

WISDOM2ACTION (W2A)

Input submitted to the

UN EXPERT ON SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY (SOGI)

For the Report to the Human Rights Council on the realisation of the right of persons affected by violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health in relation to Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG3)

10 February 2022

INTRODUCTION

Wisdom2Action (W2A) is registered in the Canadian province of Nova Scotia as a social enterprise and consulting firm. W2A works with civil society and governmental organizations to facilitate positive change and strengthen communities. We are proudly 2SLGBTQ+ owned and led. Our work is community-driven, evidence-based and guided by our commitment to anti-oppression.

W2A's work takes the following forms:

- Capacity Building and Organizational Development
- Community and Stakeholder Engagement
- Research and Knowledge Mobilization

And focuses on:

- 2SLGBTQ+ Rights and Inclusion
- Children's Rights and Youth Engagement
- Mental Health and Substance Use

As an organization with a strong commitment to 2SLGBTQ+ advocacy in Canada, we have seen immense progress over the past decade. We have seen the formal extension of existing human rights legislation to include trans and gender diverse communities, a ban on so-called 'conversion therapy' practices, a formal government apology for past purging of 2SLGBTQ+ members of the public service, and significant, first-of-its-kind, investments in 2SLGBTQ+ community organizations. Finally, we have seen the federal Government of Canada undertake consultations for their soon-to-be-launched LGBTQ2+ Action Plan. There has been significant progress in the past decade, which we applaud. Nonetheless, 2SLGBTQ+ communities in Canada continue to face significant challenges, notably, barriers to social inclusion, comparatively high rates of violence and harassment, and a high prevalence of housing instability and poverty. While we applaud the efforts of the Government of Canada, there is more that can, and must, be done.

From February 2021 – January 2022, W2A engaged in multiple projects and advocacy efforts pertaining to the focus of the United Nations Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity’s call for input and associated report. As will be evident from the descriptions below, our work can be understood in its linkages with the report’s focus on “inclusion: LGTBI and GNC people in the decision-making process” and “training and education: health care professionals and educational institutions” with tangential contributions to “access: ensuring that LGTBI and GNC people have access to health care”.

ADVOCACY

Recognizing the importance of access to and comprehensive coverage of medically necessary gender-affirming healthcare, W2A partnered with Ontario 2SLGBTQ+ and allied organizations to create a provincial advocacy campaign in support of Bill 17, the *Gender Affirming Health Care Advisory Committee Act*. Through our campaign, we’ve sent over 1000 letters of support to the Premier, received over 50 endorsements from partner organizations, and helped put trans health back on the provincial agenda in Ontario. Learn more about the ongoing campaign at www.transhealthontario.org.

PROJECTS

W2A in partnership with a group of 2SLGBTQ+ youth from across Canada (known as the Youth Advisory Council or YAC) and Access Open Minds, the Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity (CCGSD), the Enchante Network, Gris MTL, Kickstand, Kind Space, Elder Blu, and YWCA Halifax, is implementing a three-year project entitled Safer Access For Everyone in the Rainbow (SAFER). SAFER has been made possible due to the generous support provided by the Women’s Program at Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE). SAFER will train 2SLGBTQ+ organizations and youth-serving organizations on ways to engage 2SLGBTQ+ youth, and prevent and address the gender-based violence they experience. SAFER will also conduct regional and national public education campaigns to address and prevent gender-based violence against 2SLGBTQ+ youth including public harassment.

Thanks to a generous grant from the Canadian Women’s Foundation, SPECTRUM (Waterloo Region’s Rainbow Community Space) partnered W2A to develop a first-of-its-kind Trans Mental Health, Wellness and Suicide Prevention Toolkit. The toolkit synthesizes pertinent knowledge and research on trans mental health and suicidality in Canada, alongside concrete tools and resources that trans people, friends and families of trans people, and service providers who work with trans communities can put to use. Developed following engagement with local communities in Waterloo region, these resources are grounded in local context but applicable to a wide variety of audiences and stakeholders.

We have worked with the Champlain Regional Planning Table for Gender Diverse Health Services through system planning support with the goal of improving

transition-related health services in the Ottawa area. We supported the development of a new website and a new community advisory table, and engaged with physicians, social workers and other key stakeholders to improve knowledge and competence on gender-affirming healthcare.

WZA and the Canadian Public Health Association (CPHA) developed a suite of resources on trans inclusion in response to an identified gap in resources for service providers working in health and social services. Developed during the COVID-19 pandemic, these resources sought to address the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on trans people, and particularly to address negative experiences accessing healthcare. Created alongside trans community members and service providers, these resources provide concrete practices and implementation strategies for better serving and supporting trans and gender-diverse communities.

Our team worked with YWCA Halifax to support fulsome and organization-wide implementation of trans inclusion. Through training, resource development and policy review, we have continued to support the YWCA Halifax team to build their knowledge and confidence in trans inclusivity. We also developed a new onboarding video with YWCA Halifax to orient new employees to trans and gender diverse inclusion, and designed two unique resources for YWCA Halifax, one focused on supporting parents of trans and gender diverse youth, and one focused on the intersections of gender, sexuality and faith.

Over the course of 2021, we led over 50+ unique sessions on 2SLGBTQ+ and trans inclusion with a wide range of partners from different sectors across Canada. We provided training to community foundations across Canada through Community Foundations of Canada, we hosted 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion workshops for various departments in the federal public service, including the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, the Public Health Agency of Canada, and the Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, to name a few.

Over the course of 2021, we led over 50+ unique sessions on 2SLGBTQ+ and trans inclusion with a wide range of partners from different sectors across Canada. We provided training to community foundations across Canada through Community Foundations of Canada, we hosted 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion workshops for various departments in the federal public service, including the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, the Public Health Agency of Canada, and the Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, to name a few.

This year, we've also begun working with the Utilities sector in Ontario, to build their capacity on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, with a focus on 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion and creating more inclusive workplaces. From Kitchener-Wilmot Hydro to Utilities Kingston, we're excited to see real progress on 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion and DEI in male-dominated industries.

Our Executive Director, Fae Johnstone, provided keynote addresses on 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion to the Government Services Union national conference, the Nova Scotia Physiotherapy Association Annual General Meeting, and numerous other audiences across Canada.

Future Directions on SOGIECE

We applaud the Government of Canada's leadership on many 2SLGBTQ+ issues, domestic and international. Advancing 2SLGBTQ+ health, rights and inclusion has been a consistent area of interest for the state. Nonetheless, additional resources and leadership are needed to advance full inclusion for 2SLGBTQ+ people in Canada.

Current challenges within Canada include rising mobilization by anti-trans and anti-2SLGBTQ+ organizations, as seen in other jurisdictions, including the United Kingdom, Poland, and the United States of America. Increasing mobilization by actors opposed to 2SLGBTQ+ rights must be met with a coordinated response, undertaken in partnership with 2SLGBTQ+ and trans communities.

A vibrant and well-funded civil society is necessary to address the health inequities, barriers to social inclusion, and violence. While funding has been provided for capacity building within Canada's emerging 2SLGBTQ+ service sector, funding quantities and parameters do not currently meet the needs of the sector. Of notable concern is the reliability of sustainable funding in futures years outside of election cycles and politicized promises.

Additionally, state-led responses to numerous issues that impact 2SLGBTQ+ communities continue to omit specific consideration for our communities. 2SLGBTQ+ communities, rights, health, and safety continue to be siloed within 2SLGBTQ+-specific interventions, rather than reflected in both targeted interventions *and* broader social and economic policy, such as state-level strategies to address homelessness, gender-based violence, the COVID-19 pandemic, and poverty.

In closing, W2A has played a key role in advocacy and as a consulting firm working directly with 2SLGBTQ+ communities to advance evidence-based practice, strengthen community engagement, and research. We simultaneously applaud the growing involvement of the state in 2SLGBTQ+ issues, while challenging Canadian civil society and governmental institutions to broaden and deepen their efforts on 2SLGBTQ+ health, rights and safety.

Prepared by: Fae Johnstone, MSW, Executive Director, Wisdom2Action &
Dennis L. Stuebing, PhD, Director, Wisdom2Action