

# RESEARCH CONNECTION

## How can shelters in Westman be safer and more welcoming to transgender people?

By Matt Paterson, BA, & Julie Chamberlain, PhD



### Why this research is important

Every year people in Westman find it more difficult to find a safe and affordable place to live. The 2SLGBTQ+ community is at a much higher risk of homelessness than the rest of the population ([Abramovich, 2017](#)). Transgender people, specifically, experience even higher rates of housing insecurity than members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth ([Yu, 2010](#)). Despite these issues, no shelters exist locally or across the province that offer specific transitional housing programs for transgender people. There is an urgent need locally and across the country for programs that help transgender people.

### How the research was conducted

I interviewed nine service providers across Manitoba who work at shelters and housing organizations or with transgender people. The interview guides were designed to assess service provider's experiences, thoughts, and

### What you need to know

Transgender people experiencing homelessness face barriers, discrimination, and stigma in shelters and transitional housing programs. Manitoba shelters are currently failing to meet the needs of transgender people, but there are potentially effective strategies that could help make this group feel more comfortable. This project was used to help the practices of YWCA Brandon and to inform other shelters on how to better serve transgender members of the community.

perspectives on creating safer and more comfortable shelter spaces for transgender people.

### What the researchers found

Three main themes were identified:

1. There are major system-level issues related to housing transgender people.
2. Manitoba shelters are currently failing to meet the needs of transgender clients.
3. There are potential solutions that could help transgender people feel safer and more comfortable using shelters and transitional housing organizations.

Transgender people will often avoid using transitional housing that they view as unsafe. This includes faith-based shelters and those that are segregated by gender. Faith-

based shelters are challenging because transgender people have experienced discrimination and harassment from religious groups. Shelters segregated by gender are challenging to navigate and often result in discrimination, harassment, and violence against transgender clients. Rural places are often viewed as ‘more conservative’ or ‘less progressive,’ meaning that shelters and housing organizations often have the same reputation despite sometimes having their own more inclusive values. This can make it difficult for transgender people to reach out for help in rural places.

In addition to these broader issues, Manitoba shelters are failing to meet the needs of transgender people in their own ways. Currently, the staff, management, and executives of shelters and housing organizations are undertrained on transgender issues. Intake procedures are usually the first steps a person will take towards staying at a shelter but are often viewed as prodding and unnecessary by transgender people. This can lead them to avoid staying at a shelter altogether. Referrals, where one service provider contacts another service provider on a client’s behalf, can be harmful for transgender people when they are handled improperly by staff. For example, how a client is discussed between service providers can lead to harmful interactions, such as discrimination against the client.

To make this group more comfortable in shelter spaces, solutions can include developing transgender-specific identity-based housing programs which focus on how to help transgender people, hiring more transgender staff, and making training mandatory, updated, and informed by transgender people. A simple and effective way to boost comfort in shelter spaces would be to display 2SLGBTQ+ positive media, such as rainbow flags, stickers, or photos of 2SLGBTQ+ people using the space.

### How this research can be used

This research can be used to help housing providers shape their policies, practices, and programming. It can help

shelters target specific issues and transgender people experiencing homelessness. This research may also help highlight some of the issues that transgender people experience in Westman and Manitoba.

### About the researchers

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### Keywords

Homelessness, transgender, 2SLGBTQ+, transitional housing, Westman

### Publications based on this research

Hammond, R., Rempel, C., & Paterson, M. (2021). *YWCA Brandon: A demographic overview of housing, reintegration, and domestic violence service recommendations for ongoing and future strategic operations*. Centre for Critical Studies of Rural Mental Health, Brandon University.

Paterson, M. (2022). *“It’s a scary place to come out”:* *Exploring how shelters in Westman can be safer and more welcoming for transgender people*. Manitoba Research Alliance.

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