

Supporting Gender-Diverse Youth in British Columbia

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Kelowna, British Columbia
August 15, 2026



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Understanding Current Protections and Emerging Issues, and Practical Actions We Can Take to Mitigate Risk

Over the past several years, policies affecting transgender and gender-diverse youth have been introduced in jurisdictions across Canada and the United States, prompting understandable concern from youth, parents, educators, healthcare providers, and community organizations here in British Columbia.

This report was developed to provide a brief overview of current legal and policy protections in British Columbia, summarize emerging trends, and offer practical actions we can take to safeguard and promote the human rights of transgender and gender-diverse people. It is not intended to provide an exhaustive legal or policy analysis, but rather a snapshot of the current landscape, with an emphasis on preparation and practical actions.

During our consultation on this project, Dr. Claire House advised that effective policy and advocacy documents should devote at least as much attention to what communities can do as they do to describing potential threats. That philosophy became a guiding principle for this project.

How This Report Was Developed

This report draws on legislation and policy documents, academic research, news articles, reports, community consultation and the lived experiences of transgender and gender-diverse people and their parents.

The consultation involved discussions with legal experts, researchers, advocates, activists, parents, and youth. Although I am solely responsible for the content, each viewpoint greatly enriched the report and influenced the recommendations provided.

Listening to Youth

It was important to me that the project be informed directly by the voices of transgender and gender-diverse youth. Following the recommendation of the This Space Queer Wellness Group facilitator, I developed an anonymous Mentimeter survey and sent the questions ahead of time so the youth would have time to think about their answers. I chose this approach to encourage participation, protect anonymity, and create an engaging way for youth to share their perspectives with me during an in-person Queer Wellness group I was invited to attend at This Space Belongs to You. The results not only informed this report's focus but also reinforced many of the themes that emerged during consultations with others.

What Youth Told Us

Youth are paying attention.

Nearly every participant reported being aware of policy and legislative changes affecting transgender people in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and the United States. Most indicated they had heard "some" or "a lot" about these developments, suggesting that many gender-diverse youth are already following these conversations closely.

Worry is common, but so is hope.

Concern about the future in British Columbia was widespread, with half of participants describing themselves as "very concerned" that similar changes could occur in BC, while almost everyone else expressed at least some concern. At the same time, most youth described themselves as "cautiously optimistic" about the future, suggesting that uncertainty and hope co-exist.

Healthcare, safety, and schools are top of mind.

When asked what worried them most, youth overwhelmingly identified access to gender-affirming healthcare, school policies and support, legal rights and protections, and personal safety. Open-ended responses expanded on these concerns, highlighting worries about bullying, access to mental health care, the rise of misinformation, and shifts in North America towards increasingly hostile public attitudes.

Coping, protective factors and sources of resilience.

A major insight was how young people explained managing uncertainty. Some intentionally avoided news to avoid feeling overwhelmed, while many relied on trusted friends, the queer community, and moments of joy to stay hopeful. Others spoke candidly about using avoidance, compartmentalization, or dissociation when the constant stream of tough news became too overwhelming.

Young people want information and tools.

When asked what would help them feel more prepared or supported, youth stated that opportunities and tools for advocacy, clear information, and peer and mental health support were most important. Rather than reassurance, youth expressed a desire for accurate information and meaningful opportunities for self-advocacy.

What Parents Told Us

Parents are informed and paying attention.

Most parents reported having heard "some" or "a lot" about legislative and policy changes affecting trans people in other provinces and the United States, suggesting that many families are already actively following these developments.

Concern is widespread.

Concern about the future in British Columbia was high. Most respondents described themselves as "very concerned," and "somewhat concerned". Only one participant indicated they were not concerned.

Parents are concerned about healthcare, legal protections, and safety.

When asked what worried them most, almost all parents identified access to gender-affirming healthcare, legal protections, school supports, and community safety. Open-ended responses reflected concerns about bullying, growing anti-trans rhetoric, and the fear that trans youth are increasingly being used as political pawns.

Parents are trying to balance awareness with wellbeing.

Most parents described making a conscious effort to stay informed while also protecting their own and their family's wellbeing. Some coping efforts described included limiting their news consumption, seeking positive local stories, focusing on what they can control, and discussing current events openly with their children. Others described participating in petitions, protests, or advocacy as a coping strategy.

Parents need information and practical tools - and they want to be advocates.

Perhaps the clearest message from the survey was that parents want to get involved. They are looking for clear, accurate and up-to-date information, practical tools to prepare and support their families, and opportunities to advocate for their family and for the wider community.

Despite their concerns, many parents remain cautiously hopeful.

While parents are very concerned, relatively few described feeling hopeless. Over half of respondents characterized themselves as "hopeful" or "cautiously optimistic."

Where Do We Stand? Overview of Supports and Protections in BC

Many youth and families are understandably concerned about developments in other parts of Canada and the U.S. At the same time, British Columbia currently has important legal, healthcare, and educational protections for transgender and gender-diverse people. Understanding both the protections and risks can help us better organize and collaborate, and to respond to threats with knowledge rather than fear.

Human Rights Protections

The BC Human Rights Code prohibits discrimination based on gender identity or expression in areas including employment, tenancy, and services customarily available to the public, which includes education. If someone experiences discrimination based on their gender identity or gender expression, they may have grounds to file a complaint with the BC Human Rights Tribunal. These protections remain an important safeguard for transgender and gender-diverse people in British Columbia.¹

Healthcare

Publicly funded gender-affirming healthcare is available in British Columbia, with Trans Care BC, a program of the Provincial Health Services Authority, serving as a central hub for provincial information, resources and support. Current care pathways include options such as puberty blockers, hormone therapy and gender-affirming surgeries, depending on an individual's age, needs, goals and clinical circumstances.²

Unlike some other provinces, access to care for youth in BC continues to be guided by established clinical standards.^{3 4} During consultation for this project, community members emphasized that access to knowledgeable and affirming providers remains one of the greatest practical challenges for many families. While care remains available in BC, access can vary depending on geography and provider availability.

A note about care under 19: Under section 17 of British Columbia's Infants Act, a minor may consent to healthcare, including gender-affirming healthcare, when the healthcare provider is satisfied that the young person understands the nature and consequences of the treatment, including its reasonably foreseeable benefits and risks, and concludes that the treatment is in the young person's best interests. This framework applies broadly to healthcare decisions and is not unique to gender-affirming care.^{5 6}

¹ Human Rights Code, R.S.B.C. 1996, c. 210.

² Trans Care BC, Trans Care BC (2026).

³ Canadian Paediatric Society (2023), "An Affirming Approach to Caring for Transgender and Gender-Diverse Youth."

⁴ Coleman et al. (2022), "Standards of Care for the Health of Transgender and Gender Diverse People, Version 8."

⁵ Infants Act, R.S.B.C. 1996, c. 223, s. 17.

⁶ findlay (2022), "Legal Rights of Transgender Youth Seeking Medical Care."

Schools

British Columbia has province-wide protections for 2SLGBTQIA+ students in schools.⁷ Public school codes of conduct must address the prohibited grounds of discrimination in the BC Human Rights Code, including sexual orientation and gender identity or expression, and independent schools are also required to maintain SOGI-inclusive harassment and bullying-prevention policies. These requirements are intended to foster safe and inclusive learning environments and protect students from discrimination and bullying. Additionally, schools can access SOGI-inclusive educational resources for teachers and staff to help create respectful, welcoming school communities for all students.

Why Are People Worried?

Despite the protections currently in place in BC, the cumulative effect of political, legal, and social changes elsewhere, combined with growing public debate about gender diversity, has understandably raised concerns about what could happen here. Throughout consultations for this project, youth, parents/caregivers, and community experts expressed great uncertainty about the future.

In December 2025, the Alberta provincial government invoked the notwithstanding clause in relation to legislation concerning gender-affirming healthcare, schools, and sports.⁸ In Saskatchewan, the 2023 Parents' Bill of Rights was also enacted using the notwithstanding clause to shield it from human rights-related legal challenges.⁹

Why the Notwithstanding Clause Matters

One of the biggest concerns raised in consultations for this project was the notwithstanding clause. Put simply, it allows a provincial or federal government to pass a law even when that law goes against certain rights protected by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, including equality rights.¹⁰

The notwithstanding clause does not erase the Charter or make a law completely beyond the courts' control, but it can allow a law to remain in effect even if it violates certain Charter rights. The clause's original intention in 1982 was to provide oversight and balance; a compromise negotiated by the provinces to ensure that elected representatives (not unelected judges) would have the final say. The five-year limit was enacted to ensure voters would then have the opportunity to respond, through an election.

We don't know whether a future BC government would follow Alberta and Saskatchewan in restricting or violating rights, but we also cannot assume that the protections we have today will always be there.

⁷ British Columbia Ministry of Education (2017), "Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) in Schools."

⁸ French (2025), "Alberta to Invoke Notwithstanding Clause to Shield 3 Transgender Bills from Court Challenges."

⁹ Simes (2023), "Saskatchewan government tables school pronoun bill, invokes notwithstanding clause."

¹⁰ Government of Canada, Department of Justice (2024), "Charterpedia: Section 33 – Notwithstanding Clause."

Are They Allowed to Do This?

Elections matter because governments have the power to change laws and, in some circumstances, to override certain Charter protections. The extent and reach of that power is still being determined. The Supreme Court of Canada is currently considering the limits of the notwithstanding clause, including the Saskatchewan case involving trans youth.¹¹ These decisions may help clarify the role courts can still play when the clause is used, but are unlikely to change the situation for trans youth in Alberta or Saskatchewan.

The takeaway for BC is simple: we cannot rely on institutions alone to protect trans and gender-diverse people.

Emerging Trends Impacting Gender-Diverse Youth

While we cannot predict whether a future BC government would introduce restrictive legislation and invoke the notwithstanding clause, we must recognize how quickly things can change here. During BC's 2024 election, the Conservative Party of BC campaigned on proposals including ending SOGI 123, supporting "parental rights," and opposing gender-affirming healthcare and transgender participation in sports.^{12 13 14} Although there is no evidence that these issues directly influenced the election outcome, they demonstrate that BC is very closely divided. In the 2024 election, the BC NDP won 47 of 93 seats (the minimum required for a majority government). The final result ultimately hinged on extremely close races, including one contest that was determined by just 22 votes.¹⁵ Elections have consequences: they determine who holds the legislative power to strengthen or weaken existing protections, or, in some circumstances, override Charter rights using the notwithstanding clause.

Rather than focusing on individual political parties or attempting to predict future legislation, it may be helpful to look at the trends that have emerged across Canada and the United States.

Five Trends:

1. Increasing restrictions on access to gender-affirming healthcare
2. Growing political focus on schools: pronouns, GSA's, books, and 'parental rights'
3. An increase in misinformation/disinformation, and polarized public discourse
4. The growing influence of cross-border policy and advocacy networks
5. The 'chilling effects' on service provision

1. Increasing restrictions on access to gender-affirming healthcare

In many jurisdictions, laws restricting gender-affirming healthcare for minors have been introduced. In Alberta, gender-affirming surgeries under 18 have been prohibited, even with

¹¹ Supreme Court of Canada, *Government of Saskatchewan as Represented by the Minister of Education v. UR Pride Centre for Sexuality and Gender Diversity*, File No. 41979 (2026).

¹² Conservative Party of British Columbia (2025), Policy Declaration.

¹³ Pawson (2024), "How Turfing SOGI and Banning Books Became Part of B.C.'s Election."

¹⁴ The Canadian Press (2024), "B.C. Conservatives Release Education Policy Plans Ahead of Election Day."

¹⁵ Elections BC (2024), "Final Count Complete."

parental approval and support, and health professionals are prohibited from prescribing hormone therapy to minors for the treatment of gender dysphoria or gender incongruence (with specified exceptions).¹⁶

In the United States, restrictions and bans have disrupted or completely removed access to care, forcing some families to travel long distances or to relocate their families, increasing both financial and emotional stress.^{17 18}

Research has also raised concerns that legislative restrictions and political pressure have reduced access to qualified clinicians and interfered with providers' ability to deliver evidence-informed care in Canada.¹⁹ This is particularly significant because access to gender-affirming healthcare was the most frequently identified concern among youth consulted for this project, selected by all respondents who answered that question.

2. Growing political focus on schools: pronouns, GSAs, books, and the rise of the “parental rights” movement

Schools have increasingly become focal points of political debate concerning gender diversity. In Saskatchewan, the Parents' Bill of Rights requires parental consent before school staff use a new gender-related name or pronouns for students under 16 and was enacted using the notwithstanding clause. Alberta has introduced similar requirements. As of September 2025, parents must be notified when students under 18 request that school staff use a new gender-related preferred name or pronouns, and written parental consent is required for students under 16. Alberta also requires parents to 'opt in' to lessons involving discussions about gender identity, sexual orientation, or human sexuality.²⁰

In New Brunswick in 2023, the then-conservative government amended Policy 713, forbidding teachers from using students' preferred names and pronouns for students under 16 without parental consent. The government used “parental rights” framing and broader anti-gender rhetoric to justify Policy 713. (Parental rights, in this context, refers to a socially conservative political movement primarily targeting 2SLGBTQIA+ issues).²¹ The changes generated substantial opposition; in the following election, the leader lost his own seat, and his government was defeated. The new government's revised guidelines that took effect in January 2025 restored the rights of transgender and gender-diverse students.²²

¹⁶ Canadian Bar Association (2024), “Response to Bills 26, 27 and 29.”

¹⁷ Human Rights Watch (2025), “They’re Ruining People’s Lives: Bans on Gender-Affirming Care for Transgender Youth in the US.”

¹⁸ Sunny (2026), “Families Weigh Moves with Gender-Affirming Care Access Under Assault in US.”

¹⁹ Canadian Medical Association. (2025), “CMA calls on Alberta government to refrain from using notwithstanding clause to interfere with patient care.”

²⁰ French (2025), “New Rules See Province Screening Sex Education Resources Before They Hit Classrooms.”

²¹ Sorensen (2025), “A History of the ‘Parental Rights Movement(s).’”

²² New Brunswick Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (2025), Policy 713: Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity.

Similar issues have entered political debate in British Columbia. The Conservative Party of BC has publicly opposed the inclusive education and resource hub known as ‘SOGI 123,’ and Conservative MLAs and party policy proposals have targeted “parental rights” in education. The party's official 2025 policy declaration specifically states removing SOGI materials from schools and strengthening “parental rights” as immediate priorities.²³ Proposals concerning gender-related materials in schools have been introduced in the BC Legislature, and although they have not become law, Conservative members have voted consistently in favour.^{24 25}

Young people spend a significant amount of their time at school, so policies restricting the use of affirming names and pronouns, and promoting parental notification can dramatically affect students' sense of safety and their engagement with learning. Canadian researchers have specifically identified parental-consent requirements as a source of considerable stress, particularly for youth without supportive families.²⁶ The Canadian Public Health Association has similarly raised concerns about the potential harms of policies that require transgender and gender-diverse youth to suppress their identities or risk disclosure to unsupportive families.²⁷

Almost all of the youth consulted for this project identified school policies or supports as an area of concern, with written responses specifically mentioning SOGI, bullying, and sexual-health education.

3. An increase in misinformation/disinformation and polarized public discourse

Policy development is influenced by the wider information landscape. Topics like gender diversity and gender-affirming healthcare are becoming more politicized, with misinformation and misleading claims about transgender people (and healthcare) now circulating alongside news coverage, social media, and political messaging.²⁸

Researchers have specifically identified misinformation about gender-affirming care as an increasing concern within health and policy discourse.²⁹

The Canadian Anti-Hate Network documented the rapid rise of anti-trans disinformation following the Tumbler Ridge shooting in February of 2026.³⁰ These online stories portrayed

²³ Conservative Party of British Columbia (2025), Policy Declaration

²⁴ Legislative Assembly of British Columbia (2025), “Introduction of Bill: Protecting Minors from Gender Transition Act.”

²⁵ Legislative Assembly of British Columbia (2026), “Introduction of Bill: Gender Ideology and Child Protection Act.”

²⁶ Khonina and Salway (2025), “The Rise of Anti-Trans Laws and the Role of Public Health Advocacy.”

²⁷ Canadian Public Health Association (2024), “Statement on Transgender and Gender-Diverse Rights and Health.”

²⁸ Govender (2026), “Statement from B.C.’s Human Rights Commissioner on Tumbler Ridge: Human Rights and the Impacts of Disinformation”

²⁹ Shuster & McNamara (2024), “Troubling Trends in Health Misinformation Related to Gender-Affirming Care.”

³⁰ Canadian Anti-Hate Network (2026), “Online Transphobia Following the 2026 Tumbler Ridge School Shooting.”

transgender people as inherently violent or mentally ill, blamed gender-affirming institutions and supportive families for the attack, and claimed that authorities and the media could not be trusted because they recognize transgender identities.³¹

Recent Statistics Canada data show that public attitudes toward gender diversity have also shifted toward less acceptance.³² Between 2018 and 2025, the proportion of women who believe that people should be able to express their gender however they choose declined from 85% to 77%; among men, support declined from 78% to 70%. These were the largest shifts observed among all of the eight gender-related statements included in the survey. Additionally, fewer Canadians say they would support a family member who comes out as transgender. These findings show a concerning drop in acceptance and echo worries voiced by many queer community members and allies regarding a rise in misinformation and increasingly hostile public discourse.

This theme emerged clearly in the youth consultation. One participant specifically expressed concern about broader social regression fuelled by misinformation and mainstream media, while several described becoming overwhelmed, depressed, or angry when trying to stay informed, or needing to disengage from the news altogether.

4. The growing influence of cross-border policy and advocacy networks

Policy ideas often cross jurisdictional boundaries. We've seen almost identical ideological appeals and policy changes regarding restricting gender-affirming healthcare, promoting parental notification rules, and banning sports participation across multiple U.S. states and Canadian provinces, often using similar language and framing around concepts such as "parental rights," "gender ideology," and the protection of children.³³

The evidence suggests these similarities are not a coincidence. In the U.S., well-funded advocacy groups have developed and promoted templates for policy changes, as well as legal strategies that can be adapted across jurisdictions. There are also identifiable links between the U.S. legal advocacy networks involved in policy restricting transgender rights and individuals participating in Canadian policy and law. For example, Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF), a U.S.-based conservative Christian legal organization active in litigation concerning gender-affirming healthcare, schools and transgender participation in sports, has developed international networks of lawyers and experts.³⁴ Some members of this network have ties to Alberta: psychologist James Cantor, whose testimony has been involved in legal cases regarding Alberta's gender-affirming care restrictions, previously served as an expert witness in U.S. litigation supported by ADF. Additionally, Calgary lawyer Gerald Chipeur, KC has been publicly recognized by ADF as an allied attorney and currently holds a position with the Alberta government.³⁵ These connections do not establish that ADF developed or directed Alberta's

³¹ Gallagher & Rai (2026), "A Quantitative Analysis of Anti-LGBTQ+ Hate after the Tumbler Ridge Shooting."

³² Burczycka & Cotter (2026), "Perceptions of Gender-Based Violence and Gender Equality, Identity and Expression in Canada, 2025."

³³ Canadian Anti-Hate Network (2023), "Important Context about the '1 Million March 4 Children'."

³⁴ Kirkpatrick (2023), "The Next Targets for the Group That Overturned Roe."

³⁵ Maimann (2023), "This U.S.-Based 'Hate Group' Is Using a Shadowy Network of Lawyers and Doctors to Infiltrate Canada."

policies, but they illustrate how legal arguments, experts and advocacy networks can operate across international borders.

Anti-trans networks also cross provincial borders within Canada. B.C.-based Action4Canada has documented its efforts to lobby Saskatchewan officials against SOGI 123 and the involvement of sexual-health organizations in schools, including sending materials directly to provincial officials and organizing a petition campaign.³⁶ Nationally coordinated movements such as the '1 Million March 4 Children' have also held demonstrations across Canada on SOGI, pronouns, and "parental rights."

British Columbia is not immune to the impacts of this growing movement. Since 2025, several private members' bills have been introduced in the BC Legislature, including proposals opposing gender-affirming healthcare and gender-identity materials in schools; None became law.^{37 38} However, during consultation for this project, jurists Celeste Trianon, who tracks anti-trans legislation across Canada, emphasized the increasingly coordinated nature of anti-trans advocacy and the similarities between legislative strategies appearing across jurisdictions and cautioned that BC must not be complacent.^{39 40} This warning was echoed by lawyer barbara findlay, who has spent decades advocating for 2SLGBTQIA+ rights.^{41 42}

This does not imply that BC will necessarily follow the example of other provinces or U.S. states. Political, constitutional, healthcare, and educational systems differ across jurisdictions, and policy changes can also be challenged, reversed, or rejected, as we saw in New Brunswick. Nonetheless, developments elsewhere can offer early signals of the ideas, arguments, and policy approaches that BC might eventually need to address.⁴³

5. Chilling effects on service provision

Perhaps the least obvious trend is what can happen before a law requires anyone to stop providing a service. Factors like political controversy, complaints, future regulation uncertainty, funding threats, public scrutiny, or safety concerns can cause clinicians and organizations to become more cautious about providing, expanding, or publicly promoting affirming services.⁴⁴

³⁶ Action4Canada (n.d.), "Petition: Ban SOGI 123 and Planned Parenthood Saskatchewan."

³⁷ Legislative Assembly of British Columbia (2025), "Introduction of Bill: Protecting Minors from Gender Transition Act."

³⁸ Legislative Assembly of British Columbia (2026), "Introduction of Bill: Gender Ideology and Child Protection Act."

³⁹ Trianon (2025), "BC Bill M-216: Canada's Worst Anti-Trans Legislation Thus Far, but Is It Canadian?"

⁴⁰ Trianon (2026), personal consultation, August 7.

⁴¹ findlay (2026), personal consultation, July 14.

⁴² Canadian Bar Association (2026), "Remaining Vigilant – barbara findlay KC and Douglas Elliott."

⁴³ Donovan (2025), "Protecting Trans Rights in Canada."

⁴⁴ Gupta et al. (2023), "Exploring the Impact of Legislation Aiming to Ban Gender-Affirming Care on Pediatric Endocrine Providers."

Evidence from the U.S. confirms this trend. Providers in states with proposed or enacted restrictions on gender-affirming care report institutional pressure to limit services, concerns about legal consequences, negative career impacts, and worries for personal safety. Researchers caution that these pressures might significantly reduce access to qualified providers. The research has also documented high levels of moral distress among gender-affirming care providers working within these difficult environments, contributing to burnout and attrition.⁴⁵

It's worth mentioning that while legal rights and healthcare services have so far remained intact in B.C., a chilling effect could still occur here. Organizations may become less vocal about trans-inclusive services or may avoid providing certain services; educational programs could be cancelled to avoid complaints, and funders might hesitate to support 2SLGBTQIA+ initiatives. The concern is that uncertainty and instability can affect service availability or visibility even before policies officially change, and there is some indication that this has already begun.

Implications for Youth and Families

We know that the well-being of trans and gender-diverse youth depends heavily on their environment. Evidence shows that having supportive families, inclusive schools, and access to affirming healthcare are crucial protective factors.^{46 47 48 49} Conversely, stigma, discrimination, family rejection, misinformation, and lack of affirming healthcare are linked to worse mental health and well-being.^{50 51 52} These issues tend to be more severe for youth in rural or smaller communities, where access to affirming healthcare, mental health support, and peer networks can be limited. Furthermore, Indigenous, Black, racialized, newcomer, disabled, and low-income youth may experience these challenges more acutely, due to overlapping systems of discrimination and unequal service access.⁵³ Supporting these youth requires an intersectional approach that also bolsters families, communities, and care systems.

⁴⁵ Stamm et al. (2025), "Moral Distress among Gender-Affirming Care Providers for Transgender and Gender-Diverse Youth."

⁴⁶ Canadian Paediatric Society (2023), "An Affirming Approach to Caring for Transgender and Gender-Diverse Youth."

⁴⁷ Veale et al. (2015), "Being Safe, Being Me."

⁴⁸ Tordoff et al. (2022), "Mental Health Outcomes in Transgender and Nonbinary Youths Receiving Gender-Affirming Care."

⁴⁹ Flores et al. (2026), "Supporting Parents of Transgender, Nonbinary, and Gender-Expansive Youth: Considerations for Health Intervention Development."

⁵⁰ Veale et al. (2017), "Mental Health Disparities Among Canadian Transgender Youth."

⁵¹ Veale et al. (2015), "Being Safe, Being Me."

⁵² Jacobsen et al. (2024), "Misgendering and the Health and Wellbeing of Nonbinary People in Canada"

⁵³ Navarro et al. (2024), "Health and Well-Being Among Disabled Trans and Non-Binary People."

What Can We Do?

Practical Actions to Safeguard the Rights and Well-being of Gender-Diverse Youth

It's natural to feel overwhelmed by discussions of legislation, court rulings, and politics. Although many of these issues feel beyond our personal control, a clear message emerged from the leaders I spoke with: community organizing is crucial.

History demonstrates that periods of uncertainty can strengthen marginalized communities when people choose to support one another and act collectively. Collective resilience is a form of political action centred on community care, and people's ability to adapt and support each other despite tough times. While individual resilience is an important personal protective factor, collective resilience builds and sustains networks that, in turn, support the entire group.^{54 55}

As lawyer and advocate barbara findlay so eloquently put it: "Don't agonize. Organize."

Strengthen Community: We Take Care of Us

Strong relationships are among the greatest protective factors. Peer groups, community organizations, faith communities, and neighbourhoods help to reduce isolation, improve well-being, and provide practical and logistical support. Literature on youth activism and disability justice emphasizes shared resources and strong local relationships rather than relying on institutional support.^{56 57}

Community doesn't happen by accident. Reach out to someone who may be feeling isolated. Join or start a support group, book or craft club, coffee gathering, or mutual aid network. Small acts of connection strengthen the networks that help communities withstand uncertainty.

Have Real Conversations

Online spaces often increase the spread of misinformation/disinformation and deepen polarization; respectful and honest conversations between neighbours, family, colleagues and friends can build understanding and ground us in our shared values.

Encourage and engage in genuine, face-to-face conversations. Ask a neighbour over for tea, or go for a walk with a colleague during your break. Be curious and respectful by asking questions about what they believe and why. Remind them, and yourself, that we are all deserving of safety and dignity. Speaking across differences isn't easy, but open and authentic conversations remain one of the most meaningful and effective ways to challenge disinformation and increase understanding.

Help people understand the notwithstanding clause by providing clear and trustworthy information about its meaning and how its application can impact all of our rights.

⁵⁴ Museum of Protest (n.d.), "Collective Resilience and Support Networks"

⁵⁵ Lavizzari (2024), "Breaking Barriers: Stories of Youth Activism and Inclusive Participation."

⁵⁶ Alick (2023), "Principles of Disability Justice."

⁵⁷ Sins Invalid (2019), "10 Principles of Disability Justice."

Remember to have conversations with allies and accomplices as well. Take a moment to thank the teachers or coaches who create safe and supportive environments and acknowledge the businesses and leaders who openly support our cause.

Practice Mutual Aid

Mutual aid recognizes that everyone has strengths and skills to offer and everyone needs support from time to time. Mutual aid is not charity; it is based on the principles of reciprocity, shared responsibility, and community. Disability justice and mutual aid movements encourage communities to normalize both giving and receiving support, recognizing that interdependence strengthens everyone.^{58 59}

Organize a meal train for a family. Offer transportation to appointments or community events. Share your skills, for example, grant writing, food preservation, art, legal knowledge, tutoring, sewing/mending, childcare, cooking, or technology support. Create a small emergency fund within your community. Ask for support when you need it.

Get involved

Democracy depends on participation and elections have real and lasting consequences. Voting remains one of the most important ways individuals can influence public policy, but it is not the only way.

Volunteer on an election campaign for a candidate who shares your values, attend public meetings, write to your elected officials (even, and especially, if they are not the ones you voted for), donate to political campaigns for candidates who vocally defend trans rights, and tell them why. If you have the skills and time, run for public office. Candidates are often just ordinary people who decided they will no longer remain on the sidelines.

Make the notwithstanding clause an election issue. A notwithstanding declaration lasts for up to five years, so governments must face voters before renewing it.⁶⁰ Ask candidates where they stand on using it. Sign petitions and share advocacy campaigns such as the Canadian Civil Liberties Association's "Help Save Our Charter".⁶¹

From Ally to Accomplice

Accomplices use their privilege and take on some personal risk.⁶² Visible acts matter and create micro-moments of connection, safety and belonging. Display a Pride flag, wear a pronoun pin or bracelet, support local organizations by attending a community event, volunteering, or donating money. While visibility is important right now, effective allies and accomplices are also accountable, share risk, and reduce barriers for others. Accomplices combat misinformation by

⁵⁸ Sins Invalid (2019), "10 Principles of Disability Justice."

⁵⁹ Museum of Protest (n.d.), "Collective Resilience and Support Networks"

⁶⁰ Government of Canada, Department of Justice (2024), "Charterpedia: Section 33 – Notwithstanding Clause."

⁶¹ Canadian Civil Liberties Association (n.d.), "Save Our Charter Campaign: Why the Notwithstanding Clause Is Dangerous to Us All."

⁶² Indigenous Action Media (2014), "Accomplices Not Allies: Abolishing the Ally Industrial Complex."

speaking up, and they use their influence to amplify trans voices. Accomplices are committed to learning, especially from trans individuals and communities most impacted by discrimination.

Build an "Army of Equals"

One of Barbara Findlay's most compelling ideas was the importance of proactively building networks of allies before they are needed. She calls this an "Army of Equals," comprising people and organizations with aligned interests and values who maintain connections, exchange information, and support each other.

Build relationships with civil liberties organizations, unions, disability advocates, faith communities, professional associations, and others whose rights may also be affected by the notwithstanding clause. Connect trans rights to the broader defence of Charter rights.

Research shows that communities with strong, established relationships and social networks are better positioned to prepare for, respond to, and recover from crises.⁶³ If you belong to an organization with shared values, see how you can help connect them with other organizations and people already doing this work. Some other examples include service organizations, non-profits, and community associations.

Other ideas: host a networking breakfast or community roundtable, create an email list or phone tree, develop a shared list of resources, establish a monthly meeting to connect and strategize.

Resilient movements leverage collective power, lift each other up, laugh together, acknowledge small wins, and reaffirm why the fight is important. Collective resilience includes joy and hope, too!

Joy is Resistance - Create Something

People often associate advocacy with attending protests, but it can also involve: starting a podcast, making art or organizing an exhibit, hosting a film night or community picnic, starting a newsletter or publishing a zine, recording oral histories, building a community resource website, or facilitating a community dialogue. It can also involve dancing, playing music, laughing, or singing! Don't just gather when something bad happens - celebrate, create and cultivate joy at every opportunity.

⁶³ Zhao et al. (2025), "How does social capital facilitate community disaster resilience?"

Acknowledgements:

This project was inspired and guided by conversations with parents, community members, legal experts, researchers, activists, and, especially, transgender and gender-diverse youth. I sincerely thank everyone who shared their insights, experiences, and hopes for the future. While I take responsibility for any errors or omissions, this document is possible only because of their generosity, candour, and willingness to contribute.

In particular, I would like to thank:

- The youth involved in the Queer Wellness Group and Queer Joy Group at This Space Belongs to You, whose lived experiences, questions, hopes, and impressive PowerPoint and Jackbox skills, continually reminded me who this work is ultimately for.
- The TransParent Okanagan parents and caregivers who care so deeply and profoundly about their children, and all transgender children. I know you are exhausted, and that you keep fighting anyway - I see you.
- Dr. Claire House, for their support, friendship, and guidance, and their strengths-based philosophy that meaningful policy documents should devote at least as much attention to solutions and actions as they do to identifying risks.
- barbara findlay, KC, lawyer, legal expert, and advocate, for generously sharing her legal expertise, historical perspective, and wisdom on community organizing, mutual aid, and the protection of human rights during periods of political uncertainty. I can only do my work because of the ground you have paved for us all. I'm doing this for you, too, to honour the tenacity and courage with which you have fought for decades.
- Celeste Trianon, LL.B., J.D., researcher, writer and activist, for sharing her expertise regarding anti-trans legislation and trends across Canada and the United States, and for tirelessly documenting and writing and advocating and raising the alarms, so that the rest of us know and understand what is happening.
- Finally, to the staff, students, and volunteers at This Space Belongs to You: your work is saving lives. Thank you for letting me be part of the magic.

Consulting Sources and References:

This project reflects the insights I gained from conversations with many people and the wide range of sources I explored. The references below include the footnotes and the other sources that helped shape my understanding and this report; they are not exhaustive, and this is not intended to be a comprehensive analysis. They are included to provide background information and sources to support every claim in the report.

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