

Making Culturally Relevant and Gender-Affirming Referrals



When referring trans Indigenous and Two-Spirit clients to a service or resource, it is best to call or visit ahead to ensure that it is both culturally relevant and gender-affirming. Here are some considerations:

- The questions below are in addition to the usual details you would be inquiring about, such as whether services are high or low barrier in terms of substance use, if people can bring their pets with them, and how long a wait list is, etc.
 - If possible, combine the questions and considerations with a preliminary visit to the organization or provider, which can foster community relationships with other organizations.
 - The questions you ask may vary depending on the organization you're contacting or visiting. Regardless, when checking out a service or resource you'll want to make sure they are both culturally inclusive and gender-affirming.
1. Have they worked with Two-Spirit people before? Have they worked with gender diverse (ie. trans, non-binary) people before, as many Two-Spirit people are not gender diverse.
 2. Have staff there had training on working with transgender / Two-Spirit / Indigenous people?
 3. Does the organization or program have a policy around gender diversity inclusion?
 4. Does the organization or program have a policy around reconciliation with Indigenous communities?
 5. If the client will need to fill out forms, does it require specifics around sex and gender, and if so:
 - How are the question asked?
 - Is trans an option? Are there other options?
 - Must the forms match the person's sex / gender / name on government issued ID?
 6. Do they have programming available that is specific to Indigenous, trans, or Two-Spirit people? Who is facilitating this programming?
 - As the trans Indigenous and Two-Spirit community is quite small, it can be helpful for clients to know if the facilitator is someone they already know.
 7. Is there gendered programming (ie. men's meetings or girls' clubs), and are trans people welcome to participate however they feel most safe and comfortable?
 8. Do they have any trans, Indigenous, or Two-Spirit people working on staff?
 9. Are there gender neutral / universal washrooms, dorms, and change rooms available? If not:
 - Are they willing to consider changing one of their single stall washrooms into a universal washroom?
 - Is there signage that states trans and non-binary people are welcome in the men's / women's facilities?
 - Is there a policy or general expectation amongst staff that trans people are welcome to use the facilities they feel safest in, and if there's a policy, will it be upheld if someone complains?

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10. Are any Indigenous Elders who work for the program supportive of Two-Spirit people, and do they have any stories, history, or teachings around gender diversity in Indigenous communities? *
11. If there are Indigenous cultural or ceremonial activities offered, is participation optional for clients who may not feel as comfortable or involved in cultural ceremony?
12. Are Indigenous cultural or ceremonial activities taking place here inclusive of trans Indigenous and Two-Spirit people?
 - Are trans Indigenous and Two-Spirit people able to participate in a way that is most comfortable for them?
13. You may also want to take note:
 - Are territorial acknowledgements offered in email signatures or at the beginning of groups or meetings taking place here?
 - Are names and pronouns offered in email signatures, or part of any check-in circles that happen?
14. For more ideas, refer back our resource **Strategies to Support trans Indigenous Clients**.
15. Remember, the unique needs and wants of individual clients is the priority. Ask your trans Indigenous and Two-Spirit clients what is important to them in the referral:
 - Do you want staff at this organization knowing that you are trans Indigenous or Two-Spirit?
 - Is access to universal (non-gendered) washrooms / change rooms / dorms important to you? How about spaces that are trans inclusive, but still gendered?
 - Is taking part in cultural activities comfortable for you? Is it important to you?
 - Is taking part in ceremony in your felt gender important to you?
 - Is trans or Two-Spirit specific programming important to you?

Further resources:

Trans Care BC Two-Spirit page: www.transcarebc.ca/trans-basics/two-spirit

Trans Care BC's Health Navigation Team: www.transcarebc.ca/about/contact

Urban Native Youth Association: www.unya.bc.ca/programs/2-spirit-collective

* We may at times interact with Elders who embrace gender diversity and practice in traditional ways; however, Elders may not always be aware of current language that gender diverse people use to describe themselves. In some cases, offering alternatives to these Elders will feel appropriate, at other times, we may choose to accept their message the way it is. For many people, as long as Elders are embracing and honoring trans Indigenous and Two-Spirit people in principle, we accept differences in language, continue to hold these Elders in high regard, and focus on the meaning of what they are sharing with us.