



RAINBOW
NURSING
INTEREST
GROUP

Newsletter

March 2025

Greetings from your Executive!



You may contact us through our **website**: <https://chapters-igs.rnao.ca/interestgroup/58/about>

Please note: if you "login" to "MyRNAO", you will have access to way more information about us – as a member of RNIG.

Follow us on **Facebook**: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/RainbowNursing/>

and contact the Social Media ENO directly: Rainbow-RNIG@hotmail.com



Message from Sarah van den Enden Thornley, RNIG President

Dear community members and allies,

I understand that many of us share a profound concern regarding the current state of North American politics. In response, the Rainbow Nursing Interest Group (RNIG) is organizing our inaugural "Colleague to Colleague" virtual meeting on Saturday, April 12, 2025, from 10:30 to 11:30 A.M. This session aims to provide a supportive space for open discussion and mutual support. We warmly invite you to join us. To register, please refer to the detailed information provided later in this newsletter. <https://forms.gle/YQe6fxE7jmXHqorE9>

Additionally, we are preparing for upcoming elections to fill several positions on the RNIG Executive. We encourage you to consider joining our team. The commitment is manageable, and you will be well-supported by fellow members. Serving on the Executive offers rewarding experiences, opportunities to attend RNAO events in Toronto, and the chance to contribute meaningfully to our community. Reflecting on my own journey, I joined the Executive without prior connections or experience, and it has been an enriching endeavor. If I can do it, so can you!

We look forward to your participation and hope to see you at the upcoming meeting. Please enjoy the articles about affirming care.

Respectfully submitted by,

Sarah van den Enden Thornley, RN, BScN, BA, CHPCN(C)
President ENO (she/her)



Our Mission:

- To foster and advocate for nursing practice and environments that support people of all sexual orientations and gender identities and expressions.



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RNIG Executive at Queen’s Park Day

On February 27, 2025, six members of our RNIG executive (five on the picture) participated in Queen’s Park Day. This year, Queen’s Park Day fell on the day of the snap provincial election so MPPs were not able to join us. The day was still productive, however, with RNAO presenting a preview of the *ECCO (Enhancing Community Care in Ontario) 4.0 report* and centering the need for political advocacy and action as the new provincial government resumes its work and in the wake of the upcoming federal election.



Did you know? – RNAO has a federal election platform? RNAO “urges every nurse, their families and the public to engage in the democratic process. Voting is more than a right; it is a responsibility. We urge you to participate, ask critical questions and challenge political candidates. A strong democracy is foundational to a healthy society — and together — we can work to protect and strengthen it.”

To learn more about RNAO’s Federal Election Platform, visit: <https://rnao.ca/policy/platform-federal-2025>



Welcome Dimitra (Dimi) Strathopolous to the RNIG Executive !



2SLGBTQI+ Affirming Care: A Nurse's Perspective

As a 2SLGBTQI+ nurse, I've seen firsthand the importance of providing affirming care. It's more than just treating clients; it's about creating a safe and inclusive space where individuals feel valued and respected.

One of the biggest challenges for 2SLGBTQI+ clients is finding healthcare providers who understand and affirm their identities. Many have experienced discrimination, misgendering, or invalidating language, which can lead to avoidance of care and poorer health outcomes.

Here's what 2SLGBTQI+ affirming care means to me:

- **Respectful Language:** Using the correct pronouns and names, and avoiding assumptions about gender or sexual orientation.

- **Open-Ended Questions:** Asking questions that allow clients to share their experiences and identities on their own terms.
- **Non-Judgmental Attitude:** Creating a safe space where patients feel comfortable being themselves, without fear of judgment or discrimination.
- **Cultural Humility:** Recognizing and respecting the diverse experiences and needs of 2SLGBTQI+ communities.
- **Advocacy:** Speaking up for the rights and needs of 2SLGBTQI+ clients, and working to address systemic barriers to care.

By providing affirming care, nurses can help to reduce health disparities, improve client outcomes, and build trust within the healthcare system. It's not just about following guidelines; it's about embodying empathy, compassion, and a genuine commitment to the well-being of all clients.

Dimitra (Dimi) Strathopolous, RN, MPH [she / her]
Workplace Liaison - RNIG



RNIG Secretary John Edwards (he/him) EDI Panel and Video Content Award

Last year, RNIG Secretary John Edwards participated in an EDI panel as part of Queen's Park Day. We recently learned that the short video produced by RNAO interviewing the panelists was the recipient of a Canadian Online Publishing Award in the Best Video Content category.

The video can be accessed here: <https://youtu.be/Wn-LXio9JkU?feature=shared>

Congratulations!





An Update from Roya Haghiri-Vijeh, ENO Policy and Political Action (she/her)

We are excited to share a recent publication from Roya Haghiri-Vijeh, our Policy and Political Action officer. The paper is open access, which means it is available for free regardless of whether you have access to journals through an institutional subscription.

Haghiri-Vijeh, R. (Open-access, November 2024). Applying the concept of epistemic injustice as a philosophical window to examine discrimination experiences of LGBTQIA+ migrants with nurses. *Nursing Philosophy*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nup.70007>



An Update from the Communications Officer

Over the last six months, I have been deeply engaged with autistic and neurodivergent LGBTQI+ communities as the principal investigator for an autistic LGBTQI+-led project titled *Beyond the Normative Knot: Life and Praxis at the Gender-Sexuality-Autism Nexus*. As of March 2025, we have completed interviews with 26 autistic/neurodivergent LGBTQI+ adults across southern Ontario, 11 of whom have also created digital stories, which are short films (3-8 minutes) that use multimedia and art to share stories of gender, sexuality, and autism/neurodivergence toward challenging stereotypes and explore what more affirming cultures, practices, and spaces could be. Our group of interview participants was diverse, with approximately 50% of participants identifying in some way with racialized identities and 85% identifying with gender beyond the cis-gender binary (e.g. transgender, non-binary, agender, genderqueer, etc.) and 95% identified with a sexual orientation other than straight or heterosexual. We are very excited for this diversity as research focused on autistic experience has centered predominantly white autistic stories.

In the coming months, our team will be analyzing the interviews and digital stories and exploring opportunities to conduct workshops with professionals across mental health care and LGBTQI+ community health care that feature the digital stories and integrate findings from this research to prompt conversations about affirming practices and cultures across these spaces.

Stay Tuned!

Elizabeth Straus, PhD, RN (they/she)
Communications Officer, RNIG



First Article from RNAO's Health Equity Consortium Published!

We are excited to share that the first article written about the work of the Health Equity Consortium that our Rainbow Nursing Interest Group executive participated in alongside members from Black Nurses Leading Change and the Indigenous Nurses and Allies Interest Group. Our very own RNIG executive members Paul-André Gauthier and Shelley Evans were lead authors on this article. The reference and abstract are included below:

Gauthier, P. A., Evans, S., Guido, V., Brathwaite, A. C., Versailles, D., Juüdi-Hope, D. A., Garraway, C., Costa, T., Suva, G., Stade, B., & Grinspun, D. (2024). Health equity consortium: Equity, diversity, and inclusion for black, indigenous, and 2SLGBTQIA+ nurses. *Canadian Journal of Nursing Research*, December 16, on-line.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/08445621241299999>

Abstract

This article provides reflections on the initiatives and experiences of nurses who identify as Black, Indigenous, and/or 2SLGBTQIA + within the Canadian healthcare system, as well as the efforts of the Health Equity Consortium to promote equity within the nursing profession. The paper explores the unwavering commitment of marginalized nurses to exceptional patient care despite facing pervasive prejudices and discrimination. It discusses the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario's (RNAO) commitment to diversity and the creation of the Health Equity Consortium to address systemic barriers. Furthermore, the article highlights the concept of intersectional stigma and the need for comprehensive cultural competency training and inclusive leadership practices.

Additionally, it outlines the consortium's aim to gather more information and publish further work to advance equity within the nursing profession and healthcare system. Ultimately, the reflection underscores the importance of collective action and ongoing dialogue to drive meaningful change towards a more equitable and inclusive healthcare system.

Résumé

Cet article présente des réflexions sur les initiatives et les expériences des infirmières qui s'identifient comme noires, autochtones et/ou 2SLGBTQIA+ au sein du système de santé canadien, ainsi que sur les efforts du Health Equity Consortium pour promouvoir l'équité au sein de la profession infirmière. L'article explore l'engagement indéfectible des infirmières marginalisées envers des soins exceptionnels aux malades, malgré les préjugés et la discrimination omniprésents auxquels elles sont confrontées. Il traite de l'engagement de l'Association des infirmières et infirmiers autorisés de l'Ontario (AIIAO) envers la diversité et de la création du Consortium pour l'équité en santé pour éliminer les obstacles systémiques. De plus, l'article met en évidence le concept de stigmatisation intersectionnelle et la nécessité d'une formation complète en matière de compétences culturelles et de pratiques de leadership inclusives.

De plus, il décrit l'objectif du consortium de recueillir plus d'informations et de publier d'autres travaux pour faire progresser l'équité au sein de la profession infirmière et du système de santé. En fin de compte, la réflexion souligne l'importance de l'action collective et d'un dialogue continu pour mener un changement significatif vers un système de santé plus équitable et plus inclusif.



Sharing Stories of Positive 2SLGBTQI+ Stories in Healthcare

If you've been following us over the past year, you've likely heard of RNIG's growing Storytelling initiative to shed light on some of the good 2SLGBTQI+ experiences we've witnessed or been a part of within the healthcare system. News and politics continue to feel scary out there and working on solutions for those problems remains a focus for all of us working to serve our communities.

However, maintaining resilience to meet those challenges can be hard if we focus only on the things that need to be fixed. There are great 2SLGBTQI+ people and allies doing great things within healthcare. We want to hear more about that and share it with all of you! Our community is diverse, but we share many things in common. Great stories connect us and break down barriers. Since the storytelling initiative started, we've received several positive stories. We're sharing two of them with you today, but we want more!

The attached [consent form](#) will allow us to share your submission with our members. Consent can be rescinded at any time. Keep privacy in mind when you share your story, and avoid anything that would identify, or out anyone in the community who has not given consent. Both members of the 2SLGBTQI+ community and allies who serve the community are welcome to submit. We look forward to sharing your experiences, connecting, and hopefully warming each other's hearts.

Submission Guidelines: A first-person narrative about your experiences working in health care as a 2SLGBTQI+ individual. Submissions must be typed in a Word document and must be at maximum 500 words.



Featured Stories

Story 3

I am a third-year nursing student, a peer tutor, a class representative, and a non-binary individual enrolled and living in a rural, conservative area. Throughout my enrollment at my school, I have been accepted and supported; however, I still face barriers as I enter the healthcare field, from lack of understanding to discrimination and self-inflicted obstacles.

A barrier I face is introducing myself and my pronouns to my patients and even healthcare professionals due to fear of discrimination from the area I live in. While I know my school supports me, I am not invulnerable to facing discrimination within our healthcare system as a nursing student. Despite my challenges as a student, I feel supported by my peers and faculty. Their demonstrations of support, such as displaying safe-space stickers all over the campus, wearing 2SLGBTQI+ pins, and adding pronouns on nametags, have tremendously positively impacted my experiences.

I am very enthusiastic about providing healthcare services to the 2SLGBTQI+ community. This passion inspired me to pursue nursing as a career. During my studies, I have made it a priority to integrate this focus into my coursework, and I also educate my peers on the subject. I have actively participated in research to improve 2SLGBTQI+ curricula in nursing schools. My goal is to complete my consolidation at a 2SLGBTQI+ clinic, hopefully, pursue a master's degree focusing on this population's care, and continue supporting and affirming my fellow 2SLGBTQI+ people as a healthcare professional.

I believe that if I didn't have the support of like-minded individuals such as RNIG, RNAO, my nursing school peers, and faculty, I would not have felt comfortable discussing my experiences as a non-binary individual. They have empowered me to become a positive 2SLGBTQI+ role model to others within healthcare and to share my experiences to improve further and deconstruct the barriers my community faces with healthcare.

Story 4

Collaboration among diverse groups is a defining feature of the healthcare community. From nurses to physicians, pharmacists to dieticians, the beauty lies in our collective ability to unite for a common purpose. Yet, amidst this collaboration, lies a stark difference between mere tolerance and genuine acceptance – a distinction I, as a nursing student and member of the 2SLGBTQI+ community, have experienced working within our healthcare system.

Assumptions, though often unintended, permeate our society and frequently manifest in uncomfortable situations. As a lesbian, I frequently encounter situations where people assume I have a boyfriend instead of considering if I have a partner. In such moments, I'm faced with a dilemma – to disclose my orientation or not. I'm acutely aware that disclosing I have a girlfriend might create an unpleasant atmosphere. The apprehension that accompanies this decision epitomizes the delicate balance between authenticity and the desire to avoid troublesome situations.

As someone often deemed “straight passing”, I'm no stranger to hurtful comments born out of ignorance and habit being made in my presence. Yet, within these moments lies an opportunity for advocacy. By addressing and challenging such remarks, I strive to break the cycle of habitual ignorance and foster a more inclusive environment. For in a 2SLGBTQI+ friendly clinical setting, trust flourishes, barriers dissolve, and patients feel empowered to disclose vital information, ultimately leading to enhanced care.

My optimism for a more inclusive future is increased by initiatives like the free 2SLGBTQI+ course offered at my local hospital, which equips healthcare providers with the tools to provide inclusive care. Additionally, my involvement in my school's pride club, dedicated to inclusivity and advocacy, reinforces my belief in a future where discussions

surrounding 2SLGBTQI+ matters are met with ease and understanding, and assumptions become a rarity rather than the norm.

In weaving together these experiences, I've come to appreciate the power of advocacy, the significance of inclusivity, and the transformative potential of collaboration within healthcare. As we continue this journey toward a more inclusive future, let us remain unwavering in our commitment to authenticity, understanding, and above all, compassion.



Affirming Care for 2SLGBTQI+ Clients

Understanding the Unique Needs of 2SLGBTQI+ Clients

As healthcare providers, it's crucial to recognize and address the unique healthcare needs of 2SLGBTQI+ clients. This population often faces significant disparities in health outcomes due to stigma, discrimination, and lack of culturally competent care. To provide truly affirming care, we must:

- **Create a safe and inclusive environment:** Ensure that your practice is welcoming and affirming to all 2SLGBTQI+ individuals.
- **Use inclusive language:** Avoid making assumptions about a client's gender identity or sexual orientation.
- **Practice active listening:** Give your clients your full attention and validate their experiences.
- **Educate yourself:** Stay informed about 2SLGBTQI+ health issues and cultural nuances.

Addressing Mental Health Concerns in 2SLGBTQI+ Clients

Mental health issues are prevalent among 2SLGBTQI+ individuals. Factors such as discrimination, stigma, and minority stress can contribute to higher rates of depression, anxiety, and substance abuse. As nurses, we can help by:

- **Creating a safe space:** Encourage open communication and non-judgmental listening.
- **Screening for mental health issues:** Incorporate routine mental health assessments into your practice.
- **Referrals to specialized care:** Connect clients with mental health professionals who are experienced in working with 2SLGBTQI+ individuals.
- **Advocacy:** Advocate for policies and practices that promote the mental health and well-being of 2SLGBTQI+ communities.

Providing Gender-Affirming Care

Gender-affirming care is essential for the health and well-being of transgender and gender non-binary clients. This type of care can include hormone therapy, surgery, and psychosocial support. As nurses, we can play a vital role in providing gender-affirming care by:

- **Using gender-neutral language:** Avoid making assumptions about a client's gender identity.
- **Respecting pronoun preferences:** Use the pronouns that your client prefers.
- **Providing education and support:** Offer information and resources about gender transition and hormone therapy.
- **Collaborating with interdisciplinary teams:** Work with other healthcare providers, such as endocrinologists and surgeons, to coordinate care.

Addressing Sexual Health Concerns in 2SLGBTQI+ Clients

Sexual health is an important aspect of overall health for 2SLGBTQI+ individuals. However, many face unique challenges related to sexual health, such as stigma, discrimination, and limited access to care. To provide comprehensive sexual health care, we must:

- **Create a non-judgmental environment:** Encourage open and honest communication about sexual health.
- **Screen for sexually transmitted infections (STIs):** Offer routine STI testing and prevention counseling.
- **Provide comprehensive sexual health education:** Address topics such as contraception, safer sex practices, and sexual pleasure.
- **Referrals to specialized care:** Connect clients with sexual health clinics that are knowledgeable about 2SLGBTQI+ health.

Advocating for 2SLGBTQI+ Health Equity

As nurses, we have a responsibility to advocate for policies and practices that promote health equity for 2SLGBTQI+ individuals. This includes:

- **Participating in advocacy efforts:** Join professional organizations and community groups that are working to improve 2SLGBTQI+ health. One such organization is the **Rainbow Nursing Interest Group (RNIG)**. The RNIG is dedicated to advancing the health and well-being of 2SLGBTQI+ individuals through advocacy, education, and networking.
- **Educating policymakers:** Advocate for legislation that protects the rights and well-being of 2SLGBTQI+ individuals.
- **Collaborating with community organizations:** Partner with community-based organizations to address the unique needs of 2SLGBTQI+ clients.
- **Sharing knowledge and skills:** Train colleagues and students on how to provide culturally competent and affirming care.

By implementing these strategies, we can work towards creating a more equitable and inclusive healthcare system for all 2SLGBTQI+ clients.

Sincerely,

Paul-André Gauthier, Inf./RN, CNS; PhD (nursing) [he / him]
 ENO Social media & Membership RNIG (RN – 2SLGBTQI+)



Creating an Inclusive and Affirming University Experience for 2SLGBTQI+ Students

University is a time of growth, discovery, and new opportunities. But for many 2SLGBTQI+ students, it can also come with unique challenges—whether it's finding supportive communities, accessing affirming healthcare, or navigating classrooms where their identities may not always be recognized. When universities commit to affirming care, they create an environment where all students can focus on learning, thriving, and being themselves without fear or barriers.

In comparison, in high schools, support services focus on immediate safety, peer support, and fostering a sense of belonging. In contrast, universities adopt a more systemic approach, emphasizing institutional responsibility, professional preparation, and long-term advocacy. Let's examine the university context in more detail.

Making Learning Inclusive

Education should reflect the diversity of the world we live in. In many fields—nursing, healthcare, social work, psychology, law, and beyond—understanding 2SLGBTQI+ identities isn't just important; it's essential. Universities can make a real difference by:

- Including 2SLGBTQI+ perspectives in course content, whether in history, literature, science, or healthcare programs;
- Encouraging research on 2SLGBTQI+ topics and amplifying the voices of scholars from these communities;
- Inviting guest speakers, nurses, and professionals to share their lived experiences.

When students see themselves reflected in what they study, they feel more connected to their education—and better prepared to contribute meaningfully in their future careers.

Creating Safe and Supportive Spaces

University should feel like a place where you belong, not somewhere you have to hide who you are. Schools can foster a welcoming environment by:

- Supporting student-led organizations, 2SLGBTQI+ centers, and mentorship programs;
- Providing gender-neutral restrooms and inclusive housing options;
- Training professors and staff to use correct names and pronouns;
- Having clear policies against discrimination and harassment.

A campus that actively affirms its 2SLGBTQI+ students isn't just a better place to learn—it's a better place to live.

Access to Inclusive Healthcare and Mental Health Support

University is a stressful time for many students, and 2SLGBTQI+ individuals often face additional pressures. Having access to knowledgeable, affirming healthcare providers is crucial. Universities can support students by:

- Offering gender-affirming care, including hormone therapy referrals and mental health support;
- Providing therapists who are trained in 2SLGBTQI+ issues;

- Ensuring that campus health centers are safe, confidential, and free of discrimination.

When students don't have to worry about whether their healthcare provider will respect their identity, they can focus on what really matters—building their future.

Fostering a Culture of Respect and Advocacy

True inclusion doesn't stop at policies and programs—it has to be part of campus culture. Universities can help create lasting change by:

- Hosting events like Pride celebrations, panels, and workshops to educate and engage the student body;
- Encouraging allies to listen, learn, and stand up against discrimination;
- Funding research, advocacy efforts, and student initiatives that support 2SLGBTQI+ rights.

A university that prioritizes affirming care isn't just preparing students for a career—it's preparing them to be thoughtful, inclusive leaders in their communities.

Conclusion

Every student deserves to feel safe, respected, and valued at their university. Affirming care isn't just about helping 2SLGBTQI+ students—it's about making higher education a place where everyone, regardless of identity, has the chance to succeed and thrive. By fostering inclusive learning, supportive spaces, and affirming healthcare, universities can create environments where all students can truly belong.

Disclaimer: This article was created with the assistance of ChatGPT, using specific information and guidelines. The author contributed additional content to ensure its relevance to the members, with efforts made to ensure accuracy and coherence.



Colleague-to-Colleague - on Saturday, April 12, 2025, at 10:30 A.M.

You are invited to join us for a virtual "Colleague to colleague" meeting. This meeting is free of charge – for members of the RNIG.

Please register now by filling out the form <https://forms.gle/YQe6fxE7jmXHqorE9>



More information available:

Consult our website (**log in first**) <https://chapters-igs.rnao.ca/node/2539>

and check the RNAO's BPG :

Promoting 2SLGBTQI+ Health Equity: Best Practice Guideline

[2SLGBTQI BPG June 2021.pdf](#)





RNIG- Rainbow 2024 – 2025 Executive Members
(updated February 2025)

President (ENO)	(2024-2026)	Sarah Thornley (she/her)
Past - President	(2024-2025)	Shelley Evans (she/her)
ENO – Policy and political action	(2022-2026)	Roya Haghiri-Vijeh (she/her)
ENO – Membership	(2024-2026)	Paul-André Gauthier (he/him)
ENO – Finances	(2019-2025)	Linda Holm (she/her)
ENO – Communication	(2023-2025)	Elizabeth Straus (she/her/ they/ them)
ENO – Secretary	(2021-2025)	John Edwards (he/him)
ENO – Social Media	(2022-2026)	Paul-André Gauthier (he/him)
ENO – Workplace liaison	(2024-2026)	Dimi Strathopolous (she/ her)
B.Sc.N. Student Representatives	(2024-2026)	Kay Gervais (they/them)