

# TORONTO SHELTER and SUPPORT SERVICES

# DIRECTIVE

**Directive No.:** 2025-02

**Date Issued:** December 16, 2025

## Authority

This Directive is issued under the authority of the General Manager of Toronto Shelter and Support Services (TSSS).

## Subject

Amendments to Standards in the [Toronto Shelter Standards](#) to better support clients who identify as 2SLGBTQ+ (Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer plus).

## Purpose of Directive

Direction on updates to the Toronto Shelter Standards (TSS) to enhance equity and help address systemic barriers related to discrimination through new shelter standards that better support 2SLGBTQ+ clients.

## Directive or Required Action

### Key Updates

1. *Section 10.3.3 2SLGBTQ+ clients* has been updated and revised to reflect specialized program requirements specific to serving 2SLGBTQ+ clients. This section appears under *Section 10, Management, Supports and Services*.
  - All standards that previously referenced transgender clients have been revised to state “gender diverse, transgender and Two-Spirit clients”
2. Standards to improve the experience of 2SLGBTQ+ have been added to the TSS in the following areas:
  - Capacity building
  - Policy development
  - Basic needs
  - Creating safer spaces for 2SLGBTQ+ clients
  - Client-focused 2SLGBTQ+ resources and supports
  - Collaboration with community partners

All new standards are preceded by an asterisk (\*).

3. Certain existing standards have been revised to improve understandings around equity, diversity, inclusion and awareness. These revisions appear in **bold text** throughout this Directive.

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4. Five definitions have been added, and two updates have been made to the *Training Topics and Professional Competencies Matrix*.

This Directive applies to all shelter providers. Shelter providers are directed to review this Directive and the standards within it with staff, senior management, and board of directors and to implement all requirements.

Shelter providers are expected to begin adopting the updated standards to better support 2SLGBTQ+ clients in programs and services immediately, and will be assessed through the Quality Assurance Team compliance assessment process in 2026.

## **Section 3 Defined Terms**

New definitions:

### ***Deadnaming***

The act of calling a transgender or gender diverse person by their birth name after they have chosen a new name. Deadnaming is considered disrespectful and can be a form of gender-based violence or aggression, as it denies their current gender identity and can be emotionally harmful.

### ***Gender-affirming care***

A comprehensive approach to healthcare that supports and affirms an individual's gender identity and expression, especially when it differs from their sex assigned at birth. It encompasses a range of medical, psychological, and social supports that can include using a person's preferred name and pronouns to hormone therapy and surgeries.

### ***Gender diverse***

Refers to individuals who do not identify as exclusively man or woman and who do not subscribe, conform to, or identify with the traditional “man” and “woman” gender categories. This includes those who identify as non-binary, Two-Spirit, gender fluid.

### ***Misgendering***

The act of intentionally or unintentionally referring to a person, relating to a person, or using language to describe a person that doesn't align with their affirmed gender. It might involve using incorrect pronouns, using the wrong gendered name, or arguing with a person about their gender. To misgender someone is to ignore their identity and

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disregard their needs.

## ***Queerphobia***

Negative attitudes, feelings, or irrational aversion to, fear or hatred of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning people and communities. It can be manifested in numerous ways, such as verbally, emotionally, and through physical attacks. Queerphobia encompasses homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia, and includes negative stereotypes, harassment, discrimination and acts of violence.

Revised definitions:

## ***Transgender Person***

An umbrella term that describes people with diverse gender identities and gender expressions that do not conform to stereotypical ideas about what it means to be a girl/woman or boy/man in society. Trans' identities include a person whose gender identity or gender expression is different from the gender associated with their sex assigned at birth. A transgender person may or may not undergo medically supportive treatments to align their bodies with their internally felt gender identity. The term also includes but is not limited to clients who identify as transgender, transsexual, cross-dressers or gender non-conforming (gender variant or gender-queer) for the purposes of the TSS (related terms: Gender Expression and Gender Identity).

## ***Two-spirit People***

This term is culturally specific to North American Indigenous communities to describe from a cultural perspective people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, or intersex. The term can also describe a societal and spiritual role that certain people played within traditional societies, where they filled a role as an established middle gender. This 2SLGBTQ+ term is not exclusive to gender identity and can also refer to sexual orientation (related terms: 2SLGBTQ+ and Transgender Person).

## **Section 5.1 Respect and Dignity**

(a) Shelter providers will

- (iv)\* Provide services guided by equity, diversity, and inclusion that acknowledge, respect, and address the unique needs, perspectives, intersectionalities and barriers of equity-deserving client groups, fostering equitable client access and outcomes

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## **Section 5.4 Access to shelters**

(a) Shelter providers will

- (iv) \* Not use race, sexual orientation, gender expression, or gender identity, disability, or any other personal characteristic protected by law as a basis to deny any individual access to shelter services

## **Section 6 Client Rights & Responsibilities**

(b) At a minimum, clients have the right to

- (iii) an environment free from anti-Black racism (e.g., discrimination, prejudice, and harassment), anti-Indigenous racism and/or **discrimination based on gender identity and/or expression, and sexual orientation (e.g., biphobia, homophobia, transphobia, and queerphobia)**

(d) Clients will not

- (v) \* Engage in any form of queerphobia, including biphobia, transphobia and homophobia, or discriminate against any individual based on sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.

## **Section 6.1 Client input**

- (a) Client input will be sought in all areas of program planning, program development, policy development and program evaluation in multiple ways, including but not limited to exit interviews, discharge surveys, one-on-one interviews, client surveys, client focus groups, client advisory groups and/or residents' meetings.
  - (i) \* Shelter providers will seek input from clients from equity-deserving groups, including Black clients, Indigenous clients and clients from 2SLGBTQ+ communities

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## **Section 7 Complaints, Compliments and Appeals**

(a) Shelter providers will

- (ii) Identify a staff who will act as complaint lead, as part of the complaint policy. The complaint lead will have completed CABR, **2SLGBTQ+ cultural competency and awareness**, and trauma-informed trainings and be in a supervisory role. Clients will be made aware of who the complaint lead is and be reminded of this when filing a complaint

(e) \* Shelter providers will implement a process that allows incidents involving queerphobia, including biphobia, homophobia and transphobia, to be shared confidentially

(f) \* 2SLGBTQ+ clients who experience and report incidents of discrimination and/or queerphobia, including biphobia, homophobia and transphobia, will be provided with supports (e.g., check-ins with staff, referrals to mental health services and peer supports, a private space to rest, etc.)

## **Section 8.4 Shelter orientation**

(a) Shelter providers will provide clients with orientation to the shelter upon admission or as soon as possible, and no later than twenty-four (24) hours after admission. At a minimum, shelter orientation information will include

- (xii) \*A list of 2SLGBTQ+ resources (e.g., mental health providers specializing in supporting 2SLGBTQ+ communities, 2SLGBTQ+-led community organizations, etc.) and informing clients of the 2SLGBTQ+ staff liaison(s)

## **Section 8.6.2 Service restrictions**

(d) Shelter providers may only issue service restrictions from a bedded program as a last resort to address

- (iv) \*Incidents involving discrimination based on gender identity and/or expression, and/or sexual orientation (e.g., biphobia, homophobia, transphobia, and queerphobia), that threaten the well-being of clients and/or staff

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- (e) All service restrictions from a bedded program must be approved by a shelter's Executive Director or designate prior to being issued.
- (ii) \*All service restrictions from a bedded program involving 2SLGBTQ+ clients will be reviewed by the program's Equity, Diversity and Inclusion committee through an equity lens, either at the time-of-service restriction or within 36 hours

## **Section 9.1.2 Toiletries and hygiene (d) AND 10.3.3 2SLGBTQ+ clients (h)**

**Gender diverse, transgender clients and Two-Spirit clients** may have a need for specific toiletries and hygiene supplies that is different **than other clients**. Shelter providers will work with **gender diverse, transgender clients and Two-Spirit clients** to provide **needed** supplies (**e.g., binding tape, binders, tucking underwear, breast forms, hip pads**).

## **Section 9.1.3 Clothing and sundry items**

- (a) Based on a client's need, shelter providers will help clients obtain basic clothing and footwear appropriate for the season, **including options that are non-gendered and, when available, representative of their gender identity**.

## **Section 10.1 Case management**

- (b) All shelter providers will offer some degree of case management and service planning to their clients.
  - (ii) Where possible, shelter providers will offer Black clients, **2SLGBTQ+ clients and Indigenous clients** the opportunity to work with **case workers who self-identify as part of these communities, races, and cultures**.
- (i) Consistent with a Housing First approach, a client's service plan must, at a minimum, include a housing plan and a financial plan
  - (ii) \* A housing plan will take into account the unique needs of equity-deserving clients and support these clients secure housing that is inclusive and accepting

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## **Section 10.2 Health and Mental Health Services**

- (a) Shelter providers will support clients who seek to address their health and mental health care needs. At a minimum, shelter providers will
  - (iv) \* Ensure that 2SLGBTQ+ clients are aware of health and mental health supports and services that are specific to 2SLGBTQ+ communities and that are reflective of the diversity within those communities (e.g., Two-Spirit specific resources, resources aimed at queer newcomers/refugees etc.)

## **Section 10.3.2 Children's services and programs**

- (e) Family shelter providers will offer a variety of developmentally appropriate activities for children within the shelter and/or ensure such opportunities are available within the surrounding community.
  - (ii) \* Family shelter providers will ensure that all activities are offered to all children within the shelter, regardless of gender identity and/or gender expression
- (l) Family shelter providers will ensure informational materials and displays in children's activity areas are not discriminatory or disrespectful.
  - (i) \* Family shelter providers will incorporate gender-inclusive and gender diverse informational materials and displays in children's activity areas (e.g., storybooks, posters, etc.).

## **Section 10.3.3 2SLGBTQ+ clients**

- (a) Have a policy that, at a minimum, details
  - (i) how services are provided to 2SLGBTQ+ clients in a manner that preserves their safety and dignity and **that recognizes the needs of gender diverse, transgender and Two-Spirit clients**
  - (ii) \* how discrimination and bias toward 2SLGBTQ+ clients within shelters will be addressed and includes clear consequences for any person(s) engaging in queerphobic behavior, including biphobia, homophobic and/or transphobic behaviour, including clients, staff and/or volunteers.

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- (b) \* Shelter providers will develop and implement policies and procedures that are gender-inclusive
  - (i) \* All clients will be made aware of shelter policies supporting 2SLGBTQ+ clients, in addition to other measures addressing queerphobic behavior, including homophobic and/or transphobic behaviour, at orientation and as needed throughout their stay in shelter
- (c) Shelter providers will ask all clients for their gender identity rather than assume and will accept gender identity and gender expression as defined by a client.
  - (i) In all their interactions, staff will use a client's chosen name and pronouns **and will not misgender or deadname a client and/or request that a client use their deadname in interactions with shelter staff or to seek program supports and services.**
  - (ii) \* Shelter providers will have pronoun pins/stickers available for clients and staff to wear
- (d) \* At any point during their shelter stay, clients can inform staff that their name, gender identity, and/or pronoun(s) differ from those provided during intake and staff will update the client's SMIS profile accordingly
  - (i) \* Shelter providers will assist 2SLGBTQ+ clients in accessing, completing, and submitting any and all required documentation to legally change identifying information to correspond with their gender identity
- (g) \* Shelter providers will designate (a) staff liaison(s) who leads the implementation of 2SLGBTQ+ policies, programs and supports
  - (i) \* The 2SLGBTQ+ liaison(s) will support 2SLGBTQ+ clients in accessing shelter programs and services, as requested
- (i) \* Shelter providers will display visual markers (e.g. queer positive posters, Pride flags, etc.) that promote gender-inclusive and queer-positive spaces in all common areas, sleeping areas and washrooms, including spaces used to conduct an intake
- (i) \* Shelter providers will post signage promoting the use of pronouns to support the gender identity and/or gender expression of gender diverse, transgender and



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## Two-Spirit clients

- (l) Shelter providers will inform clients of the availability and location of non-gender specific and/or accessible washrooms.
  - (i) \* In instances where a non-gender specific and/or accessible washroom are not available, shelter providers will provide gender diverse, transgender and Two-Spirit clients with sole access to the communal washroom that best preserves their safety and dignity
- (m) Shelter providers will ensure that communal showers have shower curtains or equivalent privacy feature(s) or provide gender diverse, transgender and Two-Spirit clients with sole access to communal shower facilities, **if requested**.
- (n) Shelter providers will treat hormones that belong to transgender clients as any other medication and will not consider them a prohibited substance nor confiscate them.
  - (i) \* Gender diverse, transgender and Two-Spirit clients will be provided with a sharps container, if requested
- (o) \* Shelter providers will consult with 2SLGBTQ+ clients to create a safe and welcoming environment
  - (i) \* Shelter providers will ensure that 2SLGBTQ+ clients have access to resources and opportunities to create 2SLGBTQ+-only safer spaces within shelters (e.g., 2SLGBTQ+ shelter client groups and/or meetings, etc.).
- (p) \* Shelter providers will establish opportunities for 2SLGBTQ+ clients to engage in and lead peer support programs, including for 2SLGBTQ+ specific support programs and resources (e.g. groups and/or one-on-one supports)
- (q) \* Shelter providers will support year-round programming in addition to Pride Month, that celebrates the identities of 2SLGBTQ+ clients (e.g., discussions led by 2SLGBTQ+ community organizations, etc.).
  - (i) \* 2SLGBTQ+ clients will be consulted about programming to ensure that it is reflective of 2SLGBTQ+ communities and of their diversity across other identities.

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- (r) Shelter providers **will establish** partnerships with 2SLGBTQ+-positive **mental health** and health/services providers **and support 2SLGBTQ+ clients in accessing these services**
  - (i) \* Shelter providers will help gender diverse, transgender and Two-Spirit clients seek access to gender affirming care, as requested by a client
- (s) \*Shelter providers will ensure that 2SLGBTQ+ clients are aware of health and mental health supports and services that are specific to 2SLGBTQ+ communities and that are reflective of the diversity within those communities (e.g., Two-Spirit specific resources, resources aimed at queer newcomers/refugees etc.)
  - (i) Shelter providers that are not able to provide health or support services to 2SLGBTQ+ clients will provide appropriate referrals to 2SLGBTQ+-positive health/services providers.
- (t) \* Shelter providers will establish partnerships with 2SLGBTQ+ community organizations
  - (i) \* Shelter providers will inform 2SLGBTQ+ clients of community programs and services and help 2SLGBTQ+ clients access these by offering public transit fare to attend such programs or access related services.
- (u) \* Shelter providers will offer on-site programming for 2SLGBTQ+ clients informed by 2SLGBTQ+ service organization(s)
- (v) \* Shelter providers will work to invite members from 2SLGBTQ+ communities to attend resident meetings and shelter programming to support 2SLGBTQ+ clients
- (w) \* Shelters providers will seek input from 2SLGBTQ+ clients for the purpose of program planning/development/evaluation (e.g. exit interviews, discharge interviews, suggestion boxes, etc.)
- (x) \* Shelters providers will arrange opportunities for all clients to learn about 2SLGBTQ+ communities and/or participate in 2SLGBTQ+–related activities, including educational sessions and/or workshops.

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- (y) \* Shelter providers will seek additional 2SLGTBQ+ training resources and opportunities to supplement mandatory training that increase staff understanding of 2SLGBTQ+ communities
- (z) \* Shelter providers will demonstrate self-evaluation and service improvement specific to practices and policies based on leading practices that support 2SLGBTQ+ clients, including through policy reviews and client feedback.

## **Section 12.2.2 Program Accountability**

- (e) \* Shelter providers will establish (an) equity, diversity, and inclusion committee(s) that works to promote these principles within the shelter and among clients and staff
  - (i) \* (An) Equity, Diversity and Inclusion committee(s) will include staff of various roles and be representative of client and staff identities, where possible.

## **Section 12.4 Human Resources**

- (b) Shelter providers will provide all new employees with an orientation or orientation information within the first five (5) days of their employment. At a minimum, the orientation information will cover key shelter policies, procedures and processes, including
  - (ix) \* 2SLGBTQ+ policy and procedures

## **Training Topics and Professional Competencies Matrix**

### Equity, Diversity and Human Rights

2SLGBTQ+ Cultural Competency and Trans Awareness is mandatory for Board Members, to be completed within 6 months of start date of appointment.

### Working with Clients

*Working with Victims of Gender-Based Violence* will replace *Working with Abused Women and Children*.

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## **Implementation of standards to better support 2SLGBTQ+ clients**

Directive 2023-02 “Amendments to Standards in the Toronto Shelter Standards to better support clients who identify as 2SLGBTQ+ (Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer plus)” is effective immediately.

Providers are expected to begin adopting the standards into programs and services immediately. Compliance assessments of these standards will be conducted by the Quality Assurance Team in 2026.

Information sessions for management and supervisory shelter staff to better understand the changes to the Toronto Shelter Standards were held in early December 2025.

## **Background**

As part of Toronto Shelter and Support Services’ goal of advancing equity and inclusion, and in alignment with the Division’s Homelessness Solutions Service Plan – Action 2.2, work was undertaken to update the Toronto Shelter Standards and the 24-Hour Respite Site Standards (TRS) to better support Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer individuals, as well as others in City-funded shelters who identify as part of sexual and gender diverse populations not captured by these terms. Particular focus was placed on people who are gender diverse\*, transgender and Two-Spirit.

Throughout 2024, the City consulted 2SLGBTQ+ shelter clients and staff to better understand their experiences and challenges. Working with community partners such as [The 519](#) and [2-Spirited People of 1st Nations](#), feedback was gathered through in-person focus groups, one-on-one interviews, and virtual engagement sessions to inform recommendations for updating the standards.

Draft standards were shared with sector staff and clients, and feedback was collected through an online survey in July 2025. The final set of standards were approved by the General Manager of Toronto Shelter and Support Services.

\*Gender diverse includes non-binary, gender fluid, genderqueer, androgynous.

## **Resources**

- [24-Hour Respite Site Standards](#)
- [Homelessness Solutions Service Plan](#)

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## Contact Information

For more information about this Directive, please contact your Agency Review Officer (ARO) or Manager.