



Top Takeaways from Nurturing the Three Sisters Session 2: Lessons from “Growing Strong Together: Creating 2SLGBTQIA+ Inclusive Health Care Services”

2SLGBTQIA+ Individuals Face Many Barriers to Receiving Care

The iknowmine.org 2SLGBTQIA+ HIV/STD outreach and prevention effort conducted a cross-sectional study in 2017-2018 to create a community health profile and better understand Alaska Native 2SLGBTQIA+ needs. Participants reported high levels of stigma, discrimination, and violence due to sexual orientation and gender identity. Mental health challenges such as depression and suicidality, but also hope and happiness, were prevalent among respondents. Participants reported lack of access to mental health services, lack of psychological support even with access to services, and high levels of fear to disclose to providers. Respondents also reported low levels of community connection. These results highlight the significant barriers to accessing quality care for Alaska Native 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals.

The Prevalence of Stigma

Stigma is a lack of respect for a person or a group of people because they have done something or have traits of which society disapproves. Stigma comes in many forms including self, public, and institutional. For 2SLGBTQIA+ populations, stigma is pervasive in everyday life and has an impact every time individuals seek care. Stigma leads to questioning self-worth and safety when seeking care. Despite many important advances over the last decade, stigma is still a significant barrier to creating safe spaces for the 2SLGBTQIA+ community today.

The Need for Mental Health Services

68% and 65% of survey participants reported restless sleep and feeling depressed in the last week, respectively. 94% and 92% had thought about and attempted suicide in their lifetime, respectively. While this survey is not representative of all AI/AN or 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals, these staggering statistics emphasize the need to strengthen and expand access to mental health services and psychological support.

Asking for and Using Appropriate Pronouns and Terminology

Identity, orientation and expression are all fluid and subject to change. The following are some important definitions to keep in mind. Gender identity is one's internal sense of gender. Gender expression is how a person chooses to present themselves such as through hairstyles, clothing, etc. Sex assigned at birth is based on anatomy. Sexual orientation refers to physical attraction(s) and romantic orientation refers to emotional attraction(s). Create safe spaces by referring to people in the way that feels most accurate to them. In practice, ask every patient/client what name and pronouns they use and note these in their chart. Verbalizing your own pronouns shows clients that you understand and respect the concept of gender identity being different than sex assigned at birth.

How to Provide Affirming and Comprehensive Care Services

Affirming care is client-centered, validates identities, supports client choices, advocates for their needs, and continues education of relevant issues. Affirming care encompasses many practices and recognizes that 2SLGBTQIA+ clients face unique challenges. Some examples include building trust through gender-friendly posters and supportive rainbow pins, willingness to admit that you don't have all the answers, and asking for chosen pronouns as a concrete policy. Affirming care includes addressing comprehensive health concerns such as sexual health. Some actionable items include providing STI screening, HIV care such as PrEP and PEP, behavioral health, and case management. Taking a sexual history should include discussion of the 5 P's: Partners, Practices, Protection for STIs, Past History of STIs, and Pregnancy Intention. It is important to never make assumptions regarding sexual orientation and gender identity.

