

## Working with LGBTQ2S Clients for Housing Workers

LGBTQ2S (Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans Queer and Two-spirit) clients are particularly vulnerable to homelessness due to discrimination from society because of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. As a housing worker, it is your duty to advocate for your LGBTQ2S clients to ensure they receive the best treatment from landlords and housing providers.

### What if I don't identify as LGBTQ2S?

That's okay! You don't have to identify as LGBTQ2S in order to advocate for LGBTQ2S clients. What's important is that you become an ally and inform yourself on issues that relate to LGBTQ2S people. It also involves supporting your clients whenever possible and educating others to appreciate the contributions LGBTQ2S people make towards a diverse society.

### Connecting with your Client

- Demonstrate your support for the LGBTQ2S community by putting up posters, brochures, and other materials supporting LGBTQ2S people around your office area.
- Acknowledge the courage and persistence your LGBTQ2S clients possess in the face of adversity and build on those strengths.
- Recognize that some LGBTQ2S clients may face multiple levels of discrimination (ex. ethnicity, mental health, substance use).
- If your client is trans, use their preferred name, and if you're unsure, ask politely what their preferred pronouns are.
  - Consider providing a free welcome kit when a trans client secures housing (e.g: clothes, make-up, or other items.)

### LGBTQ2S Barriers

Your LGBTQ2S clients will most likely have experienced one or more of these barriers in life. However, it's also important to recognize that not all LGBTQ2S people face them.

- Increased risk of homelessness from rejection and discrimination
- Increased likelihood of mental health problems, like depression, suicidality, and anxiety disorders, due to marginalization
- Higher rates of school dropout from bullying and a homo/bi/transphobic environment at schools
- Lack of access to employment because of lower education and training resulting from oppression
- Health problems may be undiagnosed due to lack of competent LGBTQ2S health care
- Increased vulnerability to abuse and assault at home and on the streets
- Greater risk for substance use
- Inability to express their true sexual and/or gender identity for fear of their safety

## Preparing for Unit Viewings

- Don't out your clients to landlords and housing providers unless your client gives you explicit permission to do so. It is your clients' decision to decide whether or not to tell others what their sexual orientation or gender identity is.
- If your client is trans, contact the landlord or housing provider with a friendly reminder about your upcoming visit and mention the preferred name and pronouns of your client.

## At the Unit Viewings

- If your clients are willing, accompany them to provide them with support.
- Use your client's name and their preferred pronouns at all times for the benefit of the landlord or housing provider.
- Discrimination against your client is not acceptable. If you hear any discriminatory comments from the landlord or housing provider, challenge them immediately and if possible, educate the landlord or housing provider about LGBTQ2S issues. However, be aware that your client can be capable of responding to discriminatory comments, and if they wish to, let them speak.

## After Unit Viewings

- Discrimination against someone's sexual orientation or gender is illegal under the BC Human Rights Code. If you encounter a landlord or housing provider who discriminated against your LGBTQ2S client based on their sexual orientation or gender identity, discuss with your client whether legal action is appropriate or if there is a better way to deal with the situation. Whenever possible, let your client decide what to do.

## Other Areas of Focus

- Some trans people may face difficulties when they have to show their ID to landlords and housing providers because of discrepancies with the picture and gender. Assist your trans clients by telling the landlord and housing provider that the gender of a tenant is not important. Furthermore, the picture is often recognizable despite some changes.
- Continue to follow-up with your clients if they are able to obtain housing. Check to ensure they are not facing discrimination, and if they are, provide support and with your client's permission, act to address the problem.
- Compile a list of LGBTQ2S-friendly landlords and housing providers in your area for easy access and convenience.

**For more information, contact Nikki Gravelle at 604-714-6266 or at [nikki.gravelle@vch.ca](mailto:nikki.gravelle@vch.ca)**