

## BEING HEALTHY

Although there have been significant improvements in human rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer (LGBTQ) people, their needs are often 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 and non-binary people, this can be a challenge given the stress of dealing with prejudice and discrimination. But being trans and/or non-binary is a wonderful, positive experience for many people; gender expression and gender identity can be a source of pride and celebration.

## HEALTH & WELLNESS RESOURCES

### Canadian Cancer Society

Smokers' Helpline - 1 877 513 5333

Cancer Screening: [cancer.on.ca/getscreened](http://cancer.on.ca/getscreened)

[www.clear-the-air.ca](http://www.clear-the-air.ca)

### Canadian Professional Association for Transgender Health

[www.cpath.ca](http://www.cpath.ca)

### Lesbian Gay Bi Trans Youth Line

1-800-268-9688 • [www.youthline.ca](http://www.youthline.ca)

### Rainbow Services at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

416.535.8501

### Trans Lifeline

[www.translifeline.org](http://www.translifeline.org)

### TRANS Pulse

[www.transpulse.ca](http://www.transpulse.ca)

### Transgender Health Program

[www.vch.ca/transhealth](http://www.vch.ca/transhealth)

### Rainbow Health Ontario

[www.RainbowHealthOntario.ca](http://www.RainbowHealthOntario.ca)

*Rainbow Health Ontario (RHO) is a province-wide program that works to improve the health and well-being of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer people in Ontario through education, research, consultation and the development of healthy public policy.*

## GETTING GOOD HEALTH CARE

For trans and non-binary 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 get 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 and non-binary people about their health care providers and who they recommend, or check RHO's service provider directory
- 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 LGBTQ-friendly posters, brochures, magazines or other signs of a LGBTQ-positive environment
- Notice whether the in-take form asks for preferred 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
- If you do not feel comfortable with a provider, look for another so that you can get the best health care possible
- If there are not many providers in your region, look into accessing providers who can connect to you via the Ontario Telemedicine Network (OTN)

To download or order, visit:  
[www.rainbowhealthontario.ca](http://www.rainbowhealthontario.ca)

## CONTACT US:

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# ABOUT TRANS WOMEN HEALTH

HEALTH INFORMATION FOR TRANS WOMEN  
AND NON-BINARY FOLKS TO WHOM  
THIS MAY APPLY



Rainbow Health Ontario  
Santé arc-en-ciel Ontario

Because LGBTQ health matters

[www.RainbowHealthOntario.ca](http://www.RainbowHealthOntario.ca)

Trans and non-binary 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 and non-binary 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 Rainbow Health Ontario works with providers to increase capacity to deliver quality care. This brochure outlines some of the health issues that are of concern to trans and non-binary people.

## SEXUAL HEALTH

A person's risk of exposure to sexually transmitted infections (STI) and blood-borne viruses (BBV) 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 STI testing that you want.

### To reduce your risk of STIs and BBVs:

- Negotiate safety 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
- 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 studies show higher rates of HIV infection in some groups of trans women. Trans women who do sex work can be at particularly high risk of getting HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) due to the demands of their work.

- Some evidence suggests that some trans and non-binary people have a higher frequency of unprotected sex
  - This may be due to social isolation and low self-esteem caused by transphobia as well as the lack of relevant sexual health information

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 women experience higher rates of depression, anxiety, and suicide than the general population
  - This can be due to internalized, societal and institutional transphobia and transmisogyny
  - 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 support group
- Explore various coping strategies to deal with stresses and manage self-care such as meditation, physical activity and making time for activities you enjoy

## ALCOHOL & DRUG USE

Alcohol or drugs are sometimes used to cope with transphobia, discrimination and depression

- If you use drugs, learn about the effects and side effects to help make your use safer
- Ask yourself whether it is affecting your health, relationships, job 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

## TOBACCO & SMOKING

Research indicates that LGBTQ 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 LGBTQ communities
- Desire to belong to a group
- LGBTQ people might not see themselves represented in mainstream anti-smoking campaigns

### It's important to know that:

- Smoking increases the risk of blood clots in estrogen dominant bodies
- Smoking slows down healing after surgery

If you are interested in reducing tobacco use or making a quit attempt, there are LGBTQ friendly services and resources available in Ontario:

[www.clear-the-air.ca](http://www.clear-the-air.ca)

## CANCER

Cancer screening rates are low among LGBTQ 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.

- Trans women and non-binary people who are taking hormones may be at risk for breast cancer and prostate cancer
- Smoking increases the risk for lung cancer and may add risk for other types of cancer
- Anyone with breast tissue is at risk for breast cancer, and should be screened according to guidelines
- People who have a prostate should get screened for prostate cancer
- People who have anal sex are at higher risk for contracting HPV, which can lead to anal cancer

Speak to your general practitioner about cancer screening. You have the right to receive screening that is appropriate for you. If you don't have a general practitioner, there are some screenings that are available without a referral.

## BODY IMAGE

- Healthy bodies come in all shapes and sizes
- Many trans and non-binary people have a negative body image due to discomfort with their physical bodies
- Some trans and non-binary people may diet or exercise excessively to make physical changes to achieve their desired gender expression
- This may lead to unhealthy behaviours such as compulsive exercising, eating disorders or injecting silicone
- Trans and non-binary 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

## RELATIONSHIP HEALTH

Intimate partner violence does occur in LGBTQ relationships. Your health care provider may not ask you about your relationship(s), but you can speak to them if you have any doubts 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, 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.