



# News Release

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## For Immediate Release

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### **Representative calls for government commitment to protect gender diverse young people in British Columbia**

VICTORIA – Representative Jennifer Charlesworth is calling on the provincial government to play a proactive role in protecting Two Spirit and gender diverse young people – ensuring that they are free from discrimination and stigma, are safe and cared for, and have access to the services and supports that they need to thrive and experience belonging.

Charlesworth released her latest report, *The Right to Thrive: An Urgent Call to Recognize, Respect and Nurture Two Spirit, Trans, Non-Binary and other Gender Diverse Children and Youth* (2STNBGD) today.

“Let’s be clear: young people have the right to be who they are and to thrive,” Charlesworth said. “The hate speech and anti-trans legislative efforts we have seen recently in Canada and the United States are alarming and are causing great harm. As you will read in the report, the negative impacts of this on 2STNBGD children and youth are enormous, and they are paying the price in increased critical injuries and suicidality. I’m calling on the government and ministries to work together and make this a priority.”

A review of critical injury and death reports for 2STNBGD young people received by the Office of the Representative for Children and Youth (RCY) raises serious concerns about the experiences of – and outcomes for – these young people, who are doing consistently less well on many measures than their cisgender peers. A particularly concerning finding is the higher percentage of injury reports associated with suicidality and self-harm received for 2STNBGD children and youth (44 per cent) who are receiving government services compared to their cis-male and cis-female counterparts (14 per cent and 22 per cent, respectively).

“Although this is a deeply troubling finding, I want to emphasize that it is not a young person’s gender identity or expression that leads to self-harm or suicidality,” Charlesworth said. “Rather, it is the individual experiences they have and the climate in which they are growing up that are compounded by the negative effects of stigma. Far too often, young people face a lack of gender-affirming care, support, and awareness from health care providers and society. When this happens, we are failing them, and this must change.”

As evidence of this, one youth interviewed for this report spoke of their gender identity as a protective factor: “[They] think that somehow being trans is the mental problem ... when, in actuality, I think a lot of my identity is what rescued me and saved me ...”

Another major concern is that nearly two-thirds of injuries reported to RCY and experienced by 2STNBGD children and youth were for those placed in staffed resources (often referred to as group

homes) – government-funded settings that may cause further harm and trauma when they fail to provide gender-affirming care.

As a result of the critical injury and death review, and in preparation for this report, RCY commissioned research by the University of British Columbia’s Stigma and Resilience Among Vulnerable Youth Centre (SARAVYC). The respected research centre investigates how stigma, discrimination, violence and trauma affect young peoples’ health. SARAVYC conducted two literature reviews and a series of analyses using data from the 2019 Canadian Trans Youth Health Survey and the 2018 BC Adolescent Health Survey. The Centre also interviewed 2STNBGD young people so that their voices and experiences would play a central role in the report.

“The published research we reviewed, the B.C. and Canadian data we analyzed, and the young people we spoke with all pointed to the same issues,” noted Dr. Elizabeth Saewyc, UBC Professor of Nursing and the Executive Director of SARAVYC. “Most 2STNBGD young people faced frequent misgendering, long delays in care, lack of access to knowledgeable providers, greater exposure to violence in communities, and worse health outcomes than their peers. At the same time, a number of relatively simple actions – starting with recognizing their identities and respecting their rights – can make such a difference in their well-being.”

The Representative makes eight recommendations to government in *The Right to Thrive* including, notably, that B.C.’s Attorney General identify opportunities to enhance legislative protections for 2STNBGD children and youth and lead the drafting and passage of these protections.

Among the report’s other recommendations:

- that the Ministry of Health take lead responsibility for the ongoing design and implementation of a cross-government commitment to gender-affirming care
- that the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions review the mental health and substance use needs of 2STNBGD children, youth and their families and ensure that the next revision to the action plan for *A Pathway to Hope* incorporates new plans, guidance or protocols
- that the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) ensure its staff across all service lines are knowledgeable and capable of providing gender-affirming care to 2STNBGD children and their families, and that MCFD provide foster parents and caregivers with the supports and training they need to provide gender-affirming care for 2STNBGD children and youth in their care
- that MCFD ensure group homes have policies and training specific to the provision of gender-affirming care.

“I am struck by the data presented in this report that show clearly that if we support youth unequivocally without judgment, they can thrive and importantly can overcome those barriers and negative experiences so many 2STNBGD youth face,” Provincial Health Officer Dr. Bonnie Henry said. “It is incumbent on us as a caring and compassionate society to support all youth to thrive. This report is a call to action to do just that.”

Charlesworth agreed. “When 2STNBGD young people receive gender-affirming care and positive supports, their outcomes are every bit as good as other kids. By implementing these recommendations, government can create positive change. That should give us hope.”

The full report is available here: <https://rcybc.ca/reports-and-publications/right-to-thrive/>

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