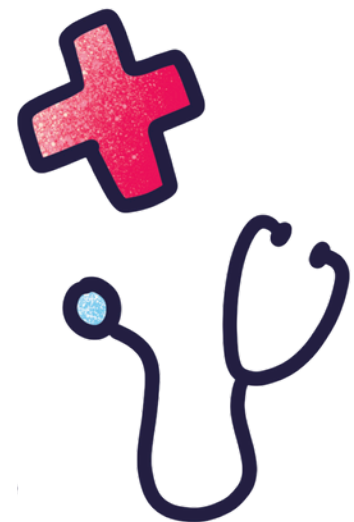
A study of Emergency Department usage in Ontario reported that over half of trans patients experienced **gendered negative experiences**, including misgendering and refusal of care, and that 1-in-5 avoided the emergency department due to identity-based concerns⁹.

Another survey found that 37% of trans patients with a family physician reported **discomfort** discussing trans-specific health issues⁵.

TSNL's Patient Outreach Survey² identified several common barriers to disclosing gender identity to healthcare providers:

- 76%** Fear of being judged
- 64%** Insufficient trust in their provider
- 58%** Concerns about the provider's limited knowledge of gender-affirming care
- 41%** Previous discriminatory experiences in healthcare settings

Thankfully, clinics and other service providers can make simple but meaningful changes to create more inclusive, safe, and welcoming spaces for gender-diverse clients.



Inclusive Documentation

Forms are often the first point of contact a patient has with a healthcare provider, and they should reflect gender diversity. Some things you can include when making forms are:

Pronouns

Provide common options (she/her, he/him, they/them) as “select all that apply” with space for other options.

Name and Legal Name

Provide fields for both name and legal name, clearly labelled, to support respectful and accurate communication.

Gender Identity

Provide common options (man, woman, non-binary, Two-Spirit) as “select all that apply,” with space for self-identification.

Sex Assigned at Birth

Provide options for sex assigned at birth (e.g., female, male, intersex) as separate from gender identity.

Inclusive Patient Management

Creating inclusive healthcare spaces involves more than just respectful conversations—it also means making sure internal documentation and communication reflect a patient’s identity wherever possible.

Documenting and Using Correct Names & Pronouns

Ensure your forms and records collect the name a patient goes by and their pronouns. Find ways to organize your documentation to make it easy for staff to use them consistently. Importantly, use the correct name and pronouns at all times, even when the patient isn’t present. Consistency shows respect, prevents assumptions, and builds trust.

Making Inclusive Referrals

When referring patients to other providers, pass on relevant identity information. This can be as simple as writing, “This patient goes by **[Name]** and uses **[Pronouns]**.” Including this in referral notes—especially when legal documents do not reflect them—sets the tone for inclusive care and reduces the burden on patients to repeatedly correct others.

Explaining System Limitations

Your clinic’s systems or external EMRs might not allow changes to name or gender markers. These limitations can be frustrating or even harmful to patients. When faced with this, explain what your clinic can do, what it can’t, and how you will offer affirming care within these constraints. This helps patients feel informed and supported, even when systems fall short.

Gender Neutral Facilities



Public washrooms have become politicized spaces for gender-diverse people. In one Ontario survey, **up to 70% of trans people** reported some sort of negative reaction when accessing a public bathroom and **57% of respondents** have avoided using public washrooms for fear of harassment¹⁰. Avoiding bathroom use can result in health conditions ranging from urinary tract infections to kidney problems.

Single unit washrooms can be easily converted from gender-specific facilities to gender-neutral ones with simple signage¹⁰.



Reception Practices

Always use a patient's correct name and pronouns, even if they differ from what's on legal documents. Intake forms should clearly distinguish between legal name and chosen name to support this practice.

Ask open-ended questions instead of making assumptions about someone's gender or reason for visiting. For example, "How can I help you today?" is more inclusive than "Are you here for a women's health appointment?"

Avoid gendered language and honorifics like "Sir" or "Ma'am," which may feel dysphoric or distressing for some patients. Even overhearing others being referred to with gendered terms can create anxiety for trans and non-binary people.

Use gender-neutral pronouns such as they/them if a patient's pronouns are unknown, and avoid assumptions. Calling people only by their last name can also help prevent misgendering or deadnaming.

Ensure privacy when discussing names, pronouns, or gender identity, especially in shared spaces like waiting rooms. Ask these questions discreetly and only when needed.

Have policies in place for respectful corrections. If a patient is misnamed or misgendered a quick, calm correction is often enough. There's no need to over-apologize—just acknowledging the mistake and moving forward respectfully helps build trust.



Visual Signals of Inclusion



Visual signs of inclusion don't make your practice inclusive on their own, but they can be signal to patients and a reminder to staff of your commitment to gender-affirming practices.

Use inclusive images and materials. Move beyond visuals that only show cisgender people. Include posters, brochures, and educational content that feature transgender, non-binary, and Two-Spirit people.

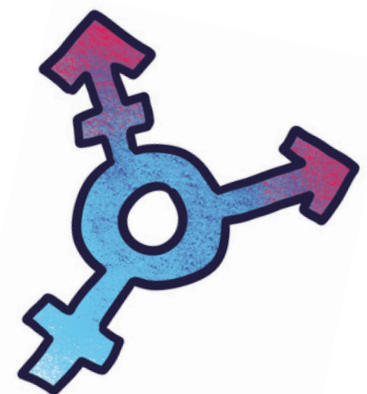
Display Pride symbols—like flags, stickers, or pins—to show support.

Make gender-affirming care information easily accessible. Place materials in waiting areas, exam rooms, and online so patients can find what they need without having to ask.

Include clear affirming statements on your website, signage, and promotional materials to signal your commitment to inclusive care.

Share & display 2SLGBTQ+ resources. Featuring materials from community groups shows support and strengthens partnerships.

Review practices & policies, and commit to promptly addressing issues. Signalling inclusion without meaningful action (i.e. **Rainbow washing**) creates uncertainty. Enshrine inclusivity in your mission mandate, and display it prominently in your spaces.





Social and Legal Transition

Everyone expresses gender. Choices about clothes, hair, voice, name, pronouns, and even ID are personal and shaped by who we are and where we come from. There's no one "right" way.

For people who are transitioning, things like using a chest binder, changing their name or gender marker on ID, or doing voice training can be important ways to feel more seen and safe.

This chapter looks at how people express and affirm their gender, socially and legally. Whether it's using the right name and pronouns, helping with forms or sourcing gender-affirming gear, there are many ways to support social and legal transition.

Social Transition

Social transition involves making outward changes that aligns someone's gender presentation with their gender identity. It's personal, flexible, and looks different for everyone. Unlike medical or legal transition, social transition doesn't require hormones, surgeries, or paperwork. At its heart, social transition is about feeling seen, safe, and affirmed. It can include things like:

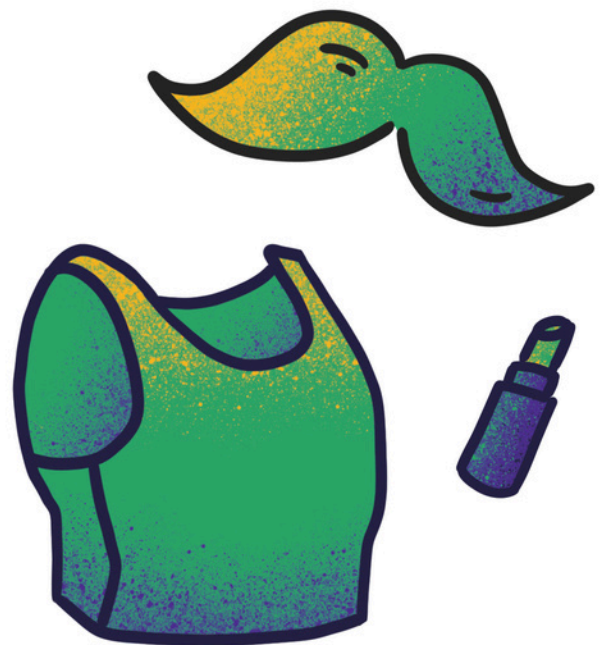
Using a name and pronouns that reflect one's gender identity

Changing clothing, hairstyle, or makeup

Using gender-congruent bathrooms or changing rooms

Coming out to friends, family, co-workers, or teachers

Adopting gendered behaviours like mannerisms and vocal patterns



For some, social transition is the only kind of transition they pursue. For others, it's one part of a broader journey that may include medical or legal steps. There's no right or wrong way to socially transition. People may express their gender differently depending on the setting, and the process can evolve over time. What matters most is that each person is supported in living as their true self.

Gender Affirming Gear

Binding, packing, tucking, and padding are common gender-affirming practices that help gender-diverse people shape how their bodies look and feel, supporting alignment with their gender identity in daily life.

These methods can reduce gender dysphoria, especially when medical interventions like hormones or surgery are not accessible, desired, or possible. While not used by everyone, they can be powerful tools for comfort, confidence, and self-expression across social, professional, and public settings to provide both temporary relief and long-term affirmation¹¹.

Binding

Flattening the torso with compression garments to reduce curves.

Packing

Wearing a prosthetic or padded item in the pants to create a bulge.

Tucking

Positioning or securing the genitals to create a flatter appearance in the groin.

Padding

Adding shape to areas like the hips, chest, or buttocks to enhance curves.

Paramedical Options

Paramedical services can help align gender expression with identity. Some of these services may be covered by private insurance.

Hair Removal

Laser hair removal, electrolysis, or waxing helps people align their appearance and identity. Working with a licensed provider experienced in gender-affirming care helps ensure safe, respectful, and effective results.



Voice Training

Voice-based misgendering is a common cause of dysphoria. With guidance from a speech-language pathologist or voice coach, people can explore pitch, resonance, speech patterns, and vocal health.



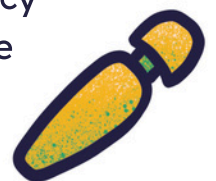
Counselling

Counselling offers space to explore identity, relationships, stress, and transition experiences. Some counsellors have a 2SLGBTQ+ focus or specialized training in gender-affirming care, meaning they understand the unique experiences of gender-diverse people and can offer informed, supportive guidance.



Sexologist

Sexologists help people explore sexual health, pleasure, and intimacy in affirming ways. For gender-diverse individuals, this might include navigating dysphoria, desire, or communication with partners.



Legal Transition



Legal transition involves updating official documents like IDs, birth certificates, and health cards, to reflect a person's gender identity. For many trans, non-binary, and gender-diverse people it's a vital step toward recognition, safety, and access.

Legal Changes in Newfoundland & Labrador



The first step in the legal name or sex designation change process is applying through the the provincial government's Vital Statistics Division. An applicant must have been a resident of the province for 3 months, and must be at least 16 years of age to apply without parental consent.

Name and sex designation changes are based on the applicant's birth certificate, and people born outside of the province may encounter additional barriers depending on the jurisdiction that issued their birth certificate.

The application must be notarized by a Commissioner of Oaths, Justice of the Peace, or Notary Public. Additionally for a name change, a criminal record check must be obtained from the RNC, RCMP, or the Commissionaires.

Once approved, the name change certificate must be provided to other institutions and agencies separately (MCP, CRA, Elections Canada, etc.).

The costs range from \$175-\$210, making this process difficult or inaccessible for those with lower income.

**NL Vital Statistics
name change site**





Next Steps

This guide provides foundational knowledge, but it is not a road map for specific future action. We hope that you will now feel confident in creating welcoming spaces and working with gender-diverse patients. How you do that is up to you.

While every workplace is different, all environments have scope for positive change. That means opportunities to **apply** your knowledge of gender-affirming care, to **share** that knowledge with your colleagues, and to **advocate** for change throughout your organization.

Together we can make our healthcare system better.

Continue the Conversation

If you're ready to build on what you've learned in this guide, we're here to help—whether that means improving your practice, educating your team, or strengthening policies and spaces.

Work Together

Trans Support NL offers support, advice, and consultation to members and leaders of organizations to help improve gender inclusivity. If you'd like to see change, visit us at tsnl.org or reach out to info@tsnl.org.

Give Feedback

Have an idea to improve this guide? Help us shape our approach to helping others learn.



Stay Updated

Sign up for our NL Gender-Affirming Healthcare Toolkit mailing list for new resources and updates.



Book a Free Workshop

Trans Support NL offers a variety of workshops to support organizations in understanding and addressing the needs of gender-diverse people.



Local Resources for Patients

Trans Support NL

Mending Mondays: Free counselling for gender-diverse people & their families. tsnl.org/mending-mondays

Peer Support: Monthly meetings in St. John's, Corner Brook, and Happy Valley-Goose Bay
tsnl.org/peer-support-group

Binder Swap: Free chest binders available province-wide
tsnl.org/gender-affirming-gear



Quadrangle NL

Quadrangle & Jacob Puddister Foundation: Free 2SLGBTQ+ counselling thequadnl.com/counselling

Trans Navigator: systems, documents, and resources navigation thequadnl.com/trans-navigator



Planned Parenthood

Warm Line: Peer support for 2SLGBTQ+ community
plannedparenthoodnlshc.com/warmline



Trans Youth NL

Peer Support: Monthly meetings for parents and youth
transyouthnl.ca



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