

July 14, 2025

RE: QS8.2 - Expanding Health Benefits for City of Toronto Staff

Dear 2SLGBTQ+ Advisory Committee,

I am writing on behalf of The 519 Community Centre, Canada's largest 2SLGBTQ+ organization, and a City of Toronto Agency, to reaffirm our strong support for expanding City of Toronto employee health benefits to include comprehensive gender-affirming care to non-unionized city staff. These benefits are a vital measure that affirms the rights and dignity of 2-spirit, trans and non-binary (2STNB) staff.

Gender-affirming healthcare is a critical and life-saving resource to staff. It addresses the full scope of health needs for individuals across the gender spectrum, supporting mental, physical, and emotional wellbeing. Research shows that gender-affirming care significantly improves quality of life, reduces gender dysphoria, and lowers rates of depression and suicidality.

Provincial health coverage in Ontario continues to exclude many essential gender-affirming procedures. Increasingly, employers across Ontario have recognized the urgent need to bridge this gap through extended health benefits. Expanding coverage is more than a health policy decision; it is a human rights imperative.

Today, nearly 40% of The 519's staff identify as 2STNB. These individuals, like many across the broader Toronto Public Service, have consistently faced barriers when trying to access affirming care. These barriers have real-world impacts not only on health outcomes, but on workplace wellbeing, engagement, and retention.

We know that employees who feel seen and supported at work stay longer, contribute more meaningfully, and build stronger teams. Offering gender-affirming benefits is essential to ensuring that all City staff can be their full selves in the workplace. It also sends a clear message that the City values equity, inclusion, and the wellbeing of its workforce, especially those historically marginalized or underserved.

In an increasingly competitive job market, the City's ability to attract and retain qualified and diverse talent depends on its ability to offer affirming, inclusive policies. This is especially true for younger workers and equity-deserving communities, who increasingly view comprehensive benefits as a baseline, not a bonus.

The 519, along with the AOCC network, has been advocating for gender-affirming benefits for several years. We remained deeply engaged through the Benefits Review Program and the City's Request for Proposals process.

We are pleased to see the inclusion of gender-affirming benefits through the bargaining processes with CUPE 79 and 416. However, the work is not complete. We strongly encourage the City to move quickly to ensure that these benefits are made fully accessible to both unionized and non-unionized staff.

Toronto has long been recognized as a leader in public sector inclusion. Adding gender-affirming benefits builds on that legacy and signals that The City is serious about creating workplaces where all staff can thrive.

We urge the City to act boldly and without delay. Let's ensure that every City employee, regardless of gender identity, is supported with the benefits, dignity, and respect they deserve.

Sincerely,



Tom Spence
Chair of the Board of Management
The 519