



State of Trans* in Alberta: Trans Day of Visibility Report 2014

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	2
Methodology.....	2
Report Domains.....	2
Identification.....	2
Health Care.....	3
Education.....	3
Social Discourse.....	4
Income & Social Status.....	4
Social Support Networks.....	5
Housing.....	5
Conclusion	5
References.....	6

Introduction

The Trans Equality Society of Alberta (TESA) is pleased to present our inaugural *State of Trans* in Alberta: Trans Day of Visibility Report 2014*.

TESA's mission is to be a witness to and a voice for matters concerning trans*-identified Albertans. TESA engages in advocacy and education in three primary areas: government, outreach, and community development. Trans Day of Visibility, observed annually on March 31, is an opportunity for TESA to provide witness to ongoing issues of concern for trans* Albertans.

TESA is pleased to provide this report towards developing dialogue and consultation for a more complete inclusion for trans* people within Alberta.

Methodology

At this time, TESA does not have the resources to fund a formal study in Alberta. Accordingly, TESA's *State of Trans* in Alberta* report relies on informal discussion with trans* people from a variety of places within the province as well as research data from other provinces when available, in addition to reference to relevant policy and legislative frameworks currently in place. As Albertans live within a context of multiple jurisdictions--such as distinct yet sometimes overlapping provincial and federal responsibilities--such frameworks may include legislation or practises from beyond Alberta's borders.

The *State of Trans* in Alberta: Trans Day of Visibility Report 2014* focuses on seven domains: identification, health care, education, social discourse, income and social status, social support networks, and housing.

Report Domains

Identification

While trans* Albertans are able to change their gender markers temporarily on Alberta Operator's Licences and Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan (AHCIP) cards, they are unable to change their sex markers on birth certificates as per Section 30(1) of the *Vital Statistics Act*, which requires that "a person's anatomical sex structure has been changed." (*Vital Statistics Act*, S. 30(1), p. 25).

Important to note is that any sex reassignment surgeries that would typically qualify as changing a person's anatomical sex structure result in permanent sterilization. TESA finds it abhorrent that 42 years after the repeal of the *Sexual Sterilization Act* (1928), an Alberta statute still requires that a subset of the population be sterilized to access appropriate legal identification.

Even with the recent improvements to amending the sex marker on Alberta Operator's Licences

(Service Alberta, n.d.), trans* Albertans still face a requirement to resubmit a letter from a psychologist or psychiatrist at every licence renewal. Repeated requirements to provide such letters are an unnecessary intrusion into trans* medical histories, and could present a large barrier to low-income Albertans, who may not be able to afford regular psychiatric visits.

Inability to amend birth certificates also affects trans* Albertans travelling beyond Canada's borders. Without an amended birth certificate, Passport Canada issues trans* Canadians only a two-year, limited-validity passport in the applicant's correct sex.

Recommendation:

TESA calls for the Province of Alberta to follow the lead of Ontario in allowing trans* people to change their birth documents without undergoing surgery.

Health Care

Currently only two physicians in Alberta offer transition-related psychiatric services. Both doctors are located in the Edmonton-area and have lengthy waiting lists, often at least for one year. Limited location and long waiting lists present an unacceptable lack of access to trans* health care for Albertans at large, both trans* Albertans who reside in other urban centres as well as rural trans* Albertans. Additionally, trans* Albertans living outside of Edmonton face expenses such as travel and accommodations, as well as needed absences from work, to visit Edmonton for services.

At this time, no clinics or physicians in Alberta are known to operate on a model of informed consent to initiate providing prescriptions such as hormones, leaving an effective bottleneck with the two Edmonton-area psychiatrists mentioned above.

Many members of the Alberta trans* community have mentioned discrimination by health service providers upon determination that their patient is trans*. This discrimination can range from misgendering and use of the wrong name to outright refusing service.

Recommendations:

TESA recommends trans* treatment options be expanded to include distance-medicine practises such as the adoption of video conferencing services in concert with local doctors providing access to prescriptions as well as positive consideration of informed-consent models of care.

TESA recommends Alberta physicians and their staff be cognizant of regulations and accepted practises regarding appropriate professional care.

Education

Edmonton Public School Board (TESA, 2011) and St. Albert Public Schools (TESA, 2013) have made progress toward trans*-inclusive policies. Despite these advancements, TESA members have noted a

number of discussions surrounding bullying experienced by trans* youth within Alberta communities, reflecting data from Egale that indicates that 78% of trans youth feel unsafe in some way at school, while only 3.4% of non-LGBTQ students felt unsafe (Taylor & Peter, 2011, p. 85).

Recommendation:

TESA recommends that all Alberta school boards establish inclusionary policies.

Social Discourse

Media in Alberta have covered trans* issues in print, radio, and television, as well as online. TESA congratulates Alberta media for presenting trans* people and issues in a professional, fair and balanced manner.

Some municipalities have acknowledged trans* issues through supporting proclamations for Trans Day of Visibility. These include the cities of Edmonton and Calgary in 2013, and the city of Edmonton in 2014.

While some Alberta politicians have shown strong support for trans* concerns (Allen, 2012), at least one elected Alberta representative has taken a strongly oppositional perspective (Anders, 2012).

Recommendation:

TESA recommends that social discourse regarding matters concerning trans* people continue to seek trans* perspectives.

Income & Social Status

TESA has found that many trans* people in Alberta face employment issues. Trans* Albertans seem to face persistent issues related to unemployment and underemployment. Unemployment and underemployment may be attributed to lack of public acceptance, lack of explicitly-supportive human rights legislation, and lack of access to official identification that matches our lived gender. While TESA was unable to conduct our own survey, TransPULSE found that in Ontario, “[o]ver 40% of participants were unemployed, unable to work, or self-described their employment status as “underemployed;” 55% of participants had an annual income of less than \$20,000” (Bauer et al, 2007, p. 4).

Recommendation:

TESA recommends the *Alberta Human Rights Act* be amended to make "gender identity" and "gender expression" explicitly stated as prohibited grounds for discrimination in Alberta.

Social Support Networks

TESA notes that a lack of support from family and friends appears to be somewhat common among Alberta trans* communities. While this often encourages new relationships to be formed, the reality of being disowned can have severe mental health consequences. While TESA has no formal data for Alberta, TransPULSE found that in Ontario, 42% of trans* youth had parents who were “not very” or “not at all” supportive. 70% of those whose parents were strongly supportive had positive mental health, as compared to 15% of youth whose parents were not strongly supportive (Travers et al, 2012, p. 2).

Recommendation:

TESA recommends support services for trans* individuals to ameliorate mental health issues.

Housing

While TESA has no formal data for Alberta, an American study indicates a high level of homelessness amongst trans* people. The National Center for Transgender Equality report *Injustice At Every Turn* indicates that 19% of trans people reported having been refused a home, and 19% reported having experienced homelessness at one point. TESA considers the American data largely in alignment with observations in the Alberta trans* community: many trans* individuals in Alberta seem to rely on public or subsidized housing, and a significant proportion seem to experience a level of homelessness at some point. Some Alberta shelters are now explicitly trans*-inclusive. TESA notes a number of individuals who stop attending support groups for a number of months, and upon returning, advise that homelessness or lack of employment was the reason for their absence.

Recommendation:

TESA recommends assessing the accessibility of social safety-net services for trans* individuals.

Conclusion

While trans* Albertans enjoy growing public understanding of matters concerning trans* individuals thanks to strong social discourse, the *State of Trans* in Alberta: Trans Day of Visibility Report 2014* notes a number of domains where improvements are clearly indicated. Trans* Albertans still have difficulty obtaining official identification documents as well as gaining and retaining employment and housing. Trans* Albertans also face substantial challenges accessing specialised medical care, in addition to challenges accessing some routine care. TESA hopes that by beginning to make these persistent issues visible, challenges may be better overcome.

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