

POSITIVE SPACE ASSESSMENT TOOLKIT

For Health Service Providers
in the Greater Hamilton Region

Greater
Hamilton
Health
Network



*Building community
health together.*

Positive Space Working Group

This toolkit was developed through the Positive Space Working Group of the Greater Hamilton Health Network (GHHN). The Positive Space Working Group is comprised of individuals from diverse backgrounds whose work, experiences, leadership, or support is aligned with ensuring inclusive and equitable health care for people from Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+ communities across Hamilton, Haldimand, and Niagara Northwest. The Positive Space Working Group supports inclusion and advocacy for Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+ communities served by all health service providing partners across the region.



Land Acknowledgment

The work of the Greater Hamilton Health Network takes place on traditional territories of the Erie, Neutral, Huron-Wendat, Haudenosaunee, and Mississaugas. Indigenous people who have lived here since time immemorial and have deep connections to these lands.

This land is covered by the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, which was an agreement between the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabek to share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes. We further acknowledge that this land is covered by the Between the Lakes Purchase, 1792, between the Crown and the Mississauga of the Credit First Nation.

As we reflect it is important to understand that the GHHN catchment area continues to be home to vibrant, diverse Indigenous communities who have distinct and specific histories and needs, as well as a constitutionally protected treaty. The GHHN is located next to Six Nations of the Grand River and Mississaugas of the Credit but most Indigenous peoples in the GHHN catchment area live in urban Hamilton. We honour this diversity and respect the knowledge, leadership, and governance frameworks within Indigenous communities.

We are grateful for the opportunity to live, meet, work, and are committed to engaging and building meaningful relationships and partnerships with the Indigenous communities, Six Nations of the Grand River, Mississaugas of the Credit and Urban Indigenous populations on this territory.



Why a Positive Space Toolkit?

The Positive Space Toolkit is a practical resource health service providers in Hamilton can use to ensure the right to adequate health care for members of Hamilton's Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+ communities.

The Positive Space Toolkit is intended to be a practical guide for staff at any position in an organization – whether directly providing services, leading at the top, or supporting behind the scenes – to improve their organization's care for queer and trans people in Hamilton.

Our hope is to ensure inclusive and safer spaces for everyone accessing health care in the Greater Hamilton region. In doing so, we must acknowledge that people belonging to Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+ communities experience poorer health and wellbeing outcomes largely as a result of interpersonal and institutional discrimination. As such, it will take specific measures to ensure a more inclusive and safer environment specifically for our Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+ community members.

At the heart of the toolkit is a collection of Positive Space checklists, audits, and report cards that staff can use to practically measure their organization's progress towards inclusivity over time. We are encouraging all staff to consider the ways that they can use their position in their organization to build safer spaces in any of the priority areas uncovered by completing the audit, and to find a way to return to this toolkit regularly.

A note on language:

This toolkit will consistently refer to Hamilton's Two Spirit (sometimes abbreviated 2S), Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, and other (LGBTQIA+) communities. The acronym intentionally separates Two Spirit from the 'LGBTQIA+' acronym in recognition of the fact that Two Spirit does not simply refer to an Indigenous member of the LGBTQIA+ community but instead is instead a way of approaching gender, sexuality, and even personhood that is distinct from colonial methods of categorization. Further, this toolkit speaks about Hamilton's Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+ communities (instead of community) to reflect the heterogeneity of assembly and expression within this diverse group.

This Positive Space Toolkit rests on a commitment to building a safer space for everyone accessing health care in the Greater Hamilton region.

We encourage readers to reflect on the language of *safer spaces*:

We cannot guarantee that a Safe Space is, in fact, safe 100% of the time: both because discrimination and harassment may occur in that space and because people's requirements for feeling safe might differ than the person or group who declared the space "Safe."

A Safer Space indicates that there has been some work done to make the space Safer than it otherwise might have been. It is not a declaration but a comparison. It is also a shift away from a one-time pronouncement and towards an invitation to deepen safety in an ongoing way.



Pride symbols – often a rainbow sticker – are commonly used to signify that a space might be more inclusive towards members of Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+ communities. Making symbols like these visible to patients and clients can communicate some level of safety in the services you offer or the space you provide, but comes with a responsibility to meaningfully engage with the ways that health service providers have historically failed to do so. Consider how health care has historically been used to promote social norms of discrimination and was responsible for practices that caused physical and mental health harm towards these communities; including forced mental institutionalization, lobotomizing, sterilizing, denying access to trans surgery and supports and forcing gender assignment.

Obviously, the work of building a safer space goes beyond putting a sticker on a window!



The GHHN is eager to support our local health service providers organizations and their staff in this work. The toolkit is not meant to be an accreditation, certification, verification, or authorization. However, the GHHN also intends to ensure all health care and community providers across the region of the GHHN develop strategies and build competencies to deliver barrier free care to Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+ communities across the life span. This includes accountability in taking action to review the inclusivity of services, the safety of physical spaces, and the competency of staff in serving members of Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+ communities.

As recently as 2021, members of Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+ communities in Hamilton told healthcare leaders:

- Transphobia and homophobia exist within all levels of health care delivery and cause harm and barriers to better health within the Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+ communities.
- Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+ communities experience discrimination and barriers when accessing health services across the spectrum and across the life span.
- Health Services lack the competency to fully affirm and support Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+ communities.
- Health care practitioners are not trained to adequately support Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+ communities.
- Health care services do not have visible representation of the community in personnel or in any branding or communication.
- Primary care providers are not consistently offering legal right to care for trans members. Some primary care physicians continue to refer out.
- Members of the community want access to Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+ therapist and health care providers.
- Mental health services neglect the needs of Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+.
- Sexual Health Services for Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+ needs improvement.
- Members of the Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+ communities fear being out in all congregate settings and when community health services are in their home due to fear of discrimination and fear of violence/hate. It was identified that the more precarious the housing the more the fear i.e., RCF and shelters.

Continued on the next page...



- Members of the Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+ communities fear end of life care and lack access to good advance care planning and health care directive supports.
- The financial burden of gender affirming care is a barrier to better health.
- There is a lack of health care transitional support for youth to adult services.
- More harm reduction and safe injection sites are needed that address the needs of the Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+ communities.
- HIV and SDI testing needs to be more accessible and inclusive.
- Due to discrimination against Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+ communities, personal risk to hate crime and personal violence exist.
- Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+ are invisible within the shelter and homeless strategies and face additional barriers.

It is more than just a gesture of good will. Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+ patients have legal rights and protections embedded primarily in the Ontario Human Rights Code and in the standards set by bodies governed under the Regulated Health Professions Act, such as¹:

The right to care that meets established quality standards.

The right to have your gender identity and expression respected.

The right to be called by your chosen name and pronouns.

The right to decide who visits you, regardless of your legal or biological relationship.

The right to treatment free from discrimination.

The right to receive respectful care.

The right to dispute being discharged or transferred from a health facility.

The right to refuse treatment services that harm Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+ individuals.

¹ Canadian Virtual Hospice (2021), Two-Spirit and LGBTQ+ Canadian Healthcare Bill of Rights.



So let's put this into action!

Step One

All GHHN-participating health service providers will have had an opportunity for leadership to sign the Pledge of Commitment, which signals their intention to build safer and more equitable spaces in their organization. In doing so, they will have designated a person (i.e. EDI coordinator) or team (i.e. Positive Space committee) responsible for carrying out this work.

Step Two

Organizational staff and leaders can complete any one of the checklists and audits contained in this toolkit as a means of assessing the quality of their organization's services for Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+ community members. We suggest the assessment be conducted at the beginning of a quality improvement cycle by leaders within the organization and staff who are positioned to act on any recommendations. These findings of the assessment can be presented back to the organization in the form of a report card, and recommendations should be effectively supported by leadership.

Step Three

Upon completing a review of the organizations services using one of these tools (or other useful ones not included here), should an organization require an updated Positive Space sticker (one that includes the black and brown chevron to represent Black, Brown, and Indigenous queer folk and the pink, blue, and white chevron to represent transgender folk), staff can contact the GHHN Positive Space Working Group to request one free of charge.

Step Four

Health service providers should remember this work is not completed with an attestation and a rainbow sticker. Safer spaces are made by continually evaluating the organization's progress towards these goals. An organization that meaningfully pursues the objectives detailed in the Positive Space Audit should result in organizational infrastructure that continually offers suggestions for deepening equity. The Positive Space Working Group recommends returning to this auditing process at least biannually.



Positive Space Audit. Developed by Randi McCabe and Lisa Jeffs at St. Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton, the Positive Space Audit is a comprehensive tool that reviews several domains of their Mood and Anxiety Portfolio within the Mental Health and Addictions Program. It is a modified version of the Ontario Public Health Association's "A Positive Space is a Healthy Space" toolkit, which is also included in this document.

Length: 14 pages // 66 questions across seven domains

Leading and Learning with Pride. Intended primarily for the Seniors Services and Long Term Care division of the City of Toronto, this toolkit intends to build individual knowledge and skill among service providers in the delivery of support to Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+ seniors as well as build organizational capacity among seniors support organizations in the creation of inclusive environments for Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+ seniors. While the auditing tool itself is on pages 169-181, users are strongly suggested to engage with the entirety of the toolkit in order to maximize its utility.

Length: 224 pages // 31 questions across two domains

Is Your Space Positive? Assembled by Dr. Rob Kerr at the Hamilton Family Health Team and similarly adapted from the Ontario Public Health Association's "A Positive Space is a Healthy Space," this checklist has been adapted for primary care practice teams.

Length: 1 page // 15 questions across one domain

Community Health Pride. While not from a Canadian source, this toolkit developed by the Department of Health and Social Services by the Victoria State Department in Australia serves a similar purpose to the GHHN toolkit in that it seeks to provide actionable ways to respond to diversity in sexual orientation, gender identity, and intersex variations within a healthcare setting. The assessment portion of the toolkit can be found on pages 17-24.

Length: 66 pages // 17 questions across six domains

2024



POSITIVE SPACE AUDIT



[CLICK HERE FOR LINK.](#)

2024

LEADING AND
LEARNING
WITH PRIDE



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2024



IS YOUR SPACE POSITIVE?



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COMMUNITY
HEALTH
PRIDE



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A Positive Space Pledge for GHHN Partners



We are dedicated to fostering a safe, inclusive, and affirming healthcare environment for Hamilton's Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+ communities. We recognize the unique healthcare needs and experiences faced by individuals within these communities, and we are committed to taking proactive measures to ensure that our services are accessible, respectful, and responsive to everyone's diverse identities and experiences.

We are committed to continuously enhancing the visibility and representation of Hamilton's Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+ communities; implementing policies and practices that promote equity for everyone; meaningfully engaging with the members of Hamilton's Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+ communities on matters of governance and program implementation; and improving staff training and competency in providing health care services to Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+ community members.

We pledge to use our positions of power to ensure no health providers with whom we work will misinform or refer a client due to lack of competency or knowledge by providing training on gender affirming care. We will ensure competent sexual health service delivery anywhere across the health system.

We have meaningfully engaged with this Positive Spaces Assessment Toolkit. In doing so, we are joining a network of health service providers in Hamilton who are contributing to building positive spaces for everyone.



NAME & ORGANIZATION

DATE

INDIVIDUAL, TEAM, OR COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE
FOR CARRYING OUT THIS WORK.



The Greater Hamilton Health Network



The Greater Hamilton Health Network (GHHN) is one of the first Ontario Health Teams across the province, with a purpose of transforming healthcare in partnership with patients, families, carepartners, primary care, local organizations, and the community.

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