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*The Trans PULSE Canada project collected survey data from 2,873 trans and non-binary people in 2019. This report presents national data on the health and well-being of trans and non-binary youth in Canada.*

# HEALTH AND WELL-BEING AMONG TRANS AND NON-BINARY YOUTH

## Health disparities and the importance of social support



### Highlights

Among transgender and non-binary youth:

- 1 in 5 avoided schools in the past 5 years for fear of harassment or outing.
- The majority reported reliable health care access, with 77% having a primary health care provider.
- 2 in 5 considered suicide in the past year; 1 in 10 attempted suicide.
- 58% were told by their parents/guardians that they were respected/supported, and half were called by their correct name, pronouns, and gendered language by their parents/guardians.

### Context

Transgender (trans) and non-binary youth face disproportionate rates of victimization, with many having experienced physical, sexual, and verbal harassment at a young age.<sup>1,2</sup> At school, trans youth are frequently targeted by bullying,<sup>2</sup> which compromises school attendance and access to education.<sup>1</sup> Trans youth have higher rates of mental health issues than non-trans youth,<sup>4</sup> frequently reporting depression, self-harm, suicide ideation, and suicide attempt.<sup>3,4</sup> However, previous research finds that family support is protective against the impact of victimization on trans youth's mental health.<sup>1-3,5</sup> Moreover, acceptance of trans and non-binary identities is growing and the proportion of trans youth living day-to-day in their felt gender is increasing, which also sup-

ports their well-being.<sup>2</sup> Regarding health care, trans youth report various barriers to access, such as discomfort with discussing trans issues with doctors.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, trans youth have significant rates of unmet physical and mental health care needs.<sup>2</sup> Despite these disparities, current research on trans youth is limited, particularly since this population is often subsumed into the larger LGBTQ+ population. This report seeks to expand on the literature on the health and well-being of trans and non-binary youth in Canada.

## Trans PULSE Canada

Over a 10-week period in 2019, the Trans PULSE Canada research team collected survey data from 2,873 trans and non-binary people age 14 years or older and living in Canada. Participants were able to complete the full survey or a 10-minute short form online, on paper, via telephone (with or without a language interpreter), or on a tablet with a Peer Research Associate (only in major cities). The 10-minute short form contained key items from the full survey, and both versions were available in English or French. Participants responding to questions only in the full survey were assigned weights such that their responses reflected the demographic profile of the entire sample, accounting for potential differences between those who opted for the full and short forms. The Trans PULSE Canada survey included questions from the Ontario's Trans PULSE project, questions from Statistics Canada surveys to allow for comparisons to the general population, and questions developed by trans and non-binary people based on community priorities. This report especially highlights questions developed by the team's Youth Priority Population Team.

## How to Interpret

This report presents results comparing youth (aged 14-24) to other Trans PULSE Canada participants (aged 25+). Questions on employment and income were limited to participants aged 16 and older. Of all participants, 35% (n = 991) were youth.

**Table 1: Distribution of youth across provinces and territories**

|                                   | Youth<br>(aged 14-24)<br>n= 991<br>% | Not youth<br>(aged 25+)<br>n= 1874<br>% |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| <b>Current province/territory</b> |                                      |   |
| Alberta                           | 22                                   | 17                                      |
| British Columbia                  | 16                                   | 20                                      |
| Manitoba                          | 2                                    | 3                                       |
| New Brunswick                     | 3                                    | 3                                       |
| Newfoundland and Labrador         | 2                                    | 1                                       |
| Nova Scotia                       | 4                                    | 3                                       |
| Ontario                           | 33                                   | 36                                      |
| Prince Edward Island              | 0.2                                  | 0.6                                     |
| Quebec                            | 14                                   | 12                                      |
| Saskatchewan                      | 4                                    | 3                                       |
| Northwest Territories             | 0                                    | 0.2                                     |
| Nunavut                           | 0.1                                  | 0                                       |
| Yukon                             | 0.2                                  | 0.3                                     |

Although Trans PULSE Canada used multiple approaches to make the survey accessible, it was not possible to conduct a random sample of the trans and non-binary population. Therefore, results cannot be assumed to represent true population demographics. For instance, that 35% of participants were youth, does not mean exactly 35% of all trans and non-binary people in Canada are youth.

The final column of all comparative tables in this report contains a p-value. A p-value indicates whether there is a statistically significant difference between groups. In this report, the groups are youth and other Trans PULSE Canada participants aged 25+ (Tables 1, 2, 4, 5). P-values that are less than 0.0500 indicate that differences between groups are statistically significant, while p-values that are greater than or equal to 0.0500 indicate that there is no statistically significant difference.

## Socio-demographics

Table 1 shows that youth were distributed across the provinces and territories similarly to the rest of the sample. One in three participants reported living in Ontario, followed by about 1 in 5 in Alberta and 1 in 5 in British Columbia.

**Table 2: Socio-demographics**

|   | Youth<br>(aged 14-24)<br><br>n= 991<br>% | Not youth<br>(aged 25+)<br><br>n= 1874<br>% | P-value <sup>a</sup> |
|---|--|---|----------------------|
| Gender  |  |   | <0.0001              |
| Woman or girl   | 12                                       | 30  |                      |
| Man or boy  | 34                                       | 21  |                      |
| Indigenous or cultural gender                           | 2  | 2   |                      |
| Non-binary or similar                                   | 52                                       | 47  |                      |
| Sexual orientation (check all that apply) <sup>b</sup>  |  |   |                      |
| Asexual   | 18                                       | 11  | <0.0001              |
| Bisexual  | 34                                       | 26  | <0.0001              |
| Gay   | 16                                       | 11  | <0.0001              |
| Lesbian   | 10                                       | 18  | <0.0001              |
| Pansexual   | 32                                       | 31  | 0.460                |
| Queer   | 49                                       | 53  | 0.020                |
| Straight or heterosexual                                | 5  | 9   | <0.0001              |
| Two-Spirit  | 3  | 4   | 0.042                |
| Unsure or questioning                                   | 11                                       | 8   | 0.005                |
| Relationship status <sup>c</sup>                        |  |   | <0.0001              |
| In a relationship(s)                                    | 43                                       | 58  |                      |
| Not in a relationship                                   | 57                                       | 42  |                      |
| Indigenous in Canada                                    |  |   | 0.004                |
| Indigenous in Canada                                    | 11                                       | 8   |                      |
| Not Indigenous in Canada                                | 89                                       | 92  |                      |
| Racialization   |  |   | 0.539                |
| Racialized  | 15                                       | 14  |                      |
| Not racialized  | 85                                       | 86  |                      |
| Immigration history                                     |  |   | 0.002                |
| Newcomer (past 5 years)                                 | 3  | 3   |                      |
| Immigrant (non-newcomer)                                | 6  | 10  |                      |
| Born in Canada  | 91                                       | 87  |                      |
| Urban / rural <sup>d</sup>                              |  |   | 0.870                |
| Rural or small town                                     | 6  | 6   |                      |
| Not rural or small town                                 | 94                                       | 94  |                      |
| Low-income household (past year, age ≥ 16) <sup>e</sup> |  |   | <0.0001              |
| Low-income household                                    | 57                                       | 40  |                      |
| Non-low-income household                                | 43                                       | 60  |                      |

**Table 2: Socio-demographics, continued**

|   | Youth<br>(aged 14-24)<br>n= 991<br>% | Not youth<br>(aged 25+)<br>n= 1874<br>% | P-value <sup>a</sup> |
|---|--------------------------------------|---|----------------------|
| <b>Disability identities (check all that apply) <sup>b</sup></b>  |                                      |   |                      |
| Autistic  | 17                                   | 12                                      | <0.0001              |
| Blind   | 0.4                                  | 0.4                                     | 1.000                |
| Crip  | 2                                    | 2                                       | 0.588                |
| Deaf  | 0.8                                  | 1                                       | 0.502                |
| Disabled or living with a disability  | 17                                   | 20                                      | 0.065                |
| Chronic pain  | 16                                   | 24                                      | <0.0001              |
| Neurodivergent  | 38                                   | 26                                      | <0.0001              |
| Psychiatric survivor, mad, or person with mental illness  | 49                                   | 40                                      | <0.0001              |
| Other (not listed above)  | 5                                    | 7                                       | 0.026                |
| <sup>a</sup> Values <0.050 indicate that differences between groups are statistically significant.<br><sup>b</sup> Participants could select more than one option, so total will be more than 100%.<br><sup>c</sup> These variables were missing for 10% of participants or more.<br><sup>d</sup> Rural and small town includes participants who reported a postal code or forward sortation area for a town or municipality with population <10,000. |                                      |   |                      |

Table 2 shows that youth were more likely than the rest of the sample to identify primarily as a man or boy (34% vs. 21%), and less likely to identify primarily as a woman or girl (12% vs. 30%). About half (52%) of youth identified primarily as non-binary or similar, and 43% of youth were in a relationship(s). A greater proportion of youth identified as autistic (17% vs. 12%) and neurodivergent (38% vs. 26%) compared to the rest of the sample. Half (49%) of youth identified as a psychiatric survivor, mad, or person with mental illness.

Fifteen percent of youth were racialized, and 11% identified as Indigenous in Canada. More than half (57%) of youth aged 16-24 reported living in a low-income household. Only 6% of Trans PULSE Canada participants, youth and otherwise, reported living in a rural area or small town.

# Education

Table 3 shows that 90% of trans youth participants of high school age (aged 14-18) were currently a student. Among trans youth aged 19–24, 93% had a high school diploma. Similarly, 89.7% of 20–24-year-olds in the broader Canadian population had completed high school in 2016.<sup>6</sup> While our sample is not representative of all Canadian trans youth, this shows evidence of how many trans youth remain resilient despite the cited disproportionate victimization experienced in school settings.<sup>1</sup>

# Health & Well-being

Table 4 includes variables relating to health and well-being. The majority of trans youth reported reliable health care access, with 77% having a primary health care provider. However, almost half (47%) reported having a past-year unmet health care need(s). A smaller proportion of youth had all needed gender-affirming care compared with the rest of the sample (14% vs. 32%), and a larger proportion of youth were planning but had not begun gender-affirming care (22% vs. 11%).

The majority of youth reported good to excellent health (70%). However, youth were less likely than other Trans PULSE Canada participants to report excellent or very good health (31% vs. 40%). A high proportion (68%) of youth reported fair or poor mental health, a proportion that is significantly greater than that of the rest of the sample (50%). Past-year suicide ideation and suicide attempt were greater in youth than in other participants: 2 in 5 youth considered suicide, and 1 in 10 attempted suicide. These findings may be attributed in part to experiences of violence and harassment. In the past 5 years, 72% of youth were verbally harassed. For fear of harassment or outing, 1 in 5 youth had avoided schools, and 70% avoided public washrooms in the past 5 years. Nearly 1 in 5 youth had insecure housing, which includes but is not limited to living in shelters, others' homes, or on the street.

Table 3: Education

| Youth (aged 14-24)<br>n= 991<br>%                            |    |
|--|----|
| Currently a student<br>(among high school aged youth, 14-18) |    |
| Yes  | 90 |
| No   | 10 |
| Has high school diploma<br>(among youth aged 19-24)          |    |
| Yes  | 93 |
| No   | 7  |

# Primary Care Experiences among Youth with a Primary Care Provider

Table 5 shows that in the past 12 months, in general, youth had fewer experiences of trans-affirmative primary care and more experiences of discrimination by a primary care provider than the rest of the Trans PULSE Canada sample. Half (53%) of youth participants had a primary health provider open to discussing trans/non-binary health concerns, compared to 68% of the rest of the sample. Youth were also less likely to have a primary care provider that demonstrated knowledge of trans/non-binary related health concerns (33% vs. 44%). Further, 24% of youth were repeatedly misgendered by their primary care provider compared to 14% of other participants.

**Table 4: Health and well-being**

|  | Youth<br>(aged 14-<br>24)<br>n= 991<br>% | Not youth<br>(aged<br>25+)<br>n= 1874<br>% | P-value <sup>a</sup> |
|--|--|--|----------------------|
| <b>Has primary health care provider</b>  |  |  | 0.0002               |
| Yes  | 77                                       | 83   |                      |
| No   | 23                                       | 17   |                      |
| <b>Unmet health care need(s) (past year) <sup>b</sup></b>                                      |  |  | 0.061                |
| Unmet need(s)  | 47                                       | 43   |                      |
| No unmet need  | 53                                       | 57   |                      |
| <b>Avoided emergency room (past year) <sup>b</sup></b>   |  |  | <0.0001              |
| Yes  | 14                                       | 11   |                      |
| No   | 56                                       | 73   |                      |
| Never needed ER care   | 30                                       | 17   |                      |
| <b>Gender-affirming medical care status <sup>b</sup></b>                                       |  |  | <0.0001              |
| Had all needed care  | 14                                       | 32   |                      |
| In the process of completing   | 33                                       | 31   |                      |
| Planning, but not begun  | 22                                       | 11   |                      |
| Not planning   | 11                                       | 12   |                      |
| Unsure if going to seek care   | 19                                       | 15   |                      |
| <b>Self-rated health</b>   |  |  | 0.0002               |
| Excellent or very good   | 31                                       | 40   |                      |
| Good   | 39                                       | 35   |                      |
| Fair or poor   | 30                                       | 26   |                      |
| <b>Self-rated mental health <sup>b</sup></b>   |  |  | <0.0001              |
| Excellent or very good   | 8  | 20   |                      |
| Good   | 24                                       | 30   |                      |
| Fair or poor   | 68                                       | 49   |                      |
| <b>Considered suicide (past year) <sup>b</sup></b>   |  |  | <0.0001              |
| Yes  | 40                                       | 27   |                      |
| No   | 60                                       | 73   |                      |
| <b>Attempted suicide (past year) <sup>b</sup></b>  |  |  | <0.0001              |
| Yes  | 9  | 4  |                      |
| No   | 91                                       | 96   |                      |
| <b>Experienced violence or harassment (past 5 years, check all that apply) <sup>b, c</sup></b> |  |  |                      |
| Verbal harassment  | 72                                       | 66   | 0.007                |
| Sexual harassment  | 42                                       | 43   | 0.774                |
| Physical intimidation or threats   | 37                                       | 38   | 0.619                |
| Sexual assault   | 29                                       | 24   | 0.014                |
| Physical violence  | 18                                       | 16   | 0.104                |

**Table 4: Health and well-being, continued**

|   | Youth<br>(aged 14-<br>24)<br>n= 991<br>% | Not youth<br>(aged 25+)<br>n= 1874<br>% | P-value <sup>a</sup> |
|---|--|---|----------------------|
| <b>Avoided public spaces for fear of harassment or outing (past 5 years) <sup>b, d</sup></b>                              |  |   | 0.130                |
| No avoidance  | 14                                       | 17                                      |                      |
| 1 or 2 types of spaces  | 21                                       | 20                                      |                      |
| 3 or more types of spaces   | 65                                       | 63                                      |                      |
| <b>Avoidance of specific spaces for fear of harassment or outing (past 5 years, check all that apply) <sup>b, c</sup></b> |  |   |                      |
| Public spaces   | 27                                       | 27                                      | 0.921                |
| Public washrooms  | 70                                       | 58                                      | <0.0001              |
| Schools   | 20                                       | 8                                       | <0.0001              |
| <b>Housing security <sup>b</sup></b>  |  |   | <0.0001              |
| Secure  | 83                                       | 94                                      |                      |
| Insecure <sup>e</sup>   | 17                                       | 6                                       |                      |
| <b>Household food security (past year) <sup>b</sup></b>   |  |   | 0.506                |
| Always had enough to eat  | 84                                       | 85                                      |                      |
| Sometimes did not have enough   | 12                                       | 11                                      |                      |
| Often did not have enough   | 4  | 3                                       |                      |

<sup>a</sup> Values <0.050 indicate that differences between groups are statistically significant.

<sup>b</sup> These variables were missing for 10% of participants or more.

<sup>c</sup> Participants could select more than one option, so total will be more than 100%.

<sup>d</sup> Of 14 spaces given as options in survey (e.g., public washrooms, schools, being out on the land, public transit).

<sup>e</sup> Included living in shelters, motels or boarding houses, temporarily with partners/friends/family, on the street, in a car, or in an abandoned building.

## Trans-specific Family Abuse and Support among Youth

Table 6 displays results relating to trans-specific family abuse and support among youth. The majority of youth had families that did not exhibit trans-specific abusive behaviours. One in four youth had family members who stopped speaking to them or

**Table 5: Primary care experiences among youth with a primary care provider**

|  | Youth (aged 14-24)<br>n= 687<br>% | Not youth (aged 25+)<br>n= 1405<br>% | P-value <sup>a</sup> |
|--|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------|
| Used your correct name, pronouns, or gendered language                                     | 57                                | 69                                   | <0.0001              |
| Was open to discussing trans or non-binary related health concerns                         | 53                                | 68                                   | <0.0001              |
| Asked about your name or pronouns  | 34                                | 32                                   | 0.364                |
| Demonstrated knowledge of trans or non-binary related health concerns                      | 32                                | 44                                   | <0.0001              |
| Needed you to educate them regarding your needs as a trans or non-binary person            | 27                                | 30                                   | 0.126                |
| Used forms with options that were inclusive of you as a trans or non-binary person         | 25                                | 37                                   | <0.0001              |
| Repeatedly misgendered you by using the wrong name, pronouns, or gendered language         | 24                                | 14                                   | <0.0001              |
| Advocated for you as a trans or non-binary person to others                                | 22                                | 30                                   | 0.001                |
| Told you they didn't know enough about trans or non-binary related care to provide it      | 22                                | 14                                   | <0.0001              |
| Took steps to make physical exams more comfortable for you as a trans or non-binary person | 22                                | 32                                   | <0.0001              |
| Thought the name or gender listed on your ID or forms was a mistake                        | 7                                 | 5                                    | 0.334                |
| Refused to discuss trans or non-binary related health concerns                             | 4                                 | 3                                    | 0.372                |
| Used hurtful or insulting language about trans or non-binary identity or experience        | 2                                 | 4                                    | 0.076                |
| Told you that you were not really trans or non-binary                                      | 2                                 | 1                                    | 0.324                |
| Discouraged you from exploring your gender   | 2                                 | 1                                    | 0.240                |
| Insisted on examining parts of your body that were not relevant to your care               | 2                                 | 2                                    | 0.697                |
| Refused to see you or ended care because you were trans or non-binary                      | 1                                 | 2                                    | 0.284                |
| Belittled or ridiculed you for being trans or non-binary                                   | 0.7                               | 1                                    | 0.251                |
| Refused to examine parts of your body because you're trans or non-binary                   | 0.7                               | 1                                    | 0.317                |

<sup>a</sup> Values <0.050 indicate that differences between groups are statistically significant.

that ended their relationship with them due to their trans/non-binary identity. One in five youth had family members who did not let them wear clothes reflecting their gender. Though a small proportion, 1 in 10 youth were sent by family to a therapist, counsellor, or religious advisor to stop them from being trans or non-binary.

Family support has repeatedly been found to be protective against issues such as depression, suicidality, and self-harm in trans youth.<sup>2,3,5</sup> Fifty-eight percent of youth were told by their parents/guardians that they were respected/supported, and half were called by their correct name, pronouns, and gendered language by their parents/guardians.

A minority of youth were lent money to fund gender-

affirming medical care (1 in 5); helped with identity document name and/or gender changes (1 in 5); and had parents/guardians that stood up for them against family, friends, or others (1 in 3).

It is important to recognize that the experiences of transgender/non-binary youth are not uniform due to variation within trans/non-binary youth communities, such as variation in race and in socioeconomic status. For instance, 61.4% of non-racialized trans youth were told by their parents/guardians that they were respected/supported, a significantly higher proportion than that in racialized trans youth (36.5%). Of trans youth living in a low-income household, 11.3% were kicked out of the house because of their identity, compared to 4.5% of trans youth living in a non-low-income household (results not shown).



in tables). In future studies, stratification by racialization, poverty, and other variables in addition to age will reveal the experiences of various groups within the trans/non-binary communities in greater detail.

These results on family support also highlight the importance of connection to broader trans communities. For instance, regarding what they love about being trans or non-binary, one youth participant responded,

*“I love how coming out as trans gave me a new family that I didn’t even know I needed.”*

Despite the challenges faced by trans and non-binary youth, many valued the sense of belonging and resilience they gained from being trans. In the words of another youth participant,

*“[I love] the community. The trans community is so strong and amazing and it’s wonderful to be a part of.”*

## Conclusion

About 35% (n = 991) of Trans PULSE Canada participants were youth. This group reported lower gender-affirming health care access, worse mental health, and fewer trans-inclusive experiences in primary care than the rest of the sample. Reported rates of violence and harassment were concerning, as were those for the avoidance of public spaces, such as schools. Encouragingly, the majority of youth had families that did not exhibit trans-specific abusive behaviours. However, results from this report must be interpreted with caution considering that certain groups, such as trans youth living in rural areas, were underrepresented in the sample.

These findings resemble those from previous research on Canadian trans youth,<sup>1-3</sup> highlighting the importance of supports and interventions specific to this population. Strategies should consider how to promote supportive environments at home and at school, as social support from family and friends

**Table 6: Trans-specific family abuse and support among youth**

| Youth<br>(aged 14-24)<br>n= 991<br>%   |    |
|--|----|
| <b>Family behaviours (check all that apply) <sup>a</sup></b>   |    |
| Stopped speaking to you or ended your relationship   | 25 |
| Threatened you with violence   | 7  |
| Was violent towards you  | 6  |
| Kicked you out of the house  | 7  |
| Didn't let you wear clothes that reflect your gender   | 21 |
| Sent you to a therapist, counsellor, or religious advisor to stop you from being trans or non-binary | 10 |
| <b>Parent/guardian support (check all that apply) <sup>a</sup></b>                                   |    |
| Told you they respect/support you  | 58 |
| Used your correct name   | 53 |
| Used your correct pronouns or gendered language  | 51 |
| Lent or gave you money to help with gender-affirming medical care                                    | 21 |
| Helped you change your name and/or gender on your identity documents (ID)                            | 22 |
| Did research to learn how to best support you  | 34 |
| Stood up for you with family, friends, or others   | 33 |
| <sup>a</sup> These variables were missing for 10% of participants or more.                           |    |

protects trans youth against mental health issues, even in the face of discrimination and stigma.<sup>3</sup> Previous research suggests that there may be support for the LGBTQ+ community among non-LGBTQ+ youth.<sup>1</sup> Such support can be used to drive initiatives like Sexuality and Gender Alliances to improve the social connectedness and comfort of trans youth in schools. Factors that not only prevent adverse outcomes but also those that promote positive health and wellness for trans youth should be explored. Given the diversity within trans youth communities, future research with an emphasis on intersectionality is required. It is suggested that research with a life course approach is conducted to observe the long-term impacts of the early life experiences of trans and non-binary people.

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