

# We Belong

Addressing Service Inequity for Trans, Non-Binary, and Two-Spirit  
Sex Workers

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# Contributors

## Author

**Serena Lukas Bhandar** (she/her)  
BA  
serenabhandar.com

## Editor

**Sophia Ciavarella** (she/her)  
Operations Manager  
Peers Victoria Resources Society

## Consultation Facilitator

**Felix Gilliland** (they/them)  
Meaningful Inclusion Project Lead  
WAVAW Rape Crisis Centre

## Live Graphic Recorder

**Tiaré Lani** (they/them)  
tiarelani.com

## Funder



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# Table of Contents

## Introduction

Executive Summary	4
Introduction	6
Methodology	9
Definitions	11

## Findings and Recommendations

Organizational Culture	15
Healthcare	21
Housing	26
Peer Networks	30
Outreach	34
Harm Reduction	37
Public Education	39
Employment & Finances	42
Criminalization	44
Summary of Recommendations	46

## Conclusion

Conclusion	50
Appendix A: Consultation Images	51
Appendix B: Literature Review	55
References	59

# Executive Summary

From December 2020 to June 2021, staff at Peers Victoria Resources Society and WAVAW Rape Crisis Centre carried out a community consultation process to learn how to make services more relevant, accessible, and safe for trans, non-binary, and Two-Spirit (TN2S) sex workers.

In a survey conducted as part of the consultation process, all 25 survey respondents expressed that they needed greater assistance than was currently available in fulfilling all essential needs, including accessing healthcare, finding safe and affordable housing, and reducing the potential harms of sex work through peer support and violence prevention methods. Peers Victoria is the only organization in the Greater Victoria region that provides services specifically dedicated to sex workers, though more exist elsewhere in British Columbia, particularly concentrated in the Lower Mainland. Many non-sex work-specific organizations in B.C. also provide services that sex workers can access, such as healthcare, harm reduction, and outreach programs.

However, many survey respondents voiced that they did not find programs and services offered by these organizations to be relevant, accessible, or safe enough for their needs.

This report condenses and summarizes the results of that survey, in addition to the findings from a series of focus groups conducted throughout Spring 2021, in order to raise the issues and experiences of TN2S sex workers in the Greater Victoria and Lower Mainland to the organizations that serve them. Following through from the survey and focus group findings, the report includes 39 recommendations that organizations should implement in order to make their programs and services more accessible, safe, and relevant to the needs of this underserved population.

The findings and recommendations are broken down thematically, with the recommendations further categorized based on which could be met via short-term or medium-term tasks, and which require long-term projects or an ongoing commitment to meet. At an organizational level, some recommendations to highlight include:

- prioritizing hiring of TN2S staff, especially those with lived experience in the sex trade and with diverse intersections of identity;
- conducting group training with current staff to improve their knowledge and skills in adequately serving TN2S sex workers; and

- creating a community advisory group composed of TN2S people with lived experience in the sex trade to guide the ongoing implementation of the rest of the recommendations.

Implementing these recommendations, and listening to their TN2S service users, are the first of many steps that sex work organizations and other service providers must take in acknowledging and addressing the historical and ongoing inequities and oppressions that TN2S sex workers continue to experience in their efforts to find support to meet their needs.

# Introduction

*"It's hard to feel like you belong in a cis space. Even amongst sex workers, if you're trans, people might still hate you."*

- survey respondent

This report presents findings and recommendations from a community consultation process that was carried out by a team of staff from Peers Victoria Resources Society and WAVAW Rape Crisis Centre to learn more about how to make programs and services that support sex workers more relevant, accessible, and safe for trans, non-binary, and Two-Spirit (TN2S) sex workers.

TN2S people and sex workers are both more likely to experience economic marginalization, unmet healthcare needs, housing insecurity, gender-based violence, harassment, and stigma. These same experiences also make it more difficult to access service providers and other organizations that support sex workers. TN2S sex workers thus experience intersectional vulnerabilities and needs. Peers Victoria Resources Society remains the primary or only service contact for many local sex workers, however Peers Victoria struggles to reach TN2S sex workers with its services. Based on disclosures from service users in community discussions and a monthly TN2S dinner/support group, this is not due to a lack of need but rather a lack of consideration of TN2S sex workers' realities and safety in the design, delivery and environment of available programs and services. Despite Greater Victoria's size, few TN2S-specific services exist beyond social/support group meet-ups, and most are geared towards youth. As such, TN2S sex workers in need of healthcare, housing, violence prevention, or outreach often navigate their problems alone.

In hearing from more than 44 trans, non-binary, and Two-Spirit (TN2S) sex workers throughout the entire consultation process, a common theme emerged when discussing the sex work organizations, service providers, and other community supports that TN2S sex workers access. Despite the steps that some of these organizations have taken to better include and support TN2S sex workers, such as creating formal gender inclusion policies, most if not all focus group participants still did not feel like they belonged in these organizations or were adequately served by them.

Based in the context of Greater Victoria, Vancouver Island, and the Lower Mainland of British Columbia, the consultation process included three focus groups and an online survey conducted

with TN2S sex workers between December 2020 and May 2021. An additional survey was conducted in May and June 2021 with unhoused and precariously housed members of the general TN2S population of Greater Victoria, in recognition of the inaccessibility of virtual consultation processes for unhoused TN2S sex workers.

Using Peers Victoria as a case study, this report illuminates issues, barriers, and gaps that sex work organizations in Greater Victoria and the Lower Mainland present in serving these communities, with findings and recommendations broken down thematically.

Additionally, an internal audit of the program leads at Peers Victoria was conducted to assess where staff feel their services currently are, and to help formulate this report's recommendations based on what could be possible in better serving TN2S sex workers.

Finally, this report includes a brief review of relevant literature in this area, as well as the methodology employed in ensuring the consultation process remained peer-based, trauma-informed, and accountable to TN2S sex workers and their communities.

The consultation process was conducted by trans inclusion staff at Peers Victoria in partnership with WAVAW Rape Crisis Centre. Located on the unceded territories of the Lekwungen-speaking peoples, now known as the Esquimalt and Songhees Nations, Peers Victoria Resources Society is a multi-service peer-based organization that provides essential services to sex workers based in and around Greater Victoria. Founded in 1995, Peers Victoria provides a broad spectrum of services, including a drop-in center, a night outreach program, housing and health outreach, violence prevention, counselling, a small business training program, and community support groups. Founded in 1982 and located on unceded Coast Salish territories, WAVAW Rape Crisis Centre supports survivors of sexualized violence who experience gender marginalization, including all women and all trans, non-binary, and Two-Spirit people.

The consultation process was originally funded in 2020 through Trans Care BC's Provincial Peer Support and Mental Health and Well-Being Services Grant, with the intent to conduct focus groups in-person between April 2020 and March 2021, however the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic meant that the consultation process was delayed and redesigned to occur online over Zoom videoconferencing. The survey was hosted on Vancouver Coastal Health's website and shared over social media.

The consultation process and compiling of this report took place on the territories of the Lekwungen peoples, also known as the Esquimalt and Songhees Nations, as well as the territories of the WSANEC peoples, and was assisted by staff located on the territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh peoples. Further prioritization of Indigenous trans, non-binary and Two-Spirit sex workers and communities is needed in implementing the recommendations of this report.



# Methodology

The methods used in the community consultation process followed a qualitative framework, but left out the ethnographic analysis present in other similar studies. TN2S sex workers are often isolated from their communities due to various social factors, and may use terms outside of trans, non-binary, and Two-Spirit, to describe themselves. As such, it was important to approach the focus groups as spaces that participants could self-select into, rather than having staff who conducted the focus groups assess or restrict any participants' right to participate based on their gender identity and experience in the sex trade. Time and specific questions were set aside to focus on the needs of Indigenous trans, non-binary, and Two-Spirit participants, which again were answered through self-selection.

As supported by two articles reviewed (Lyons et al., 2015, 2016), further research should be conducted specifically with Two-Spirit sex workers, utilizing Indigenous research methods, in order to provide adequate space for their voices to be heard and needs to be communicated. While this consultation process did not specifically employ Indigenous research methods, the report findings and recommendations highlight that Indigenous trans, non-binary, and Two-Spirit sex workers must have more attention paid to their voices and have their needs prioritized in the implementation of these recommendations.

In speaking with focus group participants, and in analyzing survey responses, a quantitative analysis of the findings was not employed for several reasons. It is unclear how many TN2S sex workers live and work in and around Vancouver Island and the Lower Mainland of British Columbia in total; often various social pressures and lived experiences of oppression contribute to social isolation for this population. Further, drawing from the internal staff audit of Peers Victoria, some staff suggested that not all individuals who engage in sex work identify as sex workers or are interested in seeking support and services from organizations who serve sex workers. Instead of trying to gather a statistically representative sample of the population that would lend itself to quantitative analysis, it was important to engage in a deep qualitative analysis of the participants' and respondents' contributions in the process. These discussions of the unmet needs and issues the participants and respondents faced could then be coalesced into findings, and further into recommendations that organizations could undertake to effectively meet those needs and address those issues.

Finally, staff and participants agreed on the efficacy of having the entire consultation process delivered by trans and non-binary staff. While cisgender staff at Peers Victoria participated through the internal staff audit of the organization, keeping the delivery of the process closed to only TN2S people meant that staff and participants could often relate and connect on a deeper level about the topics discussed in the focus groups, and little time needed to be spent reviewing TN2S concepts and terms that might have been unfamiliar to a cisgender staff person.

# Definitions

## **Cisgender**

“Used in reference to people who feel their gender identity matches their assigned sex at birth; non-trans.” (Provincial Health Services Authority [PHSA], 2021, Cisgender section, para. 1).

## **Cisnormativity**

“The belief that people will live out the experience of their gender in the sex they were assigned at birth...; presumes that man and woman are the only viable gender categories.” (Shelton, J. & Dodd, S. J., 2020, 180).

## **Civilian**

Someone who does not participate in the sex trade; a non-sex worker. Can also refer to employment that a sex worker finds outside of the sex trade.

## **Colonialism**

“Colonialism is a system that occupies and usurps labor/land/resources from one group of people for the benefit of another.... There are different types of colonial projects.... In settler colonialism land, not labor, is key. In this system, Indigenous Peoples are literally replaced by settlers.... [S]ettler colonialism is not just a vicious thing of the past, such as the gold rush, but exists as long as settlers are living on appropriated land and thus exists today.” (Hurwitz, L. & Bourque, S., 2014, para. 1-2).

## **Dead name**

“Refers to the name that a person (often a trans person) was given at birth, but is no longer actively using. The heavy connotation of the word dead is intended to stress the inappropriateness and offensiveness of a person’s terminated name (which is typically associated with their birth-assigned gender, and therefore effectively misgenders them). It is not appropriate to ask people about their dead names. Some trans people use the term ‘birth name.’” (QMUNITY, 2018, 5).

## **Harm reduction**

“A set of practices, resources, politics, and support systems that are put in place and work to reduce harm. This framework is most often cited in relation to drug use and safer consumption practices, but can be applied to many of the patterns of behaviour that we take part in. Examples include seatbelts while driving, offering and education people about safer sex supplies, consuming water and food to reduce impacts of the environment and other stimulants, and many others.” (Anti-Violence Project, 2021, Harm reduction section, para. 1).

## **Intersectionality**

“Rooted in Black feminism and Critical Race Theory, intersectionality is a method and a disposition, a heuristic and analytic tool. In the 1989 landmark essay ‘Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,’ Kimberlé Crenshaw introduced the term to address the marginalization of Black women within not only antidiscrimination law but also in feminist and antiracist theory and politics. Two years later, Crenshaw...further elaborated the framework in ‘Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color,’ There, she employed intersectionality to highlight the ways in which social movement organization and advocacy around violence against women elided the vulnerabilities of women of color, particularly those from immigrant and socially disadvantaged communities.” (Carbado et al., 2013, 303-304).

## **Misgender**

“To refer to someone (especially a trans person) by using a word, like a pronoun or form of address (i.e. sir, ma’am), that does not correctly reflect the gender with which they identify. The act of misgendering can be done intentionally and with malice, or with ignorance; both are considered harmful.” (QMUNITY, 2018, 13).

## **Non-binary**

“This umbrella term refers to diverse people whose gender identity is neither female or male. Some individuals self-identify as non-binary, whereas, others may use terms such

as Gender Non-conforming, Genderqueer, or Agender. Non-binary people may or may not conform to societal expectations for their gender expression and gender role, and they may or may not seek gender-affirming medical or surgical care.” (PHSA, 2021, Non-binary section, para. 1).

### **Service provider**

In the context of this report, any organization or institution that provides services or delivers programs for sex workers and others with experience in the sex trade.

### **Sex worker**

“Sex worker” is a term used to refer to adults (19 years and older) who exchange sexual services for money which necessarily, but not exclusively, includes direct physical sexual contact with clients. Thus, sex workers are adults who earn at least part of their income through the sale of direct sexual contact. Included in this term are those who engage in outdoor street-level sex work, as well as those who work indoors in their homes, clients’ homes, or in commercial venues. The latter includes escorts, erotic masseurs, exotic dancers.... Having said this, not everyone in the industry identifies with this term, and some may prefer to call themselves something else. (Peers Victoria Resources Society, 2014, 1).

### **Trans**

“An umbrella term that describes a wide range of people whose gender identity differs from their assigned sex at birth.” (PHSA, 2021, Trans section, para. 1).

### **Transphobia**

“The fear and dislike of, and discrimination against, trans people. Transphobia can take the form of disparaging jokes, rejection, exclusion, denial of services, employment discrimination, name-calling and violence.” (QMUNITY).

### **Two-Spirit**

“‘Two-Spirit’ is a term used within some Indigenous communities, encompassing cultural, spiritual, sexual and gender identity. The term reflects complex Indigenous understandings of gender roles, spirituality, and the long history of sexual and gender diversity in Indigenous cultures. Individual terms and roles for Two-Spirit people are

specific to each nation. The word 'Two-Spirit' was created in the early 1990s, by a group of Two-Spirit community members and leaders. Due to its cultural, spiritual, and historical context, the concept of 'Two-Spirit' is to be used only by Indigenous people. However, not all Indigenous people who hold diverse sexual and gender identities consider themselves Two-Spirit, many identify themselves as LGBTQ+." (PHSA, 2021, Two-Spirit section, para. 1).

# Organizational Culture

On an individual level, it's clear that Peers Victoria staff, and staff at other organizations that support sex workers, care about their service users who are trans, non-binary, and Two-Spirit, and want to improve their service offerings for them. However, our focus group findings and internal audit interviews with Peers staff illuminate that the lack of organizational policies and staff training around TN2S inclusion and service mean that standards of care are still lacking and inconsistent both within organizations and throughout both sex work organizations and sex worker communities at large. More work in this area is needed to meaningfully include TN2S service users and to support staff to better provide services to TN2S service users.

## Inconsistency and Organizational Conflict in Service Delivery

Particularly within the focus groups, participants spoke of inconsistent services and inter-organizational conflict as recurring and major issues in feeling adequately supported by sex work organizations. For some participants, inconsistency looked like getting passed around from one service provider or organization to another in a referral loop, as well as a lack of follow-up and adequate case management from the services they did access. For others, hearing staff at one organization talk about conflicts and biases they had with another service provider reduced participants' trust in service providers in general, and discouraged them from accessing services they needed. It was clear from all focus groups that these kinds of staff and inter-organizational conflicts are readily observed and internalized by service users, which impacts their ability to trust and access services.

Another inter-organizational issue participants expressed was the siloing and isolation of programs and services. Participants asked that sex work organizations and service providers increase their collaboration and communication with each other to improve services and provide a sustainable framework in which to build relationships between TN2S communities and all organizations that provide services to sex worker and TN2S communities.

Finally, participants expressed that they felt interrogated by staff at certain organizations they accessed, and would have preferred to interact 1:1 with individual staff. Instead, participants often felt overwhelmed by staff interactions or disruptively passed along from one staff member to another without clarification on why this was happening. Some participants even described being banned from using services if they challenged transphobia in a sex work organization.

In moving forward with staff-service user interactions, and drawing from staff input in the internal audit of Peers Victoria, it is important for sex work organizations and other service providers to recognize that TN2S service users expect consistent and accessible services. For some TN2S service users, this might mean working specifically with TN2S staff at the organization; others would just appreciate TN2S-inclusive service in general, regardless of which staff deliver it. Staff training is needed at every level within organizations that serve TN2S sex workers, to ensure that all staff can effectively and inclusive serve and support their organization's service users.

## Staff Support and Training

In the internal audit of Peers Victoria, some staff noted that they often felt they were unable to effectively communicate or resolve conflicts with other staff and service users when transphobic actions, including misgendering, occurred. All Peers staff spoke capably of how they would respond to a hypothetical incident of transphobia, including asking for the TN2S service user's consent before taking any actions. However, most staff also asked for further support and training to improve staff knowledge and capacity in responding to transphobia, resolving conflicts, and providing TN2S-inclusive services.

One staff member noted that it felt difficult sometimes to know whether a transphobic incident was intentional or resulted from ignorance. Other staff spoke of the difficulties of serving many different, often conflicting, sex worker populations, such as in the case of Peers' night outreach service, where a pattern of conflict between cisgender female and cisgender male service users using Peers' van meant that staff didn't currently feel comfortable recommending the service for TN2S service users. Adequately serving TN2S service users alongside cisgender ones when conflicts arise must be remedied through public education efforts, as is spoken to later in this report, as well as by creating dedicated services for TN2S service users when conflicts cannot be resolved. This is further elaborated on in the Outreach section of the report.

Some staff also indicated that the lack of a Human Resources staff member at Peers meant that staff conflicts were not adequately addressed. As a result, some staff didn't feel comfortable confronting other staff members when misgendering and other casual incidents of transphobia occurred.

## Organizational Policies, Values, and Representation

Many responses in the focus groups and to the survey spoke of the apparent lack of prioritization of TN2S inclusion, as well as inclusion of other marginalized identities, at a policy level in sex work organizations. One respondent succinctly asked that TN2S inclusion and equity be included in organizations' values and mission statements, while other participants recommended that organizations actively commit to diversifying their staff to increase representation of TN2S people with lived experience in the sex trade.

Other participants brought up the impacts that trans-exclusionary radical feminism (TERF) and other forms of exclusion had in making sex work organizations, and other organizations that serve TN2S sex workers, unsafe or inaccessible for them. For some participants, this presented as non-binary service users being excluded from services that were supposedly trans-inclusive. Others mentioned that they felt excluded or worried about experiencing gatekeeping because they only engaged in sex work sporadically, or before they had transitioned. More explicit inclusion of all intersections of TN2S sex workers is necessary in both organizational policies and communications to remedy the impacts of TERF ideologies and other exclusionary approaches on the sex trade.

Participants frequently reiterated their frustrations engaging with sex work organizations as spaces continually dominated by white cisgender women. Peers Victoria staff agreed that the sector predominantly employs this demographic, and that more diverse representation is needed among staff. One survey respondent recommended that Peers and other sex work organizations' staff should consist of at least 50 percent Black and Indigenous folks and people of colour, and others felt that more representation was needed intersectionally to better serve the full range of sex workers.

In terms of the impact that this lack of representation had on the general reputations of sex work organizations, another survey respondent added that they knew of many TN2S sex workers who had been accused of abuse by cisgender service users or staff, and then blocked from accessing services without recourse, and that "many trans women are afraid of cis women weaponizing their tears to claim that trans women are dangerous, or somehow a threat to their safety."

Other participants summarized that they needed organizational policies and statements to be trauma-informed, peer-based, and recognize the complicated history of TN2S sex workers

being excluded from services to promote community accountability and allow room for service users to rebuild trust in sex work organizations.

## Indigenous Inclusion

Indigenous trans, non-binary, and Two-Spirit participants in the focus groups, as well as with Indigenous staff at Peers Victoria, reiterated that sex work organizations need to respect and honour the intersections of Indigenous trans, non-binary, and Two-Spirit sex workers by recognizing the unique pressures that colonialism places upon them. One staff member acknowledged that sex work continues to be stigmatized by some Indigenous communities due to systemic oppressions and discrimination put in place by colonization, and that organizations must listen to Indigenous trans, non-binary, and Two-Spirit sex workers to help address the isolation and violence they experience. Participants asked that organizations engage with the following recommendations in their work with Indigenous sex workers:

- Be actively anti-racist in all programming, and do not white-wash Indigenous service users.
- For settlers, learn about the roles your and your ancestors have played in colonizing Turtle Island.
- Engage in cultural humility training.

Indigenous Peers staff also emphasized the necessity of group learning environments, both for staff training and for service user peer networks, in order to provide space for cisgender staff and service users to overcome common myths they may have about TN2S identities, and practice their skills in using correct pronouns, terms, and other language. For more on supporting service user peer networks, see the Peer Networks section.

In general, Indigenous focus group participants and staff agreed that sex work organizations, and other organizations that support sex workers, need to be spaces where the impacts of colonization can be openly discussed, especially as they pertain to TN2S identities. Stigma and violence against TN2S sex workers thrives in silence, and adequately including Indigenous trans, non-binary, and Two-Spirit sex workers means providing space for hard conversations to take place in order for communities to heal and grow together.

## Service Inclusion and Dedicated TN2S Services

In the internal audit of Peers Victoria, staff mentioned that their current drop-in groups in general sometimes struggled to include TN2S sex workers and other sex workers whose work or identities fell outside of Peers' current programming. For example, the Indoor Workers group was noted as having issues with including sex workers who work online, including webcam workers. Several of the focus group participants discussed transitioning into online work due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the overlap between TN2S sex workers and online work is notable even prior to the pandemic due to increased accessibility and other factors, as is further discussed in the Employment and Finances section of this report.

These issues of inclusion speak to a larger question of approach to service provision and outreach at Peers and other organizations: whether to work to support TN2S sex workers and other underrepresented workers in accessing already established services, or to develop dedicated services specifically for them. The focus groups and survey responses concur that both approaches should be employed, and that organizations should convene a community advisory group or board composed of TN2S sex workers to guide the creation of any new dedicated services for TN2S individuals and communities, as well as advise the ongoing implementation of the recommendations in this report.

## Recommendations

### *Ongoing Commitments*

1. Prioritize hiring of TN2S staff, especially TN2S staff with lived experience in the sex trade and with diverse intersections of identity.

Many focus group participants and survey respondents agreed that increasing TN2S representation in staffing was vital to ensure that TN2S experiences are valued and highlighted. Peers Victoria staff generally agreed, with one staff member suggesting that a TN2S staff person with lived experience in the sex trade be attached to each of the organization's program areas.

2. Create a community advisory group composed of TN2S people with lived experience in the sex trade to guide the ongoing implementation of the recommendations of this report, and compensate advisory group members for their contributions.

### *Short-term*

3. Provide dedicated space for feedback from TN2S service users, especially when that feedback is about transphobia experienced within the organization.

When a service user is responding to transphobia, they are responding to something that generally impacts them more than the organization, and the power imbalance in the service provider-service user relationship can compound feelings of distrust and experiences of oppression.

4. Implement group staff training on trauma-informed service for TN2S service users, and cultural humility when working with Indigenous service users.

Sex work organizations need to be safe places for TN2S staff to work, as well as TN2S sex workers to use services of. Focusing on trauma-informed service training moves beyond the common framework of “diversity training,” which some focus group participants felt was a token and ineffective way for organizations to address systemic issues. Implementing cultural humility training sends a message that Indigenous service user voices are heard, and valued by the organization.

### *Medium-term*

5. Redraft all relevant policies and organizational documents (values, mission statements, non-discrimination policies, etc.) with TN2S values, safety, and service needs in mind, including decolonization.

Formalizing an organization’s prioritization of TN2S sex workers and communities sends a strong message that TN2S lives and experiences are important to the organization, and contributes to much-needed cultural shifts against transphobia.

# Healthcare

Overall, focus group participants and survey respondents spoke of needing their healthcare services (inclusive of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health) to be more knowledgeable in TN2S health issues and needs. Further, that these services needed to be capable of meeting TN2S sex workers' accessibility needs in their delivery. This lack of knowledge and accessibility was present at all levels of interactions with healthcare services, from participants perpetually being deadnamed and misgendered by receptionists at doctor's offices, to doctors and other healthcare providers denying or reducing service when they found out participants were TN2S and/or sex workers.

*"When my service provider looks like me, half of the work is already done."*

- focus group participant

When asked what safe, accessible, and relevant health services would look like for them, participants agreed that they would appreciate being able to see healthcare providers who were trans, non-binary and/or Two-Spirit themselves. Also, for service providers to be informed and non-judgmental when it comes to serving sex workers. Put simply by one of the participants: "When my service provider looks like me, half of the work is already done." Anecdotally, while the participants and focus group facilitators could think of some counsellors and peer support providers in the area who were trans, non-binary, or Two-Spirit, no one knew of any TN2S-identifying doctors or other healthcare providers in Greater Victoria.



Some participants also spoke to the need to have their general healthcare needs treated similarly to those of cisgender patients. The term "trans broken leg syndrome" was brought up during the consultations, a phenomenon wherein TN2S patients who attempt to seek care from doctors for issues that have no relation to being trans, non-binary, or Two-Spirit (i.e., having a broken leg) are instead turned away or put on referral lists, with the explanation or excuse that their doctor cannot provide care for them because they do not specialize in TN2S healthcare. At the end of the day, this idea, that certain common ailments are beyond the scope of a general

practitioner's capability due to the gender identity of the patient, is rooted in cultural stigma and discrimination.

This barrier to receiving care was also often compounded by the stigma of being a sex worker. Many of the participants spoke of feeling like they could not talk to their doctors about any healthcare needs related to sex work. One participant mentioned that they felt more comfortable being supported by peers, even if they did not have formal healthcare training, rather than seeing yet another "white middle-class" healthcare provider who they felt did not have any shared life experience with them.

Other participants spoke of the extra steps they had to go through in their head when receiving care from service providers who did not share their identities or have shared life experience. These included preparing for how a service provider might react to finding out they were trans and a sex worker, worrying they would experience discrimination from their service provider, and feeling burnout from performing "straightness" (i.e. cisnormativity) to receive better care.

## Mental Health

Several participants spoke of experiencing continued treatment of being TN2S as a mental health issue. One shared they had been diagnosed as bipolar when they first sought medical assistance with transitioning, and that they had eventually needed to leave the city they were living in to find adequate healthcare.

When comparing these stories to the previously mentioned "trans broken leg syndrome" phenomenon, a theme emerged: the mental health needs of TN2S sex workers, while of course compounded by their experiences of being TN2S and engaged in sex work, might not necessarily overlap with their gender-affirming care needs. Rather, many of the issues these participants faced in receiving care came down to ignorance or even an unwillingness of healthcare providers to believe them and to "meet them where they were at" with respect and empathy. One survey respondent described being called "delusional and out-of-touch with reality" by their psychologist for identifying as non-binary, and other participants spoke generally of feeling distrust and a loss of faith in mental healthcare providers.

Even with Gender Identity Disorder being fully declassified in the DSM-V, and greater societal awareness of TN2S identities, it is clear from these stories that many healthcare providers have not caught up to current standards of care, and that more advocacy and intervention is needed

from sex work organizations and other service providers to ensure mental healthcare outcomes improve for TN2S sex workers.

## Patient Advocacy

Overall, participants spoke of feeling a lack of control over their healthcare, whether that included appointments where three residents or nurses were in the room with the doctor for training, or feeling like information was being withheld by healthcare providers which decreased their ability to provide informed consent.

Furthermore, participants voiced experiencing a lack of advocacy from sex work organizations and other service providers when they ran into issues with healthcare providers. More work in this area is necessary to improve organizations' capacity to advocate for their service users.

In discussing their ideal ways to be advocated for and self-advocate for their health, participants in the TN2S sex worker consultation, as well as participants in the consultation with unhoused TN2S people, suggested the creation of a centralized and moderated online guide or resource in which to share and access information about TN2S healthcare and gender-affirming care. Participants noted that they had shared and received information from their peers about gender-affirming care, especially hormone replacement therapy and surgery, that often did not line up with what their doctors had told them, which reduced their trust in healthcare providers overall.

## Spiritual Health

In terms of spiritual health, participants spoke of the need for spaces and communities of spirituality in which they could talk about their experiences as TN2S sex workers, without fear of judgment or emotional abuse in the forms of spiritual bypassing, such as spiritual or religious leaders using their justify transphobia or to avoid accountability for microaggressions. More consultation is warranted in this area, to improve healthcare services holistically for all sex workers interested in seeking care around their spiritual health.

## Confidentiality and Duty to Report

Several participants spoke of their need to be able to access healthcare services anonymously, or without using identification, to avoid stigma. Provincial and health-region based identification

systems are already a minefield for TN2S people due to the difficulty many experience in trying to change their names and gender markers. The participants spoke further of the hyper-surveillance they felt from these systems as trans, non-binary and Two-Spirit sex workers, such as not being able to access their medical history without using their BC Services Card and not being able to receive STI testing anonymously.

One participant spoke directly to the fears they had around crisis support and being reported, saying “I want to know that I’m not going to be taken off to jail if I go to the hospital.” This speaks to the need for more clarity amongst service providers, and clear communication to service users of what duty to report means for them, as well as further advocacy to increase agency and options for patients experiencing mental health crises or undergoing psychiatric holds.

## Recommendations

### *Ongoing Commitments*

1. Connect staff with Trans Care BC health navigators and other knowledgeable advocates to improve healthcare services for TN2S sex workers.

Health navigation staff at Trans Care BC can help organizations and their service users to find new healthcare providers, advocate with current healthcare providers, or provide information on gender-affirming care and other healthcare for TN2S individuals. Other resources may exist locally that organizations can connect with to support their service users.

2. Commit to further advocacy for TN2S sex workers to address stigma and ignorance in healthcare provider-patient relationships.

In discussing how organizations can advocate with doctors and other healthcare provider, it must be recognized that most TN2S sex worker health needs can be carried out by general practitioners. More advocacy is needed from sex work organizations and other organizations to ensure that TN2S sex workers are adequately supported with their healthcare needs in a timely fashion, and not constantly referred to specialists or other doctors by medical staff who can meet their needs.

3. Collaborate with Indigenous health organizations to advocate with and support Indigenous trans, non-binary, and Two-Spirit sex workers in improving their healthcare outcomes and access.
4. Investigate specific healthcare options and services, such as funding and peer support, for Indigenous trans, non-binary, and Two-Spirit service users.

### *Medium-term*

5. Create, or support the creation of, a moderated online guide or resource in which TN2S sex workers and other community members can share and access information about TN2S healthcare and gender-affirming care.

As mentioned above, some focus group participants suggested the creation of an online guide in which TN2S community members could share and receive information from their peers about gender-affirming care. Currently, peer-to-peer sharing of healthcare information occurs informally through Facebook groups and other interactions. Similar resources, like Trans Care BC's website, contain broad information about TN2S healthcare, but provide little room for community members to submit their own observations.

### *Long-term*

6. Conduct further consultation with TN2S sex workers and other service users in the area of spiritual health.

Several focus group participants recognized that spiritual health was an area in which they were underserved, due to transphobia and stigma against sex workers in spiritual and religious institutions and communities. While the participants could not determine what kind of spiritual health service or program they would benefit from, they did note that they would like to see more support from organizations in this area.

# Housing

Throughout the focus groups and survey responses, participant concerns and issues related to housing fell into one of two broad categories:

- Finding, and keeping, affordable housing
- The need for advocacy and education with housing service providers and landlords



In trying to find housing in Greater Victoria and the Lower Mainland of British Columbia, housing insecurity overshadowed many interactions that participants spoke of. Not only were they trying to find and keep their housing in an untenable rental climate, but their experiences were compounded by being TN2S and sex workers.

Some participants mentioned that issues with other residents impacted their ability to feel safe in their housing. Participants complained of being stared at in common areas, having little or no privacy in their living spaces, and suggested that their neighbours could benefit from TN2S inclusivity training. Others spoke to the overwhelming feeling of living in constant fear of eviction due to their identities and work. Still others spoke of negative interactions with law enforcement, such as police assuming they were criminals because they lived in low-income areas. This is further elaborated on in the section on Criminalization.

Several participants also spoke to the complexities of working out of their home, such as fearing that other residents or their landlord would call the police on them, even though their home might be the safest place for them to work. Childcare was also brought up when discussing working from home, as a service that was desperately needed.

Some participants expressed a desire for further advocacy from sex work organizations, as navigating legal processes with landlords who might stigmatize, disrespect, or even harass or become violent with them was difficult.

Other participants called for more ways to hold landlords accountable for discrimination and other actions.

One participant said they would appreciate living with other TN2S or cisgender sex workers, to connect through shared experience and reduce harm through peer connection and care.

Furthermore, participants spoke of being burnt out from continually needing case workers' assistance in order to keep their housing. Similarly, in the internal audit, Peers Victoria housing support workers mentioned that they often had landlords reject potential renters based solely on the stigma that comes with working with a housing support worker, before the landlord even knew that the potential renter was a sex worker.

It is clear that a multi-faceted approach is needed to not only improve housing outcomes for TN2S sex workers, but also all clients served by sex work organizations and other service providers in general.

## Shelters & Supportive Housing

In discussing shelters and supportive housing options, participants agreed that shelters were not safe spaces for TN2S people, listing policy and procedural barriers as basic as woman-only shelters excluding non-binary and gender-nonconforming people, to outright abuse and mistreatment that they had experienced at shelters. Several participants said that they felt scared or were unwilling to access shelters and used couch-surfing or other stop-gap measures instead to meet their housing needs. One participant said they would rather “die under a bridge” than go to a shelter that would mistreat and discriminate against them.

In addition to discrimination, participants named other barriers to using shelters and similar options; such as shelters typically not allowing pets, which might force a TN2S person stay in unsafe living conditions rather than seek help at a shelter. One participant also said they were worried about their kids being exposed to illicit drugs at the single room occupancy (SRO) housing they lived in.

Conversely, a participant in the focus group with unhoused and precariously housed members of the general TN2S population spoke of being treated well at a woman-only shelter, and that the fact that the shelter explicitly states on its website that it includes trans unhoused people went a long way to building trust. At the same time, this explicit statement of inclusion is not the norm across shelters and housing providers in the area, and individual experiences of inclusion or discrimination may vary depending on the intersections and circumstances of a situation. Even the aforementioned participant said they still experienced anxiety and fear of being

discriminated against by their shelter due to the systemic nature and omnipresence of transphobia and discrimination in housing.

Additionally, a participant in the consultation with unhoused TN2S individuals spoke of the difficulty of depending on staff at their temporary housing site for food, and would appreciate more support in this area, such as a cooking workshop to improve their autonomy.

When discussing shelters and supportive housing, Peers Victoria housing support workers, as well as Peers staff working at temporary housing sites, echoed participant concerns about the general inaccessibility of housing for TN2S sex workers, and said that while interpersonal discrimination between residents at the motels has not notably occurred, the framework of shelters and supportive housing in Greater Victoria is based in systemic discrimination, with services still being based in serving cisgender male residents as the default.

Staff, as well as a participant in the unhoused TN2S focus group, said that BC Housing could be doing a lot more to support unhoused and precariously housed TN2S people. Even LGBTQ2S+ unhoused people in general are not prioritized at a systemic level by BC Housing and other housing providers, and waiting on BC Housing's registry for years is even more untenable for TN2S unhoused people than it is for cisgender people, given the stigma and discrimination that TN2S people experience.

In the internal audit of Peers, one staff member noted that they had advocated for cisgender service users at the executive level with another service provider in the area. This speaks to the ability for sex work organizations to leverage their existing relationships to improve housing outcomes for TN2S service users at a systemic level.

## Recommendations

### *Ongoing Commitments*

1. Listen to TN2S residents at shelters and supportive housing sites and stay abreast of their needs.
2. Advocate for housing providers and other service providers at shelters and supportive housing sites to undertake learning opportunities in TN2S-inclusive service provision.

3. Advocate with landlords and tenancy boards and organizations to ensure accountability is held if TN2S sex workers and other service users are denied housing for discriminatory reasons.
4. Engage with housing affordability advocacy at relevant local and regional or provincial levels, and ensure that the needs of unhoused and precariously housed TN2S sex workers and other members of TN2S communities are centered and prioritized in any demands or other advocacy efforts.

#### *Short-term*

5. Organize group learning opportunities for cisgender residents at housing sites to improve their understandings of and relation to TN2S residents.

#### *Medium-term*

6. Organize learning opportunities, such as cooking workshops, at housing sites to provide residents with skills to build autonomy and control over how they interact with the space.
7. Work in collaboration with other service providers to create non-discrimination policy frameworks for staff and residents at housing sites.

Having a formal policy at housing sites would enable staff and residents to be able to refer to policy in the case of transphobic incidents, and reinforce that TN2S individuals, and sex workers in general, belong in these spaces.

## Peer Networks

Primarily the first focus group focused on peer networks, but they remained a consistent theme throughout the entire consultation process. Focus group participants and survey respondents both spoke of the need for more spaces to connect with other TN2S sex workers, learn from each other, and share strategies to make their work safer.

### Knowledge Sharing

In discussing their existing peer networks, participants said that when they had spaces (both online and in-person) in which to connect with other TN2S sex workers, they learned much from their peers that they would not have learned elsewhere, such as:

- how to use social media and payment apps to advertise and conduct their work more safely online;
- how to avoid online scams that target sex workers; how to stay safe when you cannot adequately screen your clients;
- substance use harm reduction strategies, like safer injections and drug screening; and
- self-love; how to manage the emotional, mental, or spiritual health impacts of the stigma that sex workers and TN2S people experience.



Some participants did, however, express difficulty in connecting with and learning from their peers. For them, other sex workers had sometimes been unwilling to open up and talk about their dates and other experiences in the industry. These participants also said that they were unsure how to connect with other sex workers, and that they had not had the space or time to develop their networks or a positive reputation in their community in order for other sex workers to feel safe in sharing their experiences with them.

Other participants described difficulty in sharing their or others experiences for fear of breaking confidentiality or exposing peers to violence. This speaks to the need for TN2S-specific spaces, where TN2S service users can share information without worrying about censoring themselves, or having to explain issues specific to TN2S sex work such as fetishization, for cisgender sex workers in the room.

Several of the participants spoke extensively of their ideas on how to improve TN2S sex worker peer networks in which to connect and share information. One idea proposed was an online social platform in which TN2S sex workers could gather and chat that would require membership to access in order to ensure safety. Other participants suggested that organizations should host a centralized and moderated forum or list where local TN2S-identified or TN2S-friendly service providers such as counsellors could be promoted, and other information that would otherwise be shared by in-person word-of-mouth could be shared, such as which services are unsafe or inaccessible for TN2S sex workers.

## Spaces to Connect In

The COVID-19 pandemic has also limited peer networking, which further impacted participants' ability to connect and learn from their peers. For some participants, in-person meetings were the only way they could connect with peers, as online spaces to connect in either did not exist or were inaccessible to them.



Throughout the focus groups and survey responses, participants repeatedly stated that they needed spaces in which to connect with each other as peers. This included a need both for more online spaces, which remove location-specific barriers and can better preserve service users' privacy or anonymity, and for more in-person spaces, which can be more accessible for unhoused and other people with barriers to accessing online spaces.

When asked how sex work organizations could create and facilitate spaces for peer connection, participants listed ideas such as:

- creating more in-person and online social groups for TN2S sex workers to connect weekly or every other week, with a balance between groups focused on the lived reality of sex work and groups in which TN2S sex workers could just connect as people
- actively promoting TN2S sex worker programs and services on social media

- promoting social groups offline through more robust outreach activities: mailing lists, emails, phone calls with current or potential service users
- promoting social groups at shelters by having them added to shelter resource lists and meal calendars
- utilizing outdoor spaces for social get-togethers in warm/summer weather
- having an “idea box” or other anonymous way for service users to suggest programming or activity ideas

Participants also discussed the potential for more structured and facilitated groups for TN2S sex workers, such as facilitated healing circles, in which small groups of service users could share their experiences and build trust in each other.

*“When I see the same people accessing spaces, I know they’re in the community—not a cop or a bot just trying to figure out what the sex workers are up to so they can arrest us more easily.”*

- focus group participant

Several participants said they would like to learn trans and disability-inclusive self defense in a group setting, as a way to establish peer connections, learn together, and also potentially reduce harm. One participant suggested sex work organizations host professional development and learning opportunities for TN2S sex workers in areas such as BDSM and shibari, in order provide space for skill-building, mentorship, and peer connection based around what sex work looks like in practice. Other participants suggested that skill-building in a peer context could be facilitated through establishing a community garden for TN2S sex workers. One added: “There are so many basic, nice things people do that are hard to access when you’re ostracized.”

In discussing Peers Victoria’s drop-in services, one staff member attested to the need for a dedicated drop-in for TN2S sex workers, as the general drop-in is often busy and overwhelmed with cisgender service users looking for support.

One participant concluded their discussion of peer networking by reiterating the value of in-person support spaces and the difficulty with building trust online: “When I see the same people accessing spaces, I know they’re in the community—not a cop or a bot just trying to figure out what the sex workers are up to so they can arrest us more easily.”

## Recommendations

### *Ongoing Commitments*

1. Promote peer social groups through more robust outreach methods, including emails and phone calls with current or potential service users, as well as promote at shelters by having groups added to shelter resource lists and meal calendars.

### *Short-term*

2. Create an “idea” box or other anonymous way for service users to suggest programming or activity ideas.

### *Medium-term*

3. Create both in-person and online peer social groups for TN2S sex workers to connect in.

Creating more spaces to connect in weekly or every other week will increase the ways in which service users can engage with the organization and each other.

Based on participant findings, the groups should be a balance between groups focused on the lived reality of sex work, and groups in which TN2S sex workers can just connect as people over casual activities like board games, or skill-building.

### *Long-term*

4. Host or support TN2S sex workers to host an online forum where TN2S sex workers can promote TN2S-friendly services and warn about services that are unsafe or inaccessible for TN2S sex workers.

Forums like the one suggested by participants already exist in various, decentralized locations online such as in Facebook groups, and sex work organizations and other organizations should assess how they can align with and support these kinds of peer networks, especially as they are often run by TN2S community members without pay or any kind of organizational support currently.

# Outreach

When discussing service provision by sex work organizations, “outreach” generally refers to the in-person outreach activities that organizations conduct with sex workers who cannot access drop-in services or are otherwise isolated from other service delivery methods. In-person outreach services also allow organizations to provide support during common working hours for sex workers, such as at night, as opposed to drop-in services that run during the day.

In the context of this report, “outreach” also includes any outreach activities that take place online or via word-of-mouth in TN2S and sex worker communities. Similar strategies of inclusion and dedicated service are necessary in order to make both in-person and online/word-of-mouth outreach activities more safe, accessible, and relevant for TN2S sex workers.

## In-person Outreach

In the internal audit of Peers Victoria, staff noted that the organization’s mobile night outreach service sometimes encountered conflicts between cisgender female and cisgender male service users. As a result of these conflicts, staff did not feel comfortable recommending the service for TN2S service users at the time of the audit.

This issue also references the dichotomy between broadening current service inclusion and creating dedicated services for TN2S service users, as previously mentioned in the Peer Networks section of this report. When discussing established in-person outreach services, supporting TN2S sex workers requires training cisgender staff and hiring TN2S staff to provide services in trauma-informed and peer-based ways. This recommendation is also echoed in the Organizational Culture section of this report. Additionally, this report recommends that organizations develop and pilot dedicated in-person outreach services for TN2S sex workers, and work in collaboration with the TN2S communities in their area to ensure any services developed are accountable to who they serve.

## Word-of-Mouth

For some participants, the focus groups were the first time they had interacted with Peers Victoria, despite living and working within the organization’s service area. This speaks to the need for better outreach and communication of services with TN2S communities. This also

indicates a need to improve an organization's word-of-mouth reputation in order for TN2S sex workers to feel safe and included in accessing their services.

*“Word-of-mouth travels faster than any sign on an organization's door.”*

- focus group participant

In the internal audit, Peers staff spoke of the difficulty of sharing and promoting Peers drop-in services, groups, and other programs with the TN2S community, and suggested that this was due to the lack of previous Peers work and outreach in this area. Put simply, Peers' history of relative inaccessibility for TN2S communities had created a lack of word-of-mouth, which could even create a negative perception for potential service users. As one participant said, “word-of-mouth travels faster than any sign on an organization's door”; while another stated, “I rely on my sisters to tell me what's safe for trans folks,” alluding further to the interconnectedness of word-of-mouth and peer networks.

One idea that came out of the focus groups to improve word-of-mouth and general outreach was to record and share testimonials from TN2S service users on an organization's website, in order to better demonstrate its capacity and ability to support TN2S sex workers.

## Online Promotion

In discussing outreach online, focus group participants asked that organizations commit to reaching out to TN2S sex workers in more diverse ways to increase accessibility and inclusion. Some suggestions included promoting services on Instagram, TikTok, and other platforms that are more predominantly used by younger sex workers than Facebook. Focus group participants also recommended creating a mailing list for the organization for TN2S sex workers who do not use social media.

Participants, as well as Peers Victoria staff, spoke of wanting organizations to promote TN2S events and issues more often on social media, such as promoting important dates like Trans Day of Remembrance and Trans Day of Visibility, and including intersectionally diverse representations of TN2S sex workers in social media posts.

## Recommendations

### *Ongoing Commitments*

1. Commit to further outreach on social media platforms to promote TN2S services, events, and issues.

### *Medium-term*

2. Create a mailing list to promote current service offerings and upcoming events or activities.

Several participants communicated that they would appreciate hearing about service offerings over email, especially for service users who do not use social media.

3. Record and share testimonials from TN2S service users.

If there are any TN2S sex workers who wish to share their experience with an organization, their stories will contribute to positive word-of-mouth for the organization and signal its commitment to supporting TN2S sex workers.

### *Long-term*

4. Develop a dedicated in-person outreach service for and with TN2S sex workers and communities.

Having a dedicated service that is developed in collaboration with local TN2S communities will increase the ways that TN2S sex workers can engage with service providers and other organizations. It will also further signal an organization's commitment to serve TN2S sex workers and contribute to positive word-of-mouth.

## Harm Reduction

Harm reduction was a prominent theme that wove throughout responses from all focus group participants and survey respondents. For some, harm reduction meant having spaces to connect with other sex workers, especially other TN2S sex workers, in order to compare notes and strategies how to make their work activities safer. For others, access to safer substance use supplies and other resources was vitally needed to reduce harm in their lives.

### Bad Date Reporting

Bad date reporting includes systems that sex workers can use to share violence they have experienced on the job with other sex workers to increase community safety and reduce potential harm. Some participants and respondents said they benefited from using Peers Victoria's bad date list; others indicated that they would like additional support given to this area.

One participant even suggested the creation of a "known safe client list" or client rating system in order to further reduce harm and make their work safer. While creating a list of and tracking safe clients for TN2S sex workers to engage could carry some privacy and other legal ramifications, the core message of this idea, that TN2S sex workers should be able to connect and share information with each other on how to make their work safer (whether or not that goes as far as tracking/referring safe clients for each other) was echoed by most participants. This is spoken to more in the Peer Networks section.

Additionally, one survey respondent mentioned that they would like to be able to call a sex work organization if they were going on a date, to be able to provide their location and the timeframe to ensure safety.

### Substance Use

Under the umbrella of harm reduction, several participants spoke of the need for further support around substance use, saying that they still felt the impact of societal stigma and needed the ability to use freely and in a safe environment. As well, one of the participants in the consultation with unhoused TN2S people spoke of needing support with managing drug withdrawal and detoxification.

*“I can send a message to get fentanyl to my door, but nothing else; no food, harm reduction, emergency supplies, safer sex supplies, or peer support.”*

- focus group participant

Some suggested that a mobile service to deliver supplies and other supports would be more accessible than a drop-in service, one commenting: “I can send a message to get fentanyl to my door, but nothing else; no food, harm reduction, emergency supplies, safer sex supplies, or peer support.” While Peers Victoria and other organizations do offer mobile harm reduction services, the fact that none of the focus group participants or survey respondents had accessed these services suggests that TN2S inclusion efforts must address them as well, in addition to further communication and promotion of services.

## Recommendations

### *Ongoing Commitments*

1. Assess the accessibility of mobile harm reduction services for TN2S sex workers, and commit to promoting these services further with TN2S communities.

### *Medium-term*

2. Create a “known safe client list” or other tracking and rating system to complement current bad date reporting systems.
3. Establish a phone call or text service that allows sex workers to contact an organization to provide their location and the timeframe of their date to help increase safety while working.

## Public Education

Both focus group participants and survey respondents spoke extensively of the public education they felt sex work organizations should be carrying out in their communities, as well as in lobbying for change at political and legislative levels.

When asked what areas they'd like sex work organizations to focus on in their efforts, many topics were named, but two common themes emerged:

- Explicitly recognizing cisgender privilege and dominance in sex work organizations, how that impacts interpersonal dynamics with TN2S service users, and how cisgender dominated organizations (particularly cis/white/female) provide a breeding ground for TERF ideologies
- Broadening sex work public education and advocacy to include and collaborate with anti-capitalist and poverty reduction movements, including lobbying for universal basic income



As well, some participants spoke of the need for more collaboration between organizations and the state to support incarcerated sex workers and TN2S individuals.

Participants also spoke of the need for non-sex worker (“civilian”) TN2S communities to do better at including and supporting TN2S sex workers. Among TN2S communities, social, racial, and class stratification occurs as TN2S sex workers who are low-income and/or racialized experience more barriers to accessing to gender-affirming care, healthcare, housing, employment, and other opportunities to live more safely. In general, the participants wanted civilian TN2S communities to recognize that liberation and safety for TN2S sex workers contributes to overall liberation for TN2S individuals and communities.

Above all, the participants reiterated that they wanted TN2S people who were not sex workers, as well as cisgender sex workers, to recognize that TN2S sex workers are people who deserve respect and empathy. Further to that, the participants stated that they needed sex work

organizations to recognize the severe impacts of transphobia on TN2S sex workers, whether it comes from sex work organizations or from others. Rather than repeating words about solidarity, the participants wanted to see actual actions against transphobia and advocacy against hate and discrimination at provincial and federal levels, using the base that sex work organizations and their allies already have to advocate for sex worker rights in general.

The internal audit of Peers Victoria demonstrated that staff have already been engaging in collaborative advocacy with other sex work organizations and other service providers to support service users at supportive housing sites, so it is clear there is room for Peers and other sex work organizations to extend this level of advocacy to TN2S service users, as well as expand it through both organizational relationships and public education.

## Anti-Capitalist and Poverty Reduction Movements

In discussing public education and advocacy, some focus group participants brought up universal basic income (UBI), and asked that sex work organizations recognize the role they can play in advocating for supports like UBI through aligning themselves with anti-capitalist movements and other campaigns focused on poverty reduction.

One participant noted that moving towards a model that recognizes “we shouldn’t have to work,” regardless of if that meant sex work or working a “civilian” job, could be a place to start in aligning sex work organizations with anti-capitalism and poverty reduction.

Refocusing on abolition of capitalist (as well as classist and ableist) ideas of work could also be a space to promote class solidarity between sex workers and low-income non-sex workers.

## Recommendations

### *Ongoing Commitments*

1. Leverage existing advocacy efforts at all levels to advocate with TN2S sex workers and against transphobia.
2. Confront white supremacist and TERF ideas and ideologies at sex work organizations and other service providers and organizations.

Working against white and cisgender dominance in organizations includes diversifying staff, as is recommended in the Organizational Culture section of this

report. It also means being able to have open conversations about the impacts of racial and gendered privilege and marginalization on organizations and those they serve.

3. Organizations that work specifically with overall LGBTQ+ populations and communities must listen to and make space for the needs of TN2S sex workers in their programs. Organizations must also use public education and advocacy to speak out against the social, racial, and class exclusion of TN2S sex workers from LGBTQ+ communities and public spaces.
4. Broaden sex work public education and advocacy to include and collaborate with anti-capitalist and poverty reduction movements, including lobbying for universal basic income.

#### *Medium-term*

5. Establish a TN2S visibility campaign in collaboration with TN2S sex workers to increase awareness and decrease stigma.

One idea suggested by participants was to create a billboard promoting TN2S and sex worker awareness and acceptance.

## Employment & Finances

Some of the focus group participants and survey respondents spoke of working “civilian” (that is, non-sex worker) jobs in addition to their sex work in order to make enough money to survive. They also noted that the COVID-19 pandemic and associated social distancing precautions had limited their access to clients, forcing them to rely even further on civilian employment. Sex work organizations, and other service providers and organizations that support TN2S sex workers, have a role to play in supporting TN2S sex workers to find and keep safe civilian employment, in order to improve their living conditions and healthcare outcomes.

This work must at the same time be conducted with care and with recognition that previous work to support sex workers in civilian employment has often existed within abolitionist frameworks of “leaving the sex trade,” rather than reducing harm by supporting sex workers to make their own decisions about their employment. Indeed, many participants and respondents spoke of the benefits of sex work, such as that it was more accessible as it allowed them to determine their own work schedule and location. They also noted that civilian work was often harmful due to employer stigma and discrimination against TN2S people and sex workers and tokenization of TN2S employees.

In supporting TN2S sex workers to have more control over their dependence on work, whether it be sex work or a civilian job, organizations can engage in the long-term with anti-capitalist and poverty reduction movements, as discussed further in the Public Education section of this report. Organizations can also implement some more immediate strategies as suggested by the participants and respondents, such as:

- providing TN2S-inclusive business classes to promote skill-building and self-employability for TN2S sex workers, and;
- working with employment services such as WorkBC to improve accessibility and inclusion for TN2S sex workers.

### Finances

On a similar note to employment, most of the participants and respondents voiced concerns around their finances, ranging from not being able to access Employment Insurance to

supplement their income, to having difficulty finding other avenues of financial support beyond sex work. Some respondents mentioned benefitting from Peers Victoria's tax support services.

As well, TN2S sex workers who had moved their work online noted that cam sites and other online avenues in which to work tended to take most of their money, or limit the range that they could charge clients.

Overall, the participants agreed that they would benefit from having access to financial supports that were not tied to requirements that sex workers as a population have difficulty meeting, like income in civilian jobs, as is the case with Employment Insurance.

## Recommendations

### *Medium-term*

1. Establish and/or promote access to financial supports, such as funds, for TN2S sex workers.
2. Provide TN2S-inclusive business classes to promote skill-building and self-employability for TN2S sex workers.
3. Work with employment services such as WorkBC to improve accessibility and inclusion for TN2S sex workers, such as a dedicated employment program.

## Criminalization

Many focus group participants and survey respondents voiced concerns about interacting with law enforcement and engaging in sex work under the current legislative framework. This is hardly surprising; sex workers are already an overpoliced population, the intersection of being trans, non-binary, and/or Two-Spirit adds further levels of marginalization and policing from both law enforcement and society at large. As such, it is understandable that TN2S sex workers fear criminalization.

Some participants felt their concerns could be remedied through interacting with individual liaison officers, or through having an advocate at the sex work organization that could interact with police on TN2S sex workers' behalf. However, others stated that they had no interest in interacting with law enforcement at all due to prior negative experiences.

Some participants felt they needed to see more advocacy from sex work organizations against current legislative frameworks. Participants who had engaged in online sex work voiced frustration in navigating the impacts of American legislation (SESTA/FOSTA) on their work.

Other participants described uncertainty or unclarity about the relationship between law enforcement and sex work organizations, even saying they were scared to access services in person, that they worried that police officers would be present at an organization's office. If TN2S sex workers perceive, or need, sex work organizations and other service providers to be a refuge from policing and criminalization, they will lose trust in organizations if their relationships to law enforcement are unclear or not explained.

## Safety and Security

Some participants in the TN2S sex worker focus group, as well as the focus group with unhoused TN2S people in general, spoke of the need for security in feeling safe in public spaces, even if it was coming from police. While police continue to be a source of violence and criminalization of TN2S sex workers at individual and systemic levels, some participants felt some benefit from formal connections with police liaison officers that were trained and informed in sex worker issues.

## Recommendations

### *Ongoing Commitments*

1. Ensure TN2S service users explicitly consent to being connected with liaison officers, and provide them with options and control over the presence of liaison officers in drop-in groups and other activities that TN2S sex workers may use, such as requiring that liaison officers attend in plainclothes and only attend for specific appointments or engagements.
2. Increase accountability of policing by providing a staff advocate or witness for police interactions with TN2S sex workers, such as when filing police reports about bad dates.

### *Short-term*

3. Clarify the relationship between organizations that serve TN2S sex workers and the police by sharing information about this relationship on organizational websites and in communications with TN2S sex workers and communities.

# Summary of Recommendations

## *Ongoing Commitments*

1. Prioritize hiring of TN2S staff, especially TN2S staff with lived experience in the sex trade and with diverse intersections of identity.
2. Create a community advisory group composed of TN2S people with lived experience in the sex trade to guide the ongoing implementation of the recommendations of this report, and compensate advisory group members for their contributions.
3. Connect staff with Trans Care BC health navigators and other knowledgeable advocates to improve healthcare services for TN2S sex workers.
4. Commit to further advocacy for TN2S sex workers to address stigma and ignorance in healthcare provider-patient relationships.
5. Collaborate with Indigenous health organizations to advocate with and support Indigenous trans, non-binary, and Two-Spirit sex workers in improving their healthcare outcomes.
6. Investigate specific healthcare options and services, such as funding and peer support, for Indigenous trans, non-binary, and Two-Spirit service users.
7. Listen to TN2S residents at shelters and supportive housing sites and stay abreast of their needs.
8. Advocate for housing providers and other service providers at shelters and supportive housing sites to undertake learning opportunities in TN2S-inclusive service provision.
9. Advocate with landlords and tenancy boards and organizations to ensure accountability is held if TN2S sex workers and other service users are denied housing for discriminatory reasons.
10. Engage and align with housing affordability political advocacy in ways that recognize and prioritize the needs of unhoused and precariously TN2S sex workers and other members of TN2S communities.

11. Promote peer social groups through more robust outreach methods, including emails and phone calls with current or potential service users, as well as promote at shelters by having groups added to shelter resource lists and meal calendars.
12. Commit to further outreach on social media platforms to promote TN2S services, events, and issues.
13. Assess the accessibility of mobile harm reduction services for TN2S sex workers, and commit to promoting these services further with TN2S communities.
14. Leverage existing advocacy efforts at all levels to advocate with TN2S sex workers and against transphobia.
15. Confront white supremacist and TERF ideas and ideologies at sex work organizations and other service providers and organizations.
16. Organizations that work specifically with overall LGBTQ+ populations and communities must listen to and make space for the needs of TN2S sex workers in their programs. Organizations must also use public education and advocacy to speak out against the social, racial, and class exclusion of TN2S sex workers from LGBTQ+ communities and public spaces.
17. Broaden sex work public education and advocacy to include and collaborate with anti-capitalist and poverty reduction movements, including lobbying for universal basic income.
18. Ensure TN2S service users explicitly consent to being connected with liaison officers, and provide options and control over the presence of liaison officers in drop-in groups and other activities that TN2S sex workers may use, such as requiring that liaison officers attend in plainclothes and only attend for specific appointments or engagements.
19. Increase accountability of policing by providing a staff advocate or witness for police interactions with TN2S sex workers, such as when filing police reports about bad dates.

### *Short-term*

20. Provide dedicated space for feedback from TN2S users, especially when that feedback is about transphobia experienced within the organization.

21. Implement group staff training on trauma-informed service for TN2S service users, and cultural humility when working with Indigenous service users.
22. Organize group learning opportunities for cisgender residents at housing sites to improve their understandings of and relation to TN2S residents.
23. Create an “idea” box or other anonymous way for service users to suggest programming or activity ideas.
24. Clarify the relationship between organizations that serve TN2S sex workers and the police by sharing information about this relationship on organizational websites and in communications with TN2S sex workers and communities.

### *Medium-term*

25. Redraft all relevant policies and organizational documents (values, mission statements, non-discrimination policies, etc.) with TN2S values, safety, and service needs in mind, including decolonization.
26. Create, or support the creation of, a moderated online guide or resource in which TN2S sex workers and other community members can share and access information about TN2S healthcare and gender-affirming care.
27. Organize learning opportunities, such as cooking workshops, at housing sites to provide residents with skills to build autonomy and control over how they interact with the space.
28. Work in collaboration with other service providers to create non-discrimination policy frameworks for staff and residents at housing sites.
29. Create both in-person and online peer social groups for TN2S sex workers to connect in.
30. Create a mailing list to promote current service offerings and upcoming events or activities.
31. Record and share testimonials from TN2S service users.
32. Create a “known safe client list” or other tracking and rating system to complement current bad date reporting systems.

33. Establish a phone call or text service that allows sex workers to contact an organization to provide their location and the timeframe of their date to help increase safety while working.
34. Establish a TN2S visibility campaign in collaboration with TN2S sex workers to increase awareness and decrease stigma.
35. Establish and/or promote access to financial supports, such as funds, for TN2S sex workers.
36. Provide TN2S-inclusive business classes to promote skill-building and self-employability for TN2S sex workers
37. Work with employment services such as WorkBC to improve accessibility and inclusion for TN2S sex workers, such as a dedicated employment program.

#### *Long-term*

38. Conduct further consultation with TN2S sex workers and other service users in the area of spiritual health.
39. Develop a dedicated in-person outreach service for and with TN2S sex workers and communities.

## Conclusion

The community consultation process this report is based on was conducted with an aim of finding out how to make essential services more safe, relevant, and accessible for trans, non-binary, and Two-Spirit sex workers. In that sense, the process was successful—the preceding 39 recommendations attest to this. However, the findings from the focus group participants and survey respondents also demonstrate the many limitations, barriers, and other service gaps that are currently present in organizations that serve sex workers.

There is much work ahead for organizations implementing the recommendations of this report, but there is also incredible potential. From improving healthcare and housing outcomes, to building space for peer networks and outreach, to reducing the impacts of criminalization, societal stigma, and other harms; sex work organizations and other service providers have an important and necessary role to play in supporting and serving TN2S sex workers.

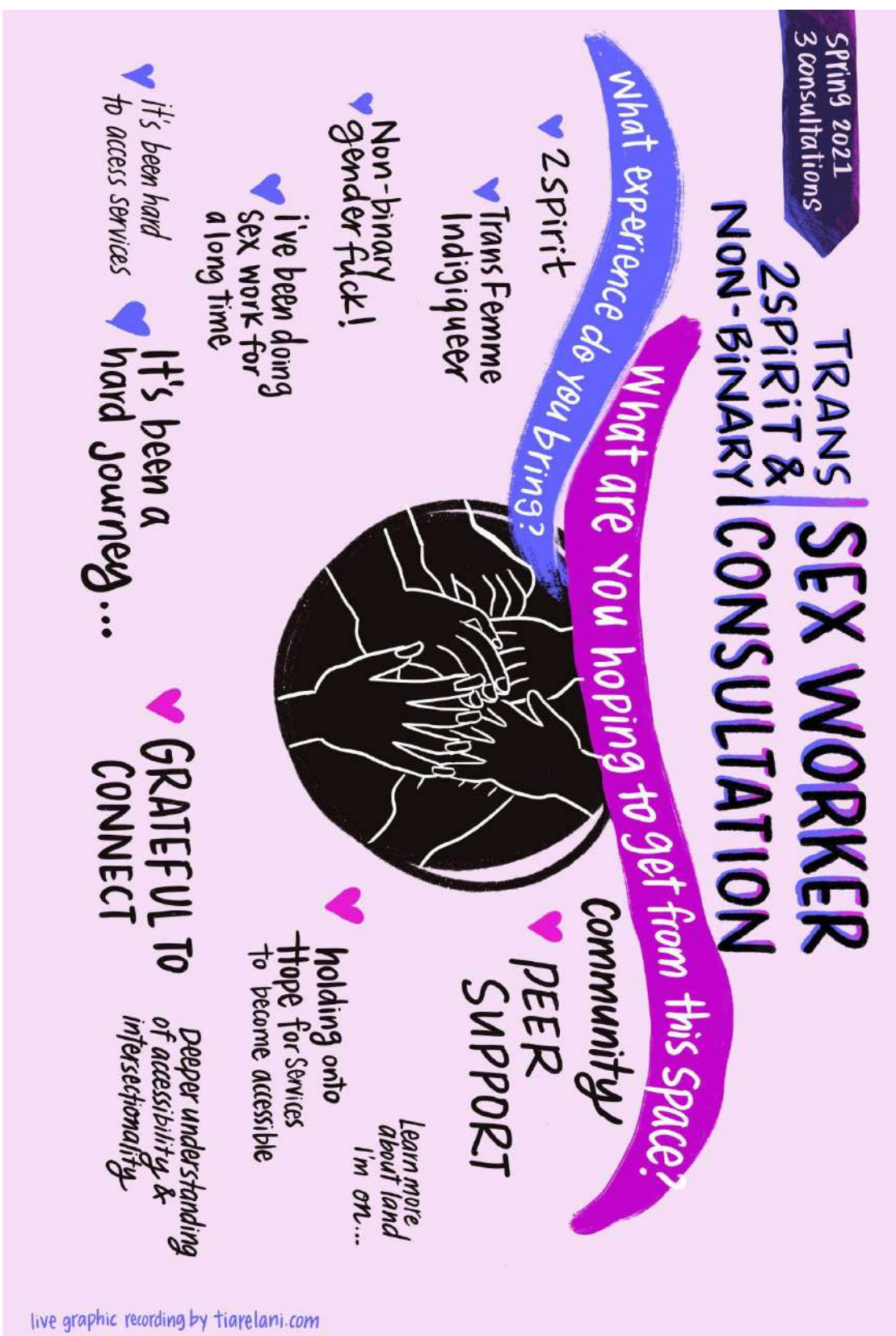
Many of the recommendations presented also have the potential to improve services for all service users, particularly in the areas of harm reduction, healthcare, and housing, as well as provide more capacity and skill-building for organizational staff in carrying out their work.

This report also fills a notable gap in the literature, by presenting findings from TN2S sex workers based in Greater Victoria. Other gaps provide opportunities for future research, such as the recommendation shared in two recent articles about researching specifically with Two-Spirit people using Indigenous research methods (Lyons et al., 2015, 2016).

Finally, speaking directly to all trans, non-binary, Two-Spirit, or otherwise non-cisgender people with any lived experience in the sex trade: we belong. We belong in, and deserve to be fully supported by, sex work organizations and other service providers in ways that are safe, accessible, and relevant to your needs.



## Appendix A: Consultation Images



SPRING 2021  
3 consultations

# TRANS SEX WORKER 2SPIRIT & NON-BINARY CONSULTATION

NON-JUDGEMENT  
COMPASSION  
PATIENCE

Learning from  
fellow TS2NB  
sex workers...

that I couldn't learn elsewhere

SELF-LOVE

SURVIVAL  
STRATEGIES

- Self-injection & harm reduction locations
- Drug screening programs
- How to advertise on social media
- How to be safe when you can't screen clients

I don't feel like there are spaces to meet 2S people like me...



ADVOCACY

SISTERS NOT SISTERS

- abolish capitalist work
- Universal basic income
- legal counselling
- affinity-based:
  - chat line
  - bad date forum
  - Crisis line

de-escalation support vs. default trajectory to police involvement

SOCIAL CONNECTION

- outdoor gatherings
- healing circles



SPACES TO BE IN RELATIONSHIP

- Festimonials → go digital
- Not being 1st guinea pig
- Not being interrogated/policed
- Targeted services, not add-ons
- Online:
  - can remain anonymous
- In-person:
  - Reassurance: there are no bots or cops

Spring 2021  
3 sessions

# TRANS SEX WORKER 2SPiRiT & CONSULTATION NON-BINARY

It is easier to get fentanyl at home than...

Peer Support

decent quality food  
mental health support  
emergency supplies  
safer sex supplies

I preferred in person sex work because it was accessible to me in the way most 9-5s are not due to discrimination (ie: neurodivergence)



we need work transition Support...

safe, fast internet access  
online sex work  
other work options

online work is grueling for less money, can't make ends meet...

often, we educate service Providers on how to care for us / services ...

or we can't get support because...  
Rapid staff turn-over  
under-resourced  
over-burdened staff



Inconsistent services



we need cross collaboration between services

performing as assigned, straight burn-out  
navigating immigration  
door to date bad forum  
sex worker burn out

taxes

applying for disability & income assistance

services that feel like getting help from a friend on an equal playing field feel safer ♡

When I see myself reflected in my provider 1/2 the work is already done!

Diversity training does not work. WE NEED ...

PEERS

MENTORSHIP

ADVOCATES

EQUITABLY PAID

with LIVED EXPERIENCE



Live graphic recording by tiare.lani.com

# TRANS SEX WORKER 2SPiRiT & CONSULTATION Non-BINARY

SPRING 2021  
3 consultations

CIS SEX WORKERS  
stop using your privilege  
to put us down!

We wish trans,  
non-sex workers knew...

my Two Spirit  
sisters are  
still trying to  
gain visibility

& access  
service

I am disabled  
& need  
accessible  
services too

I show up  
on time for  
appointments

I am  
disabled  
& I can  
still have  
sex...  
(for \$!)

I am a  
responsible  
pet owner

I am a real  
person with  
family, friends  
& romantic  
partners

I am not  
hurting  
my kids  
by seeing  
dates

I am a  
good mom  
& a sex  
worker



live graphic recording by tiarelani.com

## Appendix B: Literature Review

The literatures reviewed in this section offer a limited overview of the historical and ongoing context in which trans, non-binary, and Two-Spirit sex workers access (and experience difficulty in accessing) services from sex work organizations and other service providers in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. Unfortunately, no relevant literature could be found for review that specifically spoke to the experiences of TN2S sex workers in the context of Greater Victoria.

Searching for relevant literature for this review was difficult for several reasons. While sex workers and TN2S people are both highly researched populations on their own, most of the literature found did not provide much insight into those who intersect these two groups. In addition, the existing literature was often too dated or removed from the regional context to be fully comparable to the community consultation process undertaken in the creation of the “We Belong” report. In subject areas where recent and region-specific literature was unavailable for review, other literature was chosen to elucidate and critique differences in approach in conducting research with and writing about TN2S sex workers.

### Differences in Gendering of TN2S Sex Workers

The few historical reports and other literature reviewed usually contained limited references to TN2S sex workers, rather than being focused on the population specifically. These references also often used language and terms that would be seen as offensive by modern standards when applied to the general TN2S population. *Sex Work: 14 Answers to your Questions*, a booklet published in 2007 by Stella, a sex work organization in Montreal, to answer common questions the public may have about sex work, uses the terms “transvestite” and “transsexual” in explaining that sex workers in general need to have more autonomy and control over the environment and conditions they conduct sex work in (16). While the central messages of the booklet are still useful in advocating for sex workers in general, these word choices reflect the time period of when the booklet was published, and should not be used to discuss TN2S people except in instances where individuals self-identify using these or other similar terms, due to the negative cultural connotations associated with them (Richards, C., & Barker, M., 2013, 162)

A greater theme that can be observed and critiqued in this booklet and other literature is the consistent separation from and deprioritization of TN2S sex workers and their gender identities in comparison to cisgender woman sex workers. In many cases, this looked like TN2S sex

workers being acknowledged in addition to “woman” sex workers, without the recognition or clarification that many TN2S sex workers are (or have gender identities adjacent to) women, and could easily be included in discussions of “woman” sex workers from the outset. Even in more recent literature reviewed, which usually contained more currently accepted language and terms, this theme of separation and deprioritization showed up. For example, the phrase “not all sex workers are women” was repeated in several reports and other literature to introduce discussions around the various genders represented in the sex trade. In *Evaluating Canada’s Sex Work Laws: The Case for Repeal*, mentions of TN2S sex workers were relegated to a factsheet titled “Not All Sex Workers are Women,” which described the occurrence of cisgender male sex workers in addition to TN2S sex workers (Belak, B., & Bennett, D., 2016, 36). Otherwise, discussion of TN2S sex workers only occurred when discussing the specific context of sex workers in the Downtown Eastside in Vancouver. The rest of the report, like many others like it, repeatedly used the terms “woman” and “women” when discussing sex workers without clarifying whether each usage was referring to cisgender women exclusively, or both cisgender and trans women together. Perhaps a more accurate and inclusive phrasing of the repeated phrase would be: “not all sex workers are cisgender women.” Ensuring literature contains accurate and inclusive language about TN2S people, rather than prescriptive or reductive, is an essential first step in ensuring better representation of TN2S people in the literature.

## Literature Dedicated to TN2S People

A review of more recent literature that specifically focused on TN2S sex workers and civilians (non-sex workers) included three articles that analyzed TN2S sex worker populations in Vancouver.

The first, “Experiences of Trans Women and Two-Spirit Persons Accessing Women-Specific Health and Housing Services in a Downtown Neighbourhood of Vancouver, Canada”, explored the inequities faced by 32 trans and Two-Spirit individuals based in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver in accessing gender-segregated healthcare and housing services. In presenting their study’s setting, the authors mention that some “women’s only” services in the area have “informal trans-inclusive practices.” (Lyons et al., 374). The article focuses more on the gaps and barriers experienced by TN2S sex workers in accessing these services than the organizational practices themselves, and this is understandable, given that these practices are likely not documented.

In discussing the various variables that impacted service inclusion, such as “femme” presenting TN2S service users being more successful in accessing services, it became clear that these informal trans inclusion practices, and a lack of explicit TN2S inclusion policies, led to inconsistent, inaccessible, and often unsafe service provision for the individuals interviewed in the study. The article also complicates service provision, by suggesting that these informal practices and policies enable cisgender service users to police TN2S service users’ gender identities for service users who did not fit the ideal of a “feminine” TN2S service user.

The article also laid out that these behaviours, of inconsistently blocking or limiting service inclusion based on gender presentation or gender identity, actually go against the B.C. Human Rights Code. No other literature reviewed discussed the illegality of service inequity in such plain and direct terms, and this reframing further demonstrated the explicit harm and violence that occurs in service environments when TN2S people are excluded from support and services.

Finally, the authors suggest that a self-identified women policy is necessary at these organizations. Even at organizations that had formal trans inclusion policies, inconsistent application of those policies implies that more must be done. Inclusion policies are first step, to be followed by hiring TN2S staff, and training staff in “trauma-related education” to address any concerns about cisgender men exploiting a self-identified women policy.

The interviews with the study population in referenced in this article were also drawn upon in “Negotiating Violence in the Context of Transphobia and Criminalization: The Experiences of Trans Sex Workers in Vancouver, Canada,” which focused more generally on the oppression and violence that TN2S sex workers experience in their day-to-day lives (Lyons et al., 2017). These experiences of violence and oppression were broken down into several categories, including experiences related to clients discovering the sex workers’ gender identity, and violence that occurred due to police inaction. The article further demonstrated the extreme levels of violence and oppression that TN2S sex workers face. One recommendation that both this article and the other article based on the same study make is that future research in this area should specifically focus on the experiences of Two-Spirit sex workers and be conducted according to Indigenous research methods. Both articles included some findings from non-Indigenous trans and non-binary sex workers, though they also noted that Indigenous people are disproportionately represented among sex workers. Throughout this literature review, no articles could be found that researched Two-Spirit sex workers specifically or employed Indigenous research methods in doing so. This observation is an important reminder that any future research about Indigenous TN2S sex workers would benefit from listening to this

recommendation, as well as consulting with the population in question to ensure that the research will also benefit them.

As the previous two articles were both based on a study population comprised entirely of TN2S sex workers who were assigned male at birth, an additional article was reviewed that explored the experiences of trans men and transmasculine sex workers in the same region. “I Walked into the Industry and Came out of a Closet” studied both cisgender and trans men, as well as non-binary people who self-identified as men, and included both sex workers and clients in the study population (Matthen et al, 2018). One key finding in this article was the diverse range of gender identities and expressions of the population, which mirrored the diversity of identity and expression in the study population from the first two articles reviewed in this section. From this finding, it is important to recognize that while trans women and other people assigned male at birth are overrepresented among TN2S sex worker populations compared to their rate of occurrence in the general population, trans men and other sex workers who self-identify as men or masculine still exist, are a complex and diverse population, and require more studies that express their unique experiences.

## Conclusion

As demonstrated by the brevity of this literature review, documentation and discussion of TN2S sex workers in academic and other publications is lacking—not just in the regional context of Greater Victoria and the Lower Mainland, but also in general. Much of the literature from prior to the 2010s is generally limited to brief mentions of TN2S sex workers, and often used dated terms and language that may turn away or reduce trust in the usefulness of the literature. More recent articles and reports are much more accessible and appropriate to comparing to studies and consultations conducted today with TN2S sex workers, though they are still few in number. Literature dedicated specifically to researching Indigenous trans, non-binary, and Two-Spirit sex workers could not be found for review, and may present a new direction for future research given the overrepresentation of Indigenous people in sex worker populations.

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