

Respecting Sexually and Gender Diverse Communities



The Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (RNAO) recognizes the inherent dignity and worth of every person and endeavors to provide for equal rights and opportunities without discrimination. RNAO believes that sexually and gender diverse communities should be respected.

Prejudice, Stereotyping, and Discrimination Threaten Health through Violence and Social Exclusion

RNAO denounces any kind of stigmatization, discrimination and social exclusion based on sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression. Certain views and assumptions about sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression can be harmful and create conditions that result in human rights violations and health inequities. Health inequities can be intensified when other identities and determinants of health intersect with gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation.

2SLGBTQI+ is an acronym that describes a variety of sexually and gender diverse people, including those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersex, and Two-Spirit.

Two-Spirit refers to a person who identifies as having both a masculine and feminine spirit, and is used by some Indigenous people to describe their sexual, gender and/or spiritual identity.

The plus '+' is meant to be inclusive of all other diversities along a spectrum, to represent those who identify as non-binary, pansexual, asexual or are questioning their sexual orientation, gender identity and/or gender expression.

The core concepts of gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, physical attraction and emotional attraction underlie the terms. Some people identify with one or more labels to align with these concepts, while others do not identify with any label. One's understanding of their own gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation may be fluid and can change over time.

Members of sexually and gender diverse communities routinely experience stigma and discrimination that contributes to poor health and well-being. Discrimination against 2SLGBTQI+ people may take the form of homophobia, biphobia, or transphobia.

Heteronormativity is a world view that assumes that everyone is, or should be, heterosexual. Cisnormativity is the belief in the binary construct of gender, as either male or female, as defined by birth assigned sex.

The health and wellbeing of 2SLGBTQI+ people is compromised by micro-aggressions, sexual and physical assault, harassment, hate crimes, emotional/ psychological and verbal abuse, and chronic stress caused by stigmatization. Sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression conversion efforts ("therapy") are psychologically harmful and unethical.

Prejudice, Stereotyping, and Discrimination Threaten Access to Health Services and Care

2SLGBTQI+ people experience barriers to inclusive and appropriate care because of implicit biases of health-care professionals and cisheteronormative, heterosexist and discriminatory policies and practices ingrained in health-care institutions.

Prejudice, Stereotyping, and Discrimination Threaten Quality Work Environments

These same cisheteronormative, heterosexist, discriminatory practice environments can be traumatizing to health-care professionals who identify with the 2SLGBTQI+ community, whether that discrimination comes from colleagues, supervisors, employers, or clients.

Call to action

RNAO will:

Speak out for human rights and health equity

- Speak out against implicit biases, prejudices, stereotypes and policies that are discriminatory and cisheteronormative
- Speak out against discrimination and social exclusion based on sexual orientation and gender identity/expression
- Speak out against social inequities faced by those who identify as 2SLGBTQI+

Advance person-centred, inclusive, and appropriate health care

- Advocate for health-care services and programs that are inclusive of the needs of 2SLGBTQI+ clients, staff, and the communities they serve -- all people should be able to see, hear, and feel that their identity is acknowledged and welcomed
- Provide neutral and inclusive assessment tools, forms, and educational materials to aid in care delivery in all health-care settings

- Promote and champion educational opportunities for health-care professionals to learn about and maintain competence related to health issues affecting the 2SLGBTQI+ community and for skill-building opportunities to promote inclusive and appropriate care

Foster and advocate for safe, inclusive and healthy work environments for nurses and staff

- Develop organizational or agency-specific policies, procedures, and codes-of-conduct for all staff to help educate them on cultural diversity, sexual and gender diversity, and the duty to treat everyone respectfully
- Ensure a safe and affirmative employment setting for all health-care professionals, including those who identify as 2SLGBTQI+

It is essential to consult with and include 2SLGBTQI+ people in the development, implementation and evaluation of all policies, procedures and programs.