



Myth Busting and FAQ Sheet: Inclusive Washrooms

Public Service Pride Network
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Inclusive washrooms project: Introduction

The Public Service Pride Network (PSPN)—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 (inclusive washrooms) within the federal real property portfolio.

In response, Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC), the common service provider of office space for the federal government, is developing an Inclusive Washroom Design Guide (the Guide). The Guide will provide functional direction and design standards for the construction and renovation of washing and toilet facilities across the PSPC real property portfolio. The Guide is scheduled for release in December 2024.

The PSPN is collaborating closely with PSPC to ensure the Guide, broader design efforts and change management processes are informed by members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ communities, following the principle of “Nothing About Us Without Us.” This principle relies on the participation of affected communities in decision-making processes for policies, programs, practices and service delivery that affect them.

The PSPN firmly believes that washrooms should be inclusive by design, meaning they should cater to 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. Inclusive design helps reduce barriers to access for everyone.

The PSPN created this myth-busting and FAQ resource document to help federal public servants become better acquainted with inclusive washrooms and address some common questions and misconceptions about these facilities.

Frequently asked questions

What are inclusive washrooms?

Inclusive washrooms are washrooms 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 PSPN believes that washrooms should be inclusive by design.

Why is the Public Service Pride Network advocating for inclusive washrooms?

The PSPN is a grassroots employee-led network representing thousands of [2SLGBTQIA+](#) employees (and their allies) across the federal public service. Our network has heard from many employees that there is an immediate need for robust change management practices informed by 2SLGBTQIA+ employees to support the implementation of inclusive washrooms within the federal real property portfolio.

Washrooms are essential facilities for us all, regardless of our human diversity or identity characteristics.

[Research](#) (PDF) has also shown that gender-designated washrooms are frequently sites of anxiety, harassment and discrimination for women, persons with disabilities and members of the intersectional 2SLGBTQIA+ community. Specifically, Two-Spirit, transgender, non-binary and gender-diverse colleagues experience outright denial of access to washrooms in the workplace that match their gender identity. These acts of intimidation and deterrence are inconsistent with both the Values and Ethics Code for the Public Sector and the *Canadian Human Rights Act*. Unsurprisingly, because of the risk to their safety, many Two-Spirit, transgender, non-binary and gender-diverse people often elect to avoid gender-designated washrooms altogether, which has negative effects on their physical and mental health, alongside their sense of belonging in the workplace.

More needs to be done to improve workplace well-being and belonging for members of the intersectional 2SLGBTQIA+ community, and specifically for our transgender and gender-diverse colleagues.

What washroom types are in Public Services and Procurement Canada's real property portfolio?

In the Public Services and Procurement Canada real property portfolio, there are several different washroom types.

- **Individual washroom (also single-user washroom)**
 - A private, lockable washing and toilet facility, to be used by one individual at a time.
- **Gender-designated washroom**
 - A space with washing and toilet facilities organized by binary gender (woman or man). These spaces can be individual washrooms or multi-stall washrooms.
- **All-access washroom (also universal washroom)**
 - A washroom that can be approached, entered and used by persons with physical or sensory disabilities.
- **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.

Why are inclusive washrooms needed?

Canadian law generally recognizes that all people should be able to use a washing and toilet facility that corresponds to their gender identity and gender expression—without discrimination, harassment or abuse.

Despite that, washrooms are often indicated as one of the least safe spaces by Two-Spirit, transgender, non-binary and gender-diverse persons. This even applies to our 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 key word to describe these facilities is **inclusive**. Inclusive design considers the full range of human diversity with respect to disability, language, race, ethnicity, gender identity, gender expression, culture, religion, age and other forms of human difference. Inclusive design can help all human beings experience the world around them in a fair and equal way.

It is important to note that not every Two-Spirit, transgender, non-binary and gender-diverse person wants to solely use an inclusive washroom; some trans men and trans women, for example, will opt to use gender-designated washrooms that match their gender identity when these facilities are available. Two-Spirit, transgender, non-binary and gender-diverse persons have a right to be treated according to their deeply felt gender identity.

[For more information about key terms and concepts, please visit the Public Service Pride Network's A Way with Words: Inclusive Washrooms resource document.](#)

Who are inclusive washrooms for? Who benefits from inclusive washrooms?

The PSPN advocates for inclusive washrooms that are designed for everyone, in their full human diversity. This approach benefits everyone by ensuring that washrooms accommodate the needs of all users.

Inclusive washrooms are intended to provide dignity and privacy for all individuals, including:

- persons with disabilities (whether the impairment is physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication or sensory; temporary, permanent or episodic in nature; and apparent or non-apparent)
- people who have experienced trauma in washrooms
- people with certain medical conditions who may require more or different types of privacy
- people practising religious rites, such as someone performing an ablution prior to prayer or worship
- people with specific cultural beliefs and practices
- people using reusable menstrual products, including menstrual cups
- many other scenarios!

When will the Inclusive Washroom Design Guide be available?

Public Services and Procurement Canada aims to release the Inclusive Washroom Design Guide in December 2024. 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.

How can we tell if a washroom was designed according to the Inclusive Washroom Design Guide? Will signage be available?

The [Government of Canada's Design Standard for the Federal Identity Program](#) (FIP) is being updated to address and reflect the new Inclusive Washroom Design Guide. Public Services and Procurement Canada and the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat are leading this work.

Currently, the FIP only provides direction for signs identifying binary gender-designated washrooms (men or women), which may or may not include accessible facilities for persons with disabilities.

Best practices for signage in inclusive washrooms, based on academic and industry sources, focus on indicating the function and amenities of the space rather than specifying who can use it (for example, depicting a toilet instead of a human figure). This approach allows users to select the washroom that best meets their needs.

Are inclusive washrooms private?

Inclusive washrooms can be either single-user or multi-user. The availability of single-user and multi-user inclusive washrooms will vary by workplace.

Detailed information on the privacy and safety design principles of these spaces will be provided once the Inclusive Washroom Design Guide is finalized.

Will all gender-designated washrooms be converted to inclusive washrooms?

No!

Existing gender-designated washrooms and other washroom types will remain available for federal public servants in workplaces owned and leased by Public Services and Procurement Canada.

In new buildings, major rehabilitations, and recapitalizations* with base building** upgrades, Public Services and Procurement Canada will incorporate a specific number of inclusive washrooms based on building occupancy, as per the requirements in the latest codes and standards. These will most likely be universal or all-access washrooms. Universal and all-access washrooms are facilities designed to be accessible to individuals with physical or sensory disabilities.

* Recapitalization: The restoration, modernization, or replacement of facilities or their structural components to extend or restore a facility's lifecycle.

** Base building: The building shell, including finished floors, exterior walls, interior core demising walls, finished ceilings with lighting, and other building systems consistent with the building's designed function and planned general use.

Where are the inclusive washrooms and how can I find them?

Currently, 82.9% of Public Services and Procurement Canada's Crown-owned buildings have at least one inclusive, non-gender-designated washroom of the universal or all-access washroom type. Universal and all-access washrooms are facilities designed to be accessible to individuals with physical or sensory disabilities.

For detailed information on the availability of inclusive washrooms in your workplace, please contact your departmental real property team directly.

What should I do if I am uncomfortable using an inclusive washroom?

The federal public service will continue to provide gender-designated washrooms in every building.

Washrooms designed according to the Inclusive Washroom Design Guide will offer federal public servants access to a variety of washroom types. These new washroom designs differ significantly from traditional design standards, prioritizing privacy and choice.

Why are there menstrual products in men’s washrooms?

Federally regulated workplaces already provide basic sanitation products such as toilet paper and soap in our washrooms.

As of December 15, 2023, federally regulated employers are required to provide menstrual products (like pads and tampons) to any employee who needs them while on the job. These products must be readily available in all toilet rooms—regardless of gender designation—in workplaces controlled by the employer.

“Toilet room” means a room containing a toilet or urinal. A toilet room can be the entire room if only one toilet is present, or a larger room containing multiple compartments (stalls).

It may not always be possible to have menstrual products available in all toilet rooms within an employer-controlled workplace. In these situations, the Labour Program regulations offer flexibility. Employers may choose an alternate location if it is in the same workplace and is always accessible to employees. It must offer a reasonable amount of privacy.

This initiative is inclusive of all employees who menstruate, including cisgender women, non-binary individuals, transgender men and intersex individuals.

Unrestricted and barrier-free access to menstrual products better protects menstruating employees and makes sure that they feel safe to use the toilet room that best reflects their gender.

For more information about the Labour Program’s efforts to ensure barrier-free access to menstrual products, please visit [Requirements for employers to provide menstrual products in federally regulated workplaces](#).

How many 2SLGBTQIA+ federal public servants are there? How many 2SLGBTQIA+ Canadians are there?

In the 2022 Public Service Employee Survey, over [12,000 respondents identified as 2SLGBTQIA+](#), and over [600 respondents identified as being another gender outside of man or woman](#).

[Statistics Canada](#) notes that Canada, as a whole, is home to approximately 1 million people who are 2SLGBTQIA+, of which 52% are women, 44% are men, and 3% are non-binary.

For more information about 2SLGBTQIA+ federal public servants, please visit the Public Service Pride Network's [Resources](#) page, and for more information about 2SLGBTQIA+ Canadians, please visit the [2SLGBTQI+ Secretariat](#).

Flushing myths

As the federal public service develops and eventually implements the Inclusive Washroom Design Guide, you may encounter some questions or concerns about these facilities. It's important to remember the facts and flush away some of the common myths!

Myth: The move to inclusive washrooms will have negative impacts on the workforce.

Fact: Inclusive washrooms have positive impacts on everyone, not just members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community.

The Inclusive Washroom Design Guide is being developed with the principles of inclusivity, safety, flexibility, adaptability and choice in mind to ensure everyone, regardless of their disability, language, race, ethnicity, gender identity, gender expression, culture, religion, age and other forms of human difference, can use a washroom while in the workplace without undue effort or separation.

Existing gender-designated multi-stall washrooms can sometimes lack privacy and accessibility features needed for a variety of users, including:

- persons with disabilities
- members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, and specifically our Two-Spirit, transgender, non-binary and gender-diverse colleagues
- people practising religious rites, such as someone performing an ablution prior to prayer or worship

[Research](#) (PDF) has also shown that gender-designated washrooms are often sites of anxiety, harassment, and discrimination for Two Spirit, transgender, non-binary and gender-diverse individuals. In some cases, our colleagues in these communities face outright denial of access to washrooms that align with their gender identity in the workplace. These acts of intimidation and exclusion directly contradict the Values and Ethics Code for the Public Sector and the [Canadian Human Rights Act](#). As a result, many Two-Spirit, transgender, non-binary and gender-diverse people often avoid gender-designated washrooms altogether to protect their safety. This avoidance can negatively impact their physical and mental health, as well as their sense of belonging in the workplace.

Moving forward, new washroom designs will prioritize privacy and choice, departing from traditional standards to better meet the intersectional needs of users.

While efforts are being made to create more inclusive washrooms, gender-designated and accessible washrooms will continue to be available for federal public servants. The goal is to provide employees with choices, empowering them to use the washroom that best suits their needs.

Myth: The washroom barriers faced by the 2SLGBTQIA+ community can be solved by offering them separate facilities designated for 2SLGBTQIA+ users.

Fact: Creating or implementing exclusive washrooms for only 2SLGBTQIA+ persons actually decreases safety for members of the broader 2SLGBTQIA+ community, and creates further segregation from the rest of the workforce. Instead of forcing certain communities, or persons, to retreat into segregated physical and social spaces, washrooms need to be inclusive, accessible and safe spaces for everyone, including Two-Spirit, transgender, non-binary and gender-diverse persons.

The Inclusive Washroom Design Guide is being developed with the principles of inclusivity, safety, flexibility, adaptability and choice in mind to ensure everyone, regardless of their disability, language, race, ethnicity, gender identity, gender expression, culture, religion, age and other forms of human difference, can use a washroom while in the workplace without undue effort or separation. This important work is all about creating choices, empowering users to use the washrooms that work best for them. Inclusive washrooms also provide increased privacy, broaden the range of options and are equipped for different needs.

Alongside new inclusive washrooms, education and awareness will help remove attitudinal barriers 2SLGBTQIA+ persons face (such as harassment and violence) when using the washrooms of their choice.

Myth: Building new washrooms is too expensive.

Fact: Designing inclusive washrooms in new buildings should have a minimal impact on the overall project cost and is the ideal scenario when doing a major recapitalization of a building.

Investment in washrooms that are designed to accommodate **everyone** should be factored into project planning and costing just like any other policy requirement. It should not be viewed as an increased cost, but instead, as the cost required to build or renovate a washroom.

For existing infrastructure, some buildings can incorporate single-user inclusive washrooms with very little work or cost. It may be as simple as changing the signage or adapting an already existing single-user, fully private washroom into an inclusive washroom.

In other cases, making washroom changes can be more challenging and costly due to existing building infrastructure configurations and other constraints.

Public Services and Procurement Canada is developing the Inclusive Washroom Design Guide, which will provide guidance for these types of renovations incorporating lessons learned from pilot projects in order to minimize costs and ensure consistent design parameters.

