TRANS INCLUSION ON THE FRONTLINES OF THE COVID-19 RESPONSE

Equity and inclusion should always be part of the conversation – and no less so during COVID-19. While COVID-19 impacts us all, some communities are particularly at risk of comparatively adverse impacts due to systemic factors such as homophobia and transphobia. Providing trans inclusive care on the frontlines of the COVID-19 response, at testing clinics, in community health centres, hospitals and elsewhere is essential to a holistic response to COVID-19 that ensures all communities have access to essential COVID-19 related services.

HERE ARE FIVE TIPS FOR FRONTLINE WORKERS ON PROVIDING TRANS INCLUSIVE CARE:

TIP 1:
RESPECT PRONOUNS AND CHOSEN NAMES

Respecting the pronouns of individuals accessing services makes or breaks an inclusive experience. Trans and gender diverse people often experience microaggressions (meaning indirect, subtle, and/or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalized group) when accessing services, often through misgendering (use of the wrong gendered term or pronoun) or deadnaming (use of a previous name that is no longer used). Provide inclusive services to trans and gender diverse individuals by asking clients what pronouns they use, using chosen names when speaking with clients, and normalizing the use of gender-neutral pronouns (like "they" and "them") in instances where you are unsure of someone's correct pronouns.

"Hi, my name is John and I use he and him pronouns."

"Would you like to share your pronouns with me?"

"Is the name on your health card the same as the name you go by?"

"Could I have everyone's attention? I think Jay left their health card at the front desk."

TIP 2:
USE GENDER-NEUTRAL LANGUAGE

Respecting pronouns and chosen names are a big first step, but we must unpack the assumptions we make in other parts of our language. We often assume that everyone is heterosexual and/or cisgender (i.e., not trans) by default. Our language often reflects that. Using gender-neutral language helps everyone feel welcome and included while accessing services.

TIP 3:
LEAD WITH EMPATHY

Many people within trans and gender diverse communities are struggling with increased isolation during COVID-19, particularly given that many 2SLGBTQ+ individuals are not connected to their families due to histories of homophobia and transphobia. In this and many other ways, 2SLGBTQ+ communities are particularly impacted by and struggling to cope during COVID-19. Reflecting on how COVID-19 impacts trans, gender diverse and 2SLGBTQ+ communities helps us provide empathetic, inclusive care to all service users.

"Thank you for sharing your story with me. I can imagine it's been particularly tough to cope with COVID-19, especially as a trans person stuck in an unsafe home and family environment."

"I'm so sorry I used the wrong pronoun earlier - thank you for letting me know. I'll do better moving forward."

TIP 4:
ACKNOWLEDGE AND APOLOGIZE FOR MISTAKES

No one expects you to be perfect. We are all trying our best to provide inclusive, evidence-based care during an unprecedented pandemic. Mistakes can and will happen. But when it comes to inclusion and equity, we must acknowledge that our mistakes, intentional or not, can cause harm. Apologizing for and correcting our mistakes helps ensure trans and gender diverse clients feel seen and safe accessing services.

"It's been a really hard day, week, month and year. I think I'll treat myself to some Netflix binge-watching tonight to get my mind off everything going on at the clinic and help me decompress."

TIP 5:
CARE FOR YOURSELF

Anyone and everyone working on COVID-19 response, from front line services all the way to policy and decision makers, is striving to go above and beyond while caring for themselves. We must care for ourselves in order to provide inclusive and empathetic care to others during COVID-19.