



# Trans interweaving project: Frequently Asked Questions

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## What is the project about?

GMSH – Gay Men’s Sexual Health Alliance – supports 28 independent organizations in Ontario that are funded to do frontline HIV prevention and sexual health promotion work withGBTQ2+ people and communities. These 28 organizations make up “the GMSH Alliance.”

The forms of support that GMSH provides include:

- helping to build the knowledge and skills of staff working withGBTQ2+ people and communities
- resource development including provincial social marketing campaigns (for example: [www.thesexyouwant.ca](http://www.thesexyouwant.ca) )
- networking and community mobilization

GMSH is also a link between Provincial and Federal ministries of health andGBTQ2+ communities. GMSH received funds from the Ontario Ministry of Health to develop campaigns. In recent years, GMSH has prioritized digital communications work, to help ensure that materials are available across the province and reflect a range of lived experiences.

Essentially, this is a project to:

1. examine and understand how GMSH - and the front-line agencies that are the members of the GMSH Alliance - engage, serve and support trans people who are connected with gay men’s communities and sexual cultures,
2. look at how to improve this, and
3. create an action plan.

So the project can make the biggest difference, the project is taking an inclusive approach regarding the many parts of trans communities for whom HIV prevention and supports are particularly relevant.

## Why is a gay men’s organization doing this work?

We are very clear that being gay (or bi or queer) and being trans are different. We are also very clear that GMSH’s mandate focuses on gay, bi and queer men, both cis and trans.

GMSH’s focused mandate on the sexual health of gay, bi, and queer men’s health continues to be important due to the disproportionate impact of HIV in our communities. Until very recently, HIV testing requisition forms only collected information about sex, and didn’t collect information about gender identity. This has meant that the HIV sector – including GMSH – has not had any information about *what proportion* of trans people are testing positive, and *who* within trans communities are testing positive.

In recent years, GMSH has been very intentional about working with 2GBTQ guys (cis and trans) who have been under-represented. This has included focuses on GBMSM (gay, bi and other men who have sex with men) who are Indigenous and Two-Spirit, African-Caribbean-Black, same gender loving, and/or trans and gender nonbinary.



GMSH is currently sponsoring the re-development of Primed and QueerTransMen.org, which are sexual health resources for gay, bi and queer trans men. As part of the sponsoring this work, GMSH hired a queer trans person as a project lead and funded the engagement of a broad range of queer trans guys.

The Primed project team put together some issues to consider and recommendations for GMSH. This new project is building upon these recommendations, which included a recognition of the fluidity and diversity of experiences within trans communities. So, this new project is very intentional about looking at the experiences of not only queer trans men, but also non-binary people as well as trans women who describe themselves as being connected with gay (or bi or queer) men's communities and sexual cultures.

### Why is the project happening now?

The project is happening now as a result of a few factors. The Primed project, and the project team's recommendations, made an enormous difference in this project happening now. And, more and more trans people are now working within the HIV sector and are getting better at using their insider privilege to deepen conversations and contribute to change.

Finally, the increasing visibility of trans issues in society broadly – as well as in LGBT2SQ+ communities and among the GMSH alliance – has also contributed to shifting conversations.

### Who is involved with the project? What is their experience with trans communities?

GMSH has contracted four people with lived experience in trans communities and with connections to and / or histories in gay bi and queer men's communities.

The team consists of Devon MacFarlane (he/him; they/them) who is leading the team; Robbie Ahmed (he/him), Yasmeen Persad (she/her), and Joël Xavier (he/him; il/lui) are all team members.

For a small group of people, the team has a pretty broad mix of experiences. These include racialization, immigration, perspectives from outside of Toronto, Francophone and Anglophone perspectives. Most members of the project team have years of involvement in the HIV sector, and most have a decade (some have two decades) of involvement in trans communities and trans health. On the team, there are also skills and experience in action research, and in leading organizational change and systems change initiatives.

In addition to the project team, there will be an advisory committee that is about two-thirds members of trans communities. Participants will be from across the province and will bring a very diverse range of perspectives. Most will bring knowledge of the HIV sector and/or of trans people's sexual health, and/or



of healthy relationships. And, just under half the advisory committee members work in the sector, whether as front-line staff or as management.

## Trans women have been excluded for so long – what's changed?

GMSH has been hearing that some – but by no means all – trans women see themselves as being connected with gay men's communities. Some may have first found their sense of belonging or "home" in gay men's communities and organizations. Some trans women may use apps such as Grindr, Scruff, and Squirt.

GMSH has also been hearing that there are specific challenges for trans women in accessing HIV testing, PrEP and PEP, and other types of HIV prevention and support initiatives. And, some trans women who have connections with gay men's programming at HIV/AIDS service organizations feel as though they can no longer access services they've accessed before they started disclosing their identity or transitioning.

GMSH is striving to do this work in relation to trans women very thoughtfully and carefully, as we want to be sure that we aren't coming across as denying or minimizing trans women's identities as women. We also need to recognize the constraints of the organization's mandate. The results of this project will be brought forward widely within the HIV sector.

## This project is lumping a whole bunch of trans identities together, and in connection with a gay men's organization. How will it be useful?

The project is to learn how to improve access for trans people to services in the HIV sector. GMSH's mandate includes helping gay men's health workers in HIV-sector organizations build their skills and abilities in relation to five priority areas of work, so we'll be looking closely at these five priorities. These priorities are testing for HIV and sexually transmitted infections, PrEP and PEP, harm reduction (in the context of sexualised substance use), sexual health information, and online outreach/digital communications.

We know a broad range of trans people are connected with 2SGBTQ+ communities and sexual cultures. So, we are looking to understand what common and distinct issues in HIV prevention are and support that different parts of trans communities may experience, and what actions can be taken to better engage, support, and serve trans people.

## A lot of trans folks who have sex with men don't identify as "gay". How is that going to work?



There are a lot more issues for trans folks than HIV – will this project help with those?

We are very aware of that there are many pressing issues that trans people face, such as poverty, barriers to employment, limited safe and affordable housing, challenges in accessing appropriate and respectful health care, and more. And, many of these issues are connected with risk for becoming HIV positive, or risks for challenges in the care and treatment of trans people living with HIV.

The primary focus of this project is to improving GMSH's, and the HIV sector's abilities to engage, serve and support trans people who are connected with gay men's communities and sexual cultures. We also want to learn how GMSH – and the HIV sector more broadly – might be able to collaborate on other initiatives, and might be able to influence provincial and federal funders, policy makers, and more.

Are you looking to hear from trans communities in this project?

Absolutely!

We're looking to hear from a diverse range of trans people – of all gender identities and transition or non-transition statuses - who are connected with gay men's communities and/or sexual cultures. Participants need to be living or working in Ontario.

The reason we want to hear from a broad range of perspectives helps us paint a more accurate and nuanced picture of how we might better integrate trans, non-binary, and Two-Spirit people in the HIV sector in Ontario. This will help ensure that we create recommendations and an action plan that is most likely to work for all parts of our communities.

We are especially interested in hearing from people who often have a lot to say and who often aren't directly invited to speak: **Indigenous** and / or **racialized** trans people, trans people living in **smaller cities, towns, and rural communities**, who are **older** (age 50+) or **younger**, who are **living with HIV, disabilities, or other chronic health conditions**. And, people who may be marginalized for other reasons, like due to **being poor**, for **doing sex work**, or for **using drugs**.

We are also interested in hearing from **people who are new to Canada**, whether documented or undocumented, or are here temporarily (including international students). And, trans folks who are who are **connected with HIV sector organizations**, have been once or twice to HIV-sector organizations and didn't want to go back, or folks who've avoided them.

We will also be looking to hear from front line staff working in the HIV sector organizations that are affiliated with GMSH, trans people working in any roles in the HIV sector, as well as management in these organizations and more broadly in the HIV sector.

## How will you ensure that there's a wide diversity of trans people participating?

We're taking a few steps to ensure that we're hearing the most diverse range of perspectives possible in the project. These include:

- Being clear that we want to hear from the full diversity of trans communities, especially people who often don't receive invitations to participate.
- Holding some groups for specific parts of trans communities.
- Saving half the seats in each group for people who live outside of Toronto, so we can get a broader range of perspectives from around the province. And, holding the groups virtually, so there aren't travel barriers to participating.
- Having a screening process. This means that it isn't first come, first served for taking part in a group. We will keep track of how many people are participating, and what the mix is of people we have (and haven't) heard from, and then invite people who've said they want to join the pool possible participants. This will help, for instance, in helping to make sure that we're hearing from older trans people, trans people living in small towns, trans people with disabilities, etc., within the groups we are running.
- Using a range of approaches to get the word to the broad diversity of trans people. And, if we aren't hearing from a broad mix of people, we will take additional steps to do focused recruitment.

## What groups and interviews will you be running?

We'll be doing interviews with HIV-positive trans people who are connected with gay men's communities and sexual cultures.

We'll be running the following groups for trans people who are connected to gay men's communities and sexual cultures.

- First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people who identify as trans and/or non-binary or Two Spirit (people who **wouldn't** describe themselves in western terms as cisgender)
- Racialized trans and non-binary people
- Francophone trans and non-binary people, as well as frontline staff working in HIV sector organizations.
- HIV positive trans and non-binary people (for interviews)
- Sex workers who are trans and non-binary
- Non-binary people who were assigned male at birth
- Youth ages 16-24
- An open group for any trans or non-binary people who are connected with gay men's communities or sexual cultures.



For people who could participate in more than one group (e.g. a 23 year old Two Spirit / non binary Indigenous person who was assigned male at birth) you can let us know which group you would prefer to attend.

We're also recruiting for focus groups for staff working in HIV-sector organizations in Ontario

- Trans staff working in any role in an HIV-sector organization
- Staff who are in gay men's health roles that are affiliated with GMSH.

Will there be an honorarium or compensation for community members who participate?

We'll absolutely be compensating trans community members

There will be an honorarium of \$25 for people participating in individual interviews, which will be about an hour long, and of \$50 for people participating in a small group session. Small group sessions will be about 2 hours long.

Frontline staff participating in the groups for frontline workers won't be compensated, as they will be doing this in the course of their roles.

There's a pandemic happening. How will people participate?

People will participate via Zoom. We will be holding individual interviews (mostly for poz trans folks) and small groups.

I'm interested in participating. How can I get involved?

Please email Yasmeen Persad, the coordinator for this project, to let us know that you are interested. Yasmeen can be reached at [trans.project@gmsh.ca](mailto:trans.project@gmsh.ca).

Yasmeen will send you a link to a screening survey, which either the two of you can complete over the phone together, or you can complete on your own. You will then be added to a pool of possible participants.

As we are looking to bring forward the most diverse range of voices and issues so that the results of the project will have the best chance of making a difference around HIV prevention and support for all trans people in the province who are connected with gay men's communities, we will be selecting people from this pool to have a brief phone call. In this call, we will share with you some more about the project, explain how the group will run and the kinds of questions we'll be asking, and ask you some



questions. These questions will include things like what has you interested in participating in this project, what it's like for you to participate in groups. You will then be added to a list of people who have been fully screened. To help us have the broadest mix of participants, we will select people from this narrower list to receive an invitation to a group.