



A Way with Words: Inclusive Washrooms

Public Service Pride Network
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Introduction

Creating safe, inclusive washing and toilet facilities remains a priority across the public service. With this in mind, Public Services and Procurement Canada and the Public Service Pride Network have partnered to address current gaps, ensuring future design guidelines, design efforts and change management processes meet the needs of all users in their full human diversity (disability, age, race/ethnicity, religion and more) regardless of their gender identity, gender expression or sex.

Access to safe and inclusive washrooms is a fundamental human need, but for Two-Spirit, transgender, non-binary and gender-diverse persons, using public washrooms can lead to harassment and violence—even in federally regulated workplaces. The lack of safe and inclusive washrooms not only jeopardizes employees' health and safety, but also affects their sense of belonging in the workplace.

The Public Service Pride Network believes that everyone deserves to pee in peace!

Public Services and Procurement Canada is working on drafting an Inclusive Washroom Design Guide. The Guide is being developed with the principles of inclusivity, safety, flexibility, adaptability and choice. The Guide will allow for the ad hoc application of these design principles in a way that is responsive to the unique characteristics of each real property asset.

Attitudes can be the most difficult barrier Two-Spirit, transgender, non-binary and gender-diverse persons face when seeking access to safe and inclusive washing and toilet facilities. Since words are a mirror of society's attitudes and perceptions, we should all think carefully about how we present information on inclusive washing and toilet facilities, and the users of these spaces, to help overcome negative attitudes and shape positive ones. We can all contribute to fostering a safe and inclusive workplace if we understand and speak of inclusive washing and toilet facilities and their users in an accurate, objective, positive and inclusive manner.

The Public Service Pride Network—a grassroots employee-led network representing thousands of Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and asexual ([2SLGBTQIA+](#)) employees (and their allies) across the federal public service—has heard from employees that there is an immediate need for robust change management practices informed by 2SLGBTQIA+ employees to support the implementation of inclusive washing and toilet facilities within the federal real property portfolio. As a result, the Public Service Pride Network has created *A Way with Words: Inclusive Washrooms*, a resource document to help federal public servants understand key terms commonly used when discussing inclusive washing and toilet facilities.

Language is continuously evolving. As a result, it is important to note that this list of terminology is not exhaustive. These definitions are a starting point to understanding the

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federal government's efforts to advance the development, implementation, and maintenance of inclusive washing and toilet facilities across federal government departments and agencies.

Frequently used terms

The following terms are organized in a thematic, narrative-based (non-alphabetical) way to support learning and change management processes in the context of inclusive washrooms.

inclusive washroom

A washroom that all users in their full human diversity (disability, age, race/ethnicity and more) can use freely and easily regardless of their gender identity, gender expression or sex.

The Public Service Pride Network believes that washroom facilities should be inclusive by design.

all-access washroom (also universal washroom)

A washroom that can be approached, entered and used by persons with physical or sensory disabilities.

individual washroom (also single-user washroom)

A private, lockable washing and toilet facility, to be used by one individual at a time.

multi-stall washroom (also multi-user washroom)

A space with multiple washing and toilet facilities. Toilet facilities are separated, fully enclosed stalls for privacy. Sinks are sometimes in a shared space.

gender-designated washroom

A space with washing and toilet facilities organized by binary gender (typically woman or man). These spaces can be individual washrooms or multi-stall washrooms.

sex (also biological sex)

A defined set of anatomical and physiological characteristics, including chromosomes, gene expression, hormones and reproductive or sexual anatomy.

Sex is usually categorized as female or male, but there is variation in the biological attributes that comprise sex and how those attributes appear. For some people, sex is not static and can change in the course of a person's life. Often a person with these variations is characterized or self-identifies as intersex.

This term does not refer to sexual orientation or gender.

sex assigned at birth (also birth-assigned sex)

The sex assigned to a person at the time of birth according to a set of medical standards, usually based on the person's external genitalia.

gender

The behavioural, cultural and psychological traits associated with an array of gender identities, including woman or man, in a given society.

Gender influences how people perceive themselves and others. It refers not only to physical, psychological, behavioural and other differences, but also to the meanings and values society associates with male and female, that is, the idea that people have specific social roles and skills because of their sex. There is considerable diversity in how individuals and groups understand, experience and express gender through the roles they take on, the expectations placed on them, their relations with others and the complex ways that gender is institutionalized in and by society.

Gender is not confined to a binary (girl/woman and boy/man), nor is it static; it exists along a continuum and can change over time.

A person's gender does not determine their sexual orientation.

gender identity

A person's internal and deeply felt sense of being a man, a woman, both, neither, or somewhere along the gender spectrum. A person's gender identity may or may not align with the gender typically associated with their sex.

Gender identity is not necessarily apparent to others, and it does not determine a person's sexual orientation. It can be static or fluid, meaning that it may change over the course of one's lifetime.

gender expression

The various ways in which people choose to present and communicate the gender with which they identify. Gender can be expressed, for example, through behaviour, clothing, hair, voice and other aspects of physical appearance.

A person's gender expression may not align with societal expectations of gender. It is therefore not a reliable indicator of a person's gender identity.

cisgender (also cis)

Refers to a person who identifies with the sex they were assigned at birth.

gender fluid

Refers to a person whose gender identity varies over time and may include man, woman, androgynous, multiple, no gender, or a different gender outside of the "woman—man" spectrum.

gender diverse

Refers to individuals who do not identify exclusively as a man or exclusively as a woman (for example, individuals who are non-binary or Two-Spirit).

non-binary

Refers to a person whose gender does not align with the binary gender model of man or woman. It is a gender identity that may include man, woman, androgynous, fluid, multiple, no gender, or a different gender outside of the "woman—man" spectrum.

transgender (also trans)

Refers to a person whose gender does not align with the sex they were assigned at birth.

Two-Spirit

An English term used to broadly reflect concepts traditional in many Indigenous cultures. It is a culturally specific identity used by some Indigenous Peoples to indicate a person whose gender identity, spiritual identity or sexual orientation comprises both male and female spirits.