



SPOTLIGHT ON

THE WELL-BEING OF 2SLGBTQ+ CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN NOVA SCOTIA

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WHY WE NEED TO FOCUS OUR ATTENTION ON THIS POPULATION

In 2018-2019, approximately 10 percent of grade 7 to 12 students in Nova Scotia self-identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer (LGBTQ2+) through the *Nova Scotia Student Success Survey*, and among these, approximately 11 percent self-identified as transgender.¹² While the option to self-identify as LGBTQ2+ was only available to students in grades 7 to 12, we know that younger children and youth also identify in this way.

In virtually every society and institution, children and youth who identify as two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer (2SLGBTQ+) experience threats that

deny them of equal access to the opportunities and services they deserve for a fulfilling life.¹

Data suggest that 2SLGBTQ+ populations around the globe experience worse health outcomes than those who identify as cisgender and heterosexual.² The key reasons for these differences stem from the long-standing stigma, discrimination, and social exclusion associated with diverse sexual orientations and gender-diverse identities in a heteronormative world.³

Developing an understanding of how 2SLGBTQ+ children and youth are faring in Nova Scotia is essential to shining light on how these disparities may be impacting their well-being and for improving the lives of all 2SLGBTQ+ people in the province.



THE WELL-BEING OF 2SLGBTQ+ CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN NOVA SCOTIA

A SIGNIFICANT GAP

While great strides towards advancing human rights protections and legislation for 2SLGBTQ+ citizens have taken place across Canada, public systems and services often lag behind when it comes to implementing change.⁴

For example, equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) policies, frameworks, and programs have increased awareness of populations that have been historically marginalized within health systems, however, there is an ongoing disconnect between meeting EDI goals and the healthcare needs of 2SLGBTQ+ children and youth.⁵ This is playing out in Nova Scotia where wait times for transgender patients accessing gender-affirming hormones or surgeries are longer than those recommended in national and international guidelines.^{6,7} Research also supports the fact that education systems across Canada are failing to provide adequate supports needed for 2SLGBTQ+ children, youth and their families to ensure they feel safe in school and see themselves reflected in the curriculum and related educational resources.^{8,9}

THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE GAP

As indicated in the recent House of Commons Report from the Standing Committee on Health *The Health of LGBTQIA2 Communities in Canada*,¹⁰ systemic discrimination creates disparities in housing, income, employment and access to appropriate healthcare that have lifelong consequences on well-being.¹¹ This is reflected in higher rates of both mental health challenges and physical health conditions including higher rates of depression, chronic diseases, cancers, suicide, and addictions.

A national transgender and non-binary youth health survey, for example, found that approximately 57 percent of youth from the Atlantic region reported having experienced discrimination based on their sex, 30 percent reported attempting suicide within the last 12 months, 22 percent have run away from home, and 71 percent reported having unmet needs for emotional or mental health services in the past year.⁸





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A GLIMPSE AT THE WELL-BEING OF 2SLGBTQ+ CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN NOVA SCOTIA

In Nova Scotia, limited information about the well-being of 2SLGBTQ+ can be gleaned from the 2018-2019 *Nova Scotia Student Success Survey*. In 2018-2019, 78 percent of survey respondents who identified as LGBTQ2+ reported that they have at least one adult they can talk to versus 84 percent of respondents overall. Also of concern: 20 percent of LGBTQ2+ respondents felt disrespected because of their gender identity, and 40 percent felt disrespected because of their sexual orientation.¹² In addition, 36 percent reported feeling unsafe or threatened at school in the previous month compared with only 19 percent of respondents overall. LGBTQ2+ students said they felt unsafe or threatened in the hallways and stairwells at school (61 percent), in classrooms (51 percent), and in washrooms (49 percent).¹²

CLOSING THE GAP

More targeted efforts are urgently required to address the ongoing disparities facing 2SLGBTQ+ people, including children and youth in Nova Scotia. Without a concerted effort to

tackle the system-level drivers in key sectors like education and health, these disparities will continue to have lifelong consequences for 2SLGBTQ+ children and youth, their families, and communities across the province.¹³⁻¹⁵

There are several key intersecting areas in need of greater attention to better meet the unique needs of 2SLGBTQ+ children and youth in Nova Scotia.

Support in schools

Existing EDI policies in schools must be reviewed and new strategies developed to train teachers, guidance counsellors, administrators, and students on gender-identity, sexual orientation, and gender-affirming interventions to ensure schools are a safe and welcoming place for all youth to learn and grow. Sexuality/sexual health education curricula need to be revised to ensure the information that 2SLGBTQ+ children and youth require is appropriate.^{16,17} Ongoing monitoring and evaluation are required to ensure content is current, information is widely accessible, and resources are appropriate for diverse populations, including 2SLGBTQ+ children and youth.



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Safe and responsive healthcare

There is also an urgent need to ensure healthcare providers are equipped to address the unique health needs of gender-diverse populations. Better training of practicing healthcare providers and healthcare students in existing post-secondary programs is required.^{6,18} Health services and systems should be reviewed for how responsive they are to the unique needs of 2SLGBTQ+ patients and an environment of safety should be created.

Improving understanding

Improved research and evaluation processes must also be in place to allow for better and more complete data to be collected about the well-being outcomes of 2SLGBTQ+ children and youth in Nova Scotia. A shift toward resilience and well-being and away from a deficit approach that defines this population in terms of negatives is essential.^{5,11}



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