

A New Vision for 2-Spirited People of the First Nations Strategic Plan 2016-2020

History of 2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations

In our culture, before the Europeans came to North America, “2-Spirit” referred to an ancient teaching. Our Elders tell us of people who were gifted among all beings because they carried two spirits: those of male and female. It is told that women engaged in tribal warfare and married other women, as there were men who married other men. These individuals were looked upon as a third gender in many cases and in nearly all of our cultures they were honoured and revered.

2-Spirit people were often the visionaries, the healers and the medicine people, respected as fundamental components of our ancient culture and societies. This is our guiding force as well as our source of strength. This is the heart of 2-Spirited People of the First Nations.

At our 1992 Annual General Meeting, we adopted the name “2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations” to honour our ancestral past and reclaim our Aboriginal identity. As our 2-Spirited community is unique, so are our issues and our organization. We are members of a group of people whose way of life has been drastically altered by historical circumstance.

Since European colonization, the existence of the Two Spirit community has been systematically denied and culturally alienated from the Aboriginal identity. 2-Spirit members bear witness to this activity in the form of racism, sexism and homophobia in the courts, the streets, the education system, the media and in other lesbian and gay organizations within the dominant Canadian society.

Our Process

2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations began a lengthy strategic planning process in the spring of 2014, after a series of governance workshops for new and existing Board Members. Working with a consultant from the Ontario Organizational Development Program (OODP), the process that has resulted in our inaugural strategic plan was an exhaustive one. We reached out to all of our stakeholders through a variety of approaches. We heard from our partners and funders through one on one interviews, our volunteers and members through online surveys and held a sharing circle led by Elder Sylvia Maracle for Board, staff and interested members. The information was compiled and proved very useful as a comprehensive environmental scan that could be used to inform our first strategic plan. The plan was shared widely before being adopted by the Board and has been incorporated into Board and Staff work plans for the current year.

Our Vision

By 2020, we see a strong, healthy and independent 2-Spirit community in Toronto where HIV infections are rare and 2-Spirit people live with pride in their indigenous heritage.

Our Mission

We provide prevention education and support for 2-Spirit, including First Nations, metis and Inuit people living with or at risk for HIV and related co-infections in the Greater Toronto Area. We base our work on indigenous philosophies of wholistic health and wellness.

Our Values

The 7 Grandfather Teachings

The **Teachings of the Seven Grandfathers** is a set of traditional Anishnawbe teachings on human conduct toward others that continues to resonate in today's world.

As the story goes, the Creator gave seven Grandfathers, who were very powerful spirits, the responsibility to watch over the people. The Grandfathers asked their messenger to spend time among the people and learned that the human condition was not good and that people had a hard life. The messenger returned to tell the 7 Grandfathers he had found a child who could be tutored in the "Good Way of Life". Each of the 7 Grandfathers agreed to tutor the child on a different principle. 2-Spirit People of the First Nations bases its core values on these ancient teachings and has adapted them as follows:

- 1. Wisdom: to cherish knowledge is to know Wisdom.** Wisdom is sound judgment, an ability to see inner qualities and understand relationships with others. It is the ability to use good sense, to have a good attitude and a reason for action. We value the wisdom that is given by the Creator to be used for the good of the people. We are accountable to the individuals and communities we serve.
- 2. Love: to know love is to know peace.** Love is to feel and give complete kindness for all things around us. To love yourself is to live at peace with the Creator and in harmony with all creation. We share our love with our brothers and sisters. Love cannot be demanded; it must be earned and given freely from the goodness of the heart. We value a positive attitude toward sexual and reproductive health, and support individual choice around sex practices. We believe that human sexuality is an integral part of a healthy life.

3. **Respect: to honour all of creation is to have respect.** We show our respect for the value of others through courtesy, consideration and appreciation. We honour our families, others, and ourselves. We strive to support individuals with an approach that views health wholistically as inclusive of the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. “Honour myself and honour the medicines”. We do our work through an understanding of the social determinants of health and strategies to reduce harm and risk to individuals and community.
4. **Bravery: to face life with courage is to know bravery.** We work to build the personal strength to face difficulties, obstacles and make positive choices. We teach 2-Spirit people to stand up for their convictions, to show courage in making and communicating healthy choices.
5. **Honesty: to be honest in action and character, to be faithful to fact and reality. To walk through life with integrity is to know honesty.** We work to build honest and truthful relationships with each other and ourselves. We strive to be open in our communication with each other and the communities we serve.
6. **Humility: to accept yourself as a sacred part of creation is to know humility.** We recognize the human need for balance in life. We are all equal to each other and to everyone around us. We take pride in our work and share our accomplishments with others.
7. **Truth: to know of these things is to know the truth.** We trust in the Creator. We honour the Creator by being truthful and trustworthy. We commit to sincerity in action, character and utterance – true to ourselves and those around us. We respect confidentiality in all our working relationships.

In addition, we are committed to the concept of Cultural Safety

Cultural Safety was introduced by Irihapeti Ramsden, a Maori nurse living in Aotearoa, New Zealand, in 1990. Her definition of the term explains that Cultural Safety moves beyond cultural sensitivity and cultural competence (having knowledge about the culture of “the other”) toward an analysis of power imbalances in society, as well as political ideals of self-determination and de-colonization.

Cultural safety incorporates the following ideas:

- Cultural awareness is the acknowledgement of difference;
- Cultural sensitivity is the recognition of the importance of respecting difference;
- Cultural competence focuses on the skills, knowledge, and attitudes of practitioners; whereas
- Cultural safety involves self-reflection and a deeper understanding that cultural values and norms of 2-Spirit people may be different due to unique socio-political histories.
- Self-reflection leads to empathy, the ability to share another being's emotions and feelings; this helps to improve the relationship with the people and communities we serve, leading to better health outcomes.

- Empathy also leads to social justice work on behalf of our communities.

Who are our Priority Communities?

- **2-Spirit people* living with HIV and/or other co-infections**

2-Spirits will provide a wide range of education and support services that are free and confidential for all 2-Spirit people in the GTA, including youth, women, and men who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, intersex and queer, and who are living with HIV and/or other co-infections such as hepatitis C. We work with individuals through a range of programs and services that help to build knowledge, skills, confidence and resilience, using a wholistic approach that includes western medicine in conjunction with traditional indigenous philosophies and modalities of health and wellness.

- **2-Spirit people at risk for HIV and/or other co-infections**

2-Spirits will develop and deliver HIV and prevention education for other sexually transmitted infections (STI) to 2-Spirit individuals and communities that are at risk. We will work in partnership with other community-based agencies where expertise in prevention education has been developed for those who are HIV-negative, or who do not know their HIV status. We will develop strategic local partnerships to increase access to mental health and addiction services, and social supports that address overall health and well being for 2-Spirit people in the GTA.

* Some Aboriginal people choose to identify as 2-Spirit rather than, or in addition to, identifying as gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, intersex or queer. Not all GLBTIQ indigenous people feel that “2-Spirit” speaks to their experience and may opt for terms specific to their nation.

Strategic Directions

1. We will strengthen the Programs and Services we offer

Through interviews with our community partners and a Sharing Circle conducted as part of our environmental scan, we learned that the top issues facing Aboriginal PHAs and those at risk for HIV include: stigma and discrimination; lack of information about HIV prevention and treatments; access to housing and other social determinants of health. Access to culturally safe and appropriate services related to mental health, addictions and aging with HIV and other co-infections were also frequently mentioned. When asked about the strengths of 2-Spirits, many people spoke about the long term committed staff and cultural connections to community as evidenced by annual participation in Toronto Pride. We recognize that we must meet the needs of 2-Spirit people wherever they gather in the GTA.

In order to build on these assets and increase programs and services related to prevention, care and support, **we will:**

- Offer prevention education and support to Aboriginal youth and women at risk for HIV and other co-infections such as STIs and hepatitis C through workshops on site and in community where people gather;
- Offer wholistic education and support in-house and in-community regarding treatment for HIV and other co-infections to all 2-Spirit people using an approach that combines western medicine in conjunction with indigenous health and wellness practices;
- Ensure that those who come to us for service are connected to care and supported to stay in care in a coordinated fashion that also provides links to other social services as needed;
- Ensure that aging APHAs have up to date information with which to make important health decisions;
- Establish programs to reduce social isolation in our community.

2. We will build on our Partnerships and Collaborations

We understand the important role 2-Spirits plays in helping to achieve the goals of the Ontario Strategy on HIV and AIDS. At the same time, we acknowledge that we cannot deliver all needed services without the help of partnerships and collaborations. 2-Spirits plans to build on existing relationships with partners such as Casey House, St. Michael's Hospital, ODE, CAAN and Egale to ensure they have the knowledge and capacity to serve the needs of 2-Spirit people. Other important collaborations relate to the conduct of community based participatory research, in which 2-Spirits has been very involved over the years.

In order to build on existing partnerships and enhance our collaborative efforts, **we will:**

- Build our relationship with providers of mental and emotional health care to link our clients who have issues related to depression and substance use with the CAMH Rainbow and Aboriginal Services Programs;
- Strengthen our staff capacity to link our 2-Spirit clients to care by helping to find a family doctor, and by establishing strong links to clinics such as Sherbourne Health Centre, Maple Leaf Clinic, downtown hospital clinics and Anishnawbe Health;
- Ensure that we have written agreements in place with all of our partners;
- Work with CATIE and ACT to develop educational resources that are tailored to the needs of the communities we serve;
- Build on our capacity to engage in community based participatory research that crosses sectors and respects OCAP principles of "Ownership, Control, Access and Possession";

- Focus on research that enhances our capacity to prevent, link and retain affected community members in care and on treatment;
- Ensure that research results are shared with our communities and used to inform public policy discussions through our participation with the City of Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy and Fife House.

3. We will sustain and diversify our Funding

Our partners describe 2-Spirits as a “small but mighty” organization. We recognize that we are increasingly dependent on unstable public funds for the work we do to meet the needs of a growing population of 2-Spirit people at risk for and living with HIV and/or other co-infections.

In order to sustain and increase our access to sufficient funding to accomplish our goal of providing culturally appropriate programs and services, **we will:**

- Develop a fundraising strategy that leverages our relationships with community allies;
- Work to sustain our public funding while growing our capacity to raise funds in the private sector from allied corporations and individuals;
- Rebuild an emergency fund sufficient to serve the needs of our 2-Spirit clients for transportation to medical appointments or other short-term assistance.

4. We will strengthen our collective response to meet the needs of the 2-Spirit communities we serve

During our consultations with partners and other stakeholders, we asked what 2-Spirits should be doing differently to strengthen the internal capacity of the organization and increase its ability to serve greater numbers of 2-Spirit individuals at risk for or living with HIV. One community Elder gave us wise advice that was repeated by others: “A healthy organization needs good infrastructure and good governance”.

In order to increase our capacity to respond collectively to the needs of the 2-Spirits communities we serve, **we will:**

- Build on our practice of recruiting community members with relevant skills to serve on our Board;
- Increase volunteer recruitment efforts for both governance and service roles supporting 2-Spirits;
- Re-establish our Buddy Program;
- Update our policies (operational and governance) and our bylaws;

- Develop a communications plan to update our website and increase our presence on social media.

Approved by the Board of Directors on February 9, 2016