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Transgender-Inclusivity Organization Plan

Vin Quang

Transgender-Inclusivity Organization Plan

*Please note that for the purpose of submitting an anonymous entry, the name of the public health organization will be removed and replaced with **X**.*

Note from Author

Before diving into the transgender-inclusivity organization plan, I would like to acknowledge that the concept of a gender binary, consisting of only male and female, is a social construct that became normalized through colonization. Societies across the world, including First Nations on Turtle Island, embraced gender diversity prior to European colonization. Two-spirit peoples, an umbrella term used to describe Indigenous individuals who carry both male and female spirits, were seen as gifted, and they often became knowledge keepers and healers (Rainbow Resource Centre, 2014). Many First Nations respected two-spirit people as fundamental components of society, as gender and sexuality were often tied with one's role in cultural and spiritual systems (Hunt, 2016). However, as a result of colonial efforts to assimilate Indigenous peoples, two-spirit individuals became marginalized and erased (Hunt, 2016). Common language to discuss gender, including the language used in this plan, is born from a colonized lens. As **X** works towards reconciliation, it is essential to incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing into the organization's work and Indigenize **X**'s understanding of gender.

Background

Although every individual has a gender identity and unique gender expression, many institutional norms and practices assume that being cisgender, meaning that one's gender identity aligns with their sex assigned at birth, is the default. As a result, transgender people often face systemic discrimination and prejudice. The term transgender is used to describe a person whose

gender identity does not align with their sex assigned at birth. Transgender people do not necessarily have to identify with a binary gender (i.e. male or female); non-binary gender identities, such as genderfluid and agender, can also fall under the term transgender, as they often differ from an individual's sex assigned at birth.

Transgender people in Ontario often face barriers in regard to accessing healthcare; a study by Giblon and Bauer (2017) showed that over 40% of transgender Ontarians have reported an unmet healthcare need. Barriers preventing transgender people from accessing appropriate healthcare include "avoidance of healthcare, refusal of care, difficulties getting referrals, lack of provider information on trans issues, and uncomfortable or problematic interpersonal interactions" (Bauer et al., 2009, p. 359). As Health Equity is a Foundational Standard for public health in Ontario, it should be every public health unit's goal to decrease health inequities and create opportunities for everyone to attain their full health potential (Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, 2018). Therefore, it is the responsibility of **X** to evaluate their services and programs, as well as policies, to ensure that the organization intentionally supports transgender clients and eliminates barriers that prevent transgender clients from accessing health services.

On the other front of promoting inclusivity, **X** cannot claim to support transgender people without supporting the organization's transgender employees. The health unit must evaluate how to create and maintain an inclusive and equitable work environment for transgender employees. Approximately 70% of transgender employees in Canada have experienced receiving unwanted and inappropriate behaviours at their workplaces (Statistics Canada, 2020). Refusal to hire, privacy violations, harassment, as well as physical and sexual violence on the job are common occurrences and experienced at even higher rates by racialized transgender people (James et al., 2016). Without transgender-inclusive policies, organizations cannot adequately address barriers

and unsafe work environments for their transgender employees (Bauer et al., 2011). Furthermore, inclusive policies must be supported by inclusive attitudes from all employees to foster a healthy work environment (Bauer et al., 2011). As dictated by the Ontario Human Rights Code (1990), every person has the right to equal treatment at their workplace without discrimination or harassment because of their gender identity and expression. **X** must commit to making this the reality for transgender employees.

While many organizations across Canada, including the **X**, have anti-discrimination policies that include gender identity and gender expression, only a fraction of these organizations have specific plans that aim to equitably support transgender staff and clients. **X** currently does not have a specific transgender inclusivity plan. The lack of policies that support transgender individuals, as well as the lack of awareness that such policies are even necessary, are forms of institutional erasure (Ontario HIV Treatment Network, 2017). By not proactively creating accountable spaces, transgender people are unanticipated and ultimately, unsupported. This organization plan, created by the Health Equity and Indigenous Reconciliation Team, will be an evidence-informed guide to implement equitable practices and policies supporting transgender staff and clients at the **X**.

Summary

This organization plan will be informed by existing policies, research, and best practice guidelines, as well as community consultations. The plan will provide recommendations to promote transgender inclusivity on two fronts – inclusivity of transgender clients and of transgender employees. Although the recommendations are separated, it should be noted that the two sections are, by nature, related to one another.

Recommendations to promote inclusivity of transgender clients will explore:

- Names and Pronouns Identification and Usage

- Visibility

- Staff Training

- Gendered Language

Recommendations to promote inclusivity of transgender employees will explore:

- Recruitment and Hiring

- Names and Pronouns Identification and Usage

- Supporting Gender Transitions

- All-Gender Washrooms

Volunteers and students should be included in the implementation of the recommendations for promoting inclusivity of transgender employees, if applicable.

Promoting Inclusivity of Transgender Clients

Names and Pronouns Identification and Usage

The privilege of being referred to accurately by one's name and pronouns is often taken for granted. Referring to someone by their name is a sign of respect and value. Pronouns are equally as important, as they are used frequently in replacement of an individual's name. Through the process of completing bureaucratic applications, such as intake and referral forms, many transgender people have their identities erased (Bauer et al., 2009). Bureaucratic processes that lack an option to input clients' name, if different than their legal name, as well as an inclusive gender section are harmful. Transgender clients have reported feeling uncomfortable

when filling out gender-binary forms which negatively impacts their experiences with healthcare (Ontario HIV Treatment Network, 2017). Furthermore, the lack of an option for clients to identify their pronouns will inevitably result in clients being misgendered by **X** staff members.

X needs to create clear, accessible, and inclusive processes for clients to identify their name, gender, and pronouns. It is also important that **X** staff members receive training on how to appropriately identify and use clients' names and pronouns. Additionally, the training should normalize **X** staff members introducing themselves with their own name and pronouns.

Recommendation 1: Update intake and referral forms to include the following:

- A section for client's name, if different than legal name.
- A section to identify client's pronouns
- An updated gender section that includes "non-binary" as a gender option as well as an "other" option for clients to write their gender identity

Recommendation 2: Update digital systems and databases to be able to include client's name (if different than legal name), pronouns, as well as inclusive gender options. Ensure that chosen names are used for clients whenever possible.

Recommendation 3: Provide training to all staff members regarding how to appropriately identify and utilize clients' names and pronouns, as well as how to normalize introducing themselves with their own name and pronouns. Staff members must understand that names and pronouns can change, as well as how to appropriate support and empower clients throughout the transition.

Visibility

Although demonstrating visible support for transgender people holds little value if an organization lacks structural support, it is an important step to promote inclusion of transgender clients. Organizations that have an absence of transgender-friendly posters, displays, and/or pamphlets creates an environment in which transgender people may not feel safe to disclose their gender identity (Ontario HIV Treatment Network, 2017). The lack of transgender-friendly informational displays is also a barrier for transgender clients to learn about their unique health issues (e.g. pap smears for transgender men). **X** currently does not have transgender-friendly displays at neither the **LOCATION A** or **LOCATION B**. Aside from physical displays of visible support for transgender people, **X** should also consider the organization's online presence, such as its website and social media.

Recommendation 4: Put up visible displays of transgender inclusivity at **X**'s **LOCATION A** and **LOCATION B**. Displays can include education pamphlets or posters (e.g. promoting pap smears for transgender men). Pronoun buttons, stickers of the transgender flag, or transgender art are additional options.

Recommendation 5: Include a transgender health section on the **X** website stating that **X** is dedicated to providing trans-inclusive care, as well as provide examples on how the **X** is working towards becoming trans-inclusive. The section should include transgender health resources.

Staff Training

Interpersonal interactions between **X** staff members and transgender clients can be harmful to the clients if staff members have not received appropriate training on how to be inclusive of transgender individuals. Several studies have show that transgender clients are frequently put in a position in which they feel that they need to educate their healthcare provider

on transgender-related topics and issues (Ontario HIV Treatment Network, 2017). Transgender clients are also often asked unnecessary questions about their gender identity when seeking unrelated care. Healthcare professionals have an evident lack of knowledge about transgender-related topics; this issue must be addressed by providing staff members with orientation and ongoing training.

The lack of knowledge and awareness from healthcare professionals could also result in transgender clients being discriminated against. Subtle acts of discrimination, such as being misgendered, "may be more common than overt discrimination, but both forms of discrimination may have detrimental effects on transgender individuals accessing care or feeling excluded from care" (Ontario HIV Treatment Network, 2017, p. 5). Although **X** has anti-discrimination policies, staff members may be unaware that they are discriminating against transgender individuals due to their lack to awareness. Once again, this issue needs to be addressed with appropriate staff training.

Recommendation 6: Mandate training for all staff specifically about transgender inclusivity. The module should cover topics of gender identity, historical and contemporary barriers that transgender clients face, as well as how staff members can challenge their biases and support transgender clients.

Recommendation 7: Offer ongoing professional development opportunities to staff members regarding how to better support transgender clients. Hire transgender people to facilitate professional development.

Gendered Language

"Language reflects and reinforces our attitudes . . . [w]hen we evaluate our language, we examine more deeply the assumptions that frame our work" (Moseson et al., 2020, p. 1067). Gendered language is present across the **X**, often without many people having a second thought about it. However, gendered language harms transgender clients. Clients who don't identify as a cisgender woman are put in a stigmatizing and uncomfortable situation when they utilize clinics that only have pamphlets and posters with language exclusively targeting cisgender women (Moseson et al., 2020). Electronic medical records also often utilize gendered language and lack inclusive options, such as prompting transgender men to have up-to-date pap smears or providing different lab value reference ranges specific for transgender clients (Moseson et al., 2020). **X** staff members can perpetuate the usage of gendered language as well. For example, staff members may assume the gender of clients who use "women's" services (e.g. birth control clinics, breastfeeding programs) and misgender clients (Moseson et al., 2020). Nurses and physicians working at the Sexual Health Clinic may ask clients about their sexual partners while assuming that the partners are cisgender, which can be misinforming. These uncomfortable and harmful situations, compounded with the lack of accessible information on transgender-specific health needs, lead to transgender individuals not seeking nor receiving the care that they require.

Recommendation 8: Review **X** policies, forms, posters, pamphlets, and staff training materials for gendered language. Examine if gendered language is necessary and remove if it is not determined necessary.

Promoting Inclusivity of Transgender Employees

Recruitment and Hiring

X's Employment Systems Review as part of the Diversity and Inclusion Assessment has provided robust recommendations for equitable recruitment and hiring processes. However, there are additional factors to consider for becoming more transgender-inclusive in these processes.

In relation to recruitment, Pride at Work Canada (2018) has found that over 60% of LGBTQ2+ people would feel more comfortable applying to an organization if they publicized all LGBTQ2+ related policies and/or stated that they are LGBTQ2+ friendly on job postings. Furthermore, it is important that recruitment materials clearly indicate that an employee's gender identity and expression will be respected (Bauer et al., 2011). Recruitment materials should also indicate that applicants whose legal name does not correspond with their chosen name will be supported throughout the hiring processes. Additional factors to consider are if recruiters are trained in being transgender-inclusive and if **X** is using their partnership with community-based organizations that support transgender communities to help with recruitment.

In relation to hiring, it is important for hiring managers to be trained in supporting applicants whose name and gender have changed throughout their education and employment history. Over a quarter of transgender people in Ontario reported to have, at least once, chosen not to provide references from a specific past employer because of their transition history (Bauer et al., 2011). Moreover, many transgender people may not have legally changed their name. **X** needs to create clear processes for applicants to identify their names and pronouns. Policies and processes that are inclusive towards transgender people need to be created to support hiring managers in equitably hiring new employees.

Recommendation 9: State in recruitment material that applicants whose legal name does not correspond with their chosen name will be supported throughout the hiring processes.

Recommendation 10: Ask applicants what name and pronouns they would like to be referred to by as well as what name and pronouns their references know them by.

Recommendation 11: Provide training to hiring managers about equitable hiring practices for gender diverse applicants.

Names and Pronouns Identification and Usage

As of present, **X** does not have standardized processes for employees to identify their pronouns and change their name or pronouns in **X**'s data systems. There should be a clear process, such as an intake form, for employees to identify their name, if different from their legal name, as well as their pronouns. A model policy written by the Transgender Law Centre (2013) suggested that organizations create processes to efficiently change official records to reflect the employee's name and gender upon request. Some records, such as payroll, may require a legal name change, however most records do not. It is important to maintain privacy for transgender employees, especially those who have a different legal name on file, to ensure that they are consistently being referred to by their accurate name with exception of situations when using one's legal name is necessary. Intentional and/or persistent refusal to respect and utilize an employee's name and/or pronouns should constitute as harassment and be a violation of **X**'s anti-discrimination policies. To prevent misgendering and erasure of transgender identities, **X** should also normalize the introduction of pronouns alongside names.

Recommendation 12: Gather employee's name, if different than legal name, and pronouns upon hiring during intake process.

Recommendation 13: Standardized employee email signatures and business cards to include pronouns

Recommendation 14: Create a clear protocol outlining how an employee can change their name within **X**'s database, even without completing a legal name change (in all areas where possible)

Supporting Gender Transitions

Every transgender individual's transition will look different. Some transgender employees may already be medically transitioning when they are hired at the **X** and others may decide to begin medically transitioning after working at **X**. Many transgender people choose only to socially transition and not to medically transition at all. There are different ways to socially and medically transition. Transitioning for some individuals may involve set goals, while for others, is a fluid and dynamic process. As transitioning is not a cookie-cutter process, **X** should create guidelines that support every transgender employee's transition in a person-centred manner. This is supported and recommended in the Diversity and Inclusion Assessment's Employment Systems Review, as **X** is currently lacking a transition plan.

The Human Rights Campaign Foundation (2015) created a template for employee gender transition guidelines that highlights several important considerations for organizations. These considerations include:

- Establishing a first point of contact
- Providing training for managers and HR representatives
- Maintaining privacy and being person-centred
- Informing co-workers
- Changing names and pronouns
- Providing equitable health benefits
- Monitoring for signs of hostility from coworkers in a proactive manner

- Checking in

The Transgender Law Centre (2013) stated that if an organization wishes to support their transgender employees, an important action would be to exclusively enter health insurance contracts that include coverage for gender transition-related care. Obtaining transition-related care can improve the physical health, mental health, and economic stability of transgender individuals (Transgender Law Centre, 2014; Human Rights Campaign Foundation, 2012). Furthermore, providing equitable health insurance can improve an organization's recruitment strategies to promote diversity (Transgender Law Centre, 2014). Specifically, the health insurance plan should explicitly cover transition-related care such as short-term medical leave, mental health benefits, pharmaceutical coverage (e.g. for hormone replacement therapy), and gender-affirming surgeries (Human Rights Campaign Foundation, 2012). Financial cost is often utilized as one of the main reasons for resistance against having equitable health insurance, however, the Transgender Law Centre (2014) argued that the high financial cost estimates are often inaccurate due to the lack of data from health insurance companies and assumption that all transgender people undergo costly surgeries (which is not reflective of the reality). Being prepared with accurate and thorough information to present to insurance companies will give organizations the greatest chance of success for negotiating equitable health insurance policies (Transgender Law Centre, 2014).

Recommendation 15: Create a transition plan that promotes decision-making and empowerment for transgender employees. Ensure that all managers and HR staff are familiar with the plan.

Recommendation 16: Ensure that transition-related health coverage is covered in **X**'s employee benefits plan.

All-Gender Washrooms

Two-thirds of transgender Ontarians have avoided a public space because of fear of harassment, and washrooms are the most frequently avoided space (Scheim et al., 2014). **X**'s **LOCATION A** has single-stalled all-gender washrooms on the ground floor, near client-facing services, but lacks an all-gender washroom on the second floor, where most of the employees' office spaces are located. Access to washrooms is a health and safety matter (Occupational Safety and Health Administration, 2015). If a transgender employee who works in the office spaces feels uncomfortable in using gendered washrooms, they must travel to the ground floor to utilize a single-stalled washroom. This situation singles out transgender people and creates a barrier for accessing washrooms.

Recommendation 17: Designate all-gender washrooms on the second floor of the **LOCATION A** and **LOCATION B**.

Moving Forward

This plan only covers the basic recommendations of promoting inclusivity for transgender clients and staff members. Moving beyond the organization and working with community partners would be the next step; for example, ensuring that referral processes are seamless to prevent transgender clients from having to repeatedly explain their identities. **X** should also commit to collecting inclusive demographic data to better understand the needs and barriers of the populations that the organization serves. The Transgender Inclusivity Organization Plan will need to be periodically revisited and updated to reflect the evolving needs of the transgender community. Learning and supporting transgender individuals are ongoing

processes; **X** must commit resources to implement the recommendations and continue to do better.

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