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>>> Orientation to Ontario

LGBTQI+ DISCRIMINATION

Canada is known globally as a leader in human rights, including those of 2SLGBTQI+ people. But while Canada is progressive in laws and policies, discrimination against 2SLGBTQI+ individuals still happens—often in less visible ways.

If you are new to Canada, learning about the diverse 2SLGBTQI+ community and the challenges they face can help build a more inclusive, respectful society.

WHAT DOES 2SLGBTQI+ MEAN?

The term 2SLGBTQI+ refers to a range of sexual orientations, gender identities and gender expressions. This acronym is the most current, inclusive version adopted by advocates; you may be more familiar with shorter but less inclusive versions, such as LGBT or LGBTQ+. Here is a breakdown of all the identities included in 2SLGBTQI+:

- **Two-Spirit (2S):** A unique Indigenous identity for individuals with both men's and women's spirits.
- **Lesbian:** A woman attracted to other women.
- **Gay:** A person attracted to someone with the same gender.
- **Bisexual:** A person attracted to more than one gender.
- **Trans (Transgender):** Describing a person whose gender identity does not match the sex assigned at birth; an umbrella term encompassing diverse gender identities including genderqueer and nonbinary.

- **Queer:** An umbrella term for people not identifying as heterosexual or cisgender (not trans); once a derogatory term, "queer" has been reclaimed by the community.
- **Intersex:** People who do not fit in the reproductive/anatomical binary of male and female.
- **+:** Represents the inclusion of other identities like nonbinary, pansexual and asexual.

LEGAL PROTECTIONS IN CANADA

Canada protects 2SLGBTQI+ individuals through its strong legal framework for human and civil rights:

- The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms ensures equality for everyone and protects against discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity or expression.
- The Ontario Human Rights Code specifically prohibits discrimination in housing, employment, education and access to services; other provinces have similar laws.

However, having protections in law does not mean discrimination disappears.

THE REALITY OF DISCRIMINATION

Even with these laws, many 2SLGBTQI+ individuals face unfair treatment and harmful experiences every day. Examples may include the following:

- **Verbal Abuse:** Insults, derogatory jokes or refusing to use someone's correct

pronouns or chosen name. This can cause deep emotional harm and mental stress.

- **Exclusion:** Being denied access to washrooms or social spaces that match one's gender identity.
- **Workplace Discrimination:** Unsafe or hostile workplaces, missing out on promotions or dealing with inappropriate comments.
- **Housing Barriers:** Refusing to rent or sell a home based on someone's sexual orientation, gender expression or gender identity.
- **Healthcare Issues:** Being judged or misunderstood by healthcare professionals, or receiving poor care, especially for trans and intersex individuals. Many queer and trans seniors experience extreme difficulty in accessing care and support because of a lack of medical research.
- **Public Harassment:** Facing stares, threats or violence in public spaces, leading to fear and isolation.

HATE CRIMES: A SERIOUS PROBLEM

Hate crimes remain a harsh reality. According to Statistics Canada, hate crimes related to sexual orientation made up 10% of all reported hate crimes in 2021. Hate crimes are a by-product of systemic oppression. These crimes are often violent and leave long-lasting impacts on both individuals and communities. For more details, visit Statistics Canada online.

HOW TO BE AN ALLY

Creating a more inclusive society starts with allyship—standing up for and supporting 2SLGBTQI+ individuals. Here are a few ways you can help:

Educate Yourself: Learn about 2SLGBTQI+ issues, history and terminology. Lean into the discomfort and unlearn common stereotypes and prejudiced ideas.

Respect Pronouns: Use someone's correct name and pronouns. If you are unsure, ask politely and make asking for and sharing pronouns a regular practice.

Speak Up: Challenge discrimination when you see it and advocate for fair policies in workplaces and schools. Interrupt the generalizations based on gender identity, sexual orientation or gender expression.

Resources for Support

If you or someone you know needs help, here are trusted resources:

Egale Canada: egale.ca

Resources for mental health and 2SLGBTQI+ rights.

pflag Canada : pflagcanada.ca

Support for individuals and families.

Trans Lifeline: translifeline.org

Emotional and financial support for transgender people.

Rainbow Railroad: rainbowrailroad.org

Assists 2SLGBTQI+ people fleeing violence and persecution.

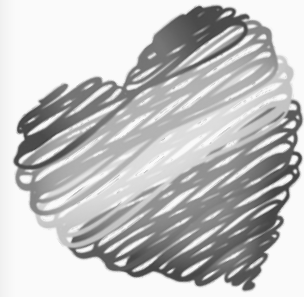
Kids Help Phone: Kidshelpphone.ca [1-800-668-6868](tel:1-800-668-6868); 24/7 support for youth, including 2SLGBTQI+.

LGBT Youth line: youthline.ca Free support through an Ontario-wide 2SLGBTQ+ peer-support helpline.

Dealing with Discrimination

If you experience or witness discrimination, you can:

1. Seek legal support by contacting the Human Rights Legal Support Centre at hrlsc.on.ca or call [1-866-625-5179](tel:1-866-625-5179).
2. File a complaint with the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal at tribunalsoh.on.ca or [1-866-598-0322](tel:1-866-598-0322).
3. Report hate crimes by calling the local police service or the Victim Support Line at [1-888-579-2888](tel:1-888-579-2888).
4. Seek mental health support by reaching out to organizations such as [The 519](http://The519.org), which offers diverse services and resources for 2SLGBTQI+ communities.



Did You Know?

The rainbow flag is a powerful symbol of pride and inclusion for 2SLGBTQI+ communities worldwide. Created by artist and activist Gilbert Baker in 1978, each colour on the flag represents a unique aspect of the community: red for life, orange for healing, yellow for sunlight, green for nature, blue for harmony and violet for spirit. The flag has since evolved to include additional colours to represent diversity and intersectionality, such as black and brown to acknowledge marginalized racial groups and light blue, pink and white for the transgender community. Sometimes called the Pride flag, the rainbow flag serves as a universal emblem of hope, visibility and solidarity.

