

7. Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgendered People

The underlining principle for any government must be to ensure members of all communities can participate fully in their society. A cornerstone must be the recognition that individuals and families are an integral part of Ontario society. But full and equitable participation is still not the daily reality for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people. Members of these communities who have disabilities, who are aboriginal, people of colour, youth, seniors, immigrants and/or poor, continue to face multiple levels of discrimination.

Recommendations for A People's Charter:

- ***Respect the fundamental human and Charter rights of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people.***
- ***Recognize, affirm and support gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered families.***
- ***Support and validate gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered youth.***
- ***Honour and respect gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered elders.***

Over the past decades the gay, lesbian and bisexual communities won major victories concerning individual rights and relationship recognition. These have been enshrined in laws and judgments affirming the right to full equality. Now the fight is on to win rights for people who identify as transgender, transsexual or intersex. These communities still face violence, discrimination and harassment.

Specific goals that will help realize equality are:

- Include broadly defined concepts of gender identity and gender expression as prohibited grounds of discrimination under the Human Rights Code.
- End the use of the “separate but equal” status implied by the term “same sex partnership” used in Ontario laws.
- End the two-tier system of relationship recognition itself, with its distinctions between married and common-law status.

- Launch a public education campaign about human rights, focusing on anti-harassment, anti-violence and anti-discrimination.
- Restore the *Employment Equity Act* and expand it to include lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered people.
- Police forces must work with the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered communities to reach mutual understanding and support. They must provide training and education to help police officers do this work.
- School boards must be proactive in their responsibility to ensure the safety and well-being of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered youth and the children of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered parents.
- Health care providers must be responsive to the needs of these communities. This includes providing:
 - funded care for those requiring medical support for gender transition, and
 - appropriate and adequately funded care for people facing life-threatening illnesses such as AIDS and breast cancer.
- Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people should have the same family rights as heterosexuals.
 - people in gay and lesbian relationships should be able to adopt children;
 - same sex partners should be able to co-register as parents on their child's birth certificate;
 - estate and succession laws should recognize gay and lesbian common-law partnerships, and
 - the needs of the children of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered parents in schools and the community must be recognized.

Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered youth are among the most vulnerable members of our communities. They face hostility, rejection and violence. Their suicide rate is 14 times higher than other youths. Their experience in schools and society continue the harm.

- They need and deserve an end to homophobia, "gay bashing," physical and emotional assaults, prejudice and bigotry.

- They must be able to explore their identity without fear.
- Our school curricula must include information about their identities, and the history of their communities.
- They have a right to know about the struggles that have led to greater equality and to understand the work that lies ahead.
- Most importantly, they have the right to receive the support and encouragement all young people are entitled to as they move towards self-actualization and adulthood.
- Gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered and transsexual teachers must have the ability to act as positive role models.
- There are many gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered senior citizens in Ontario. Respect and acknowledgment of those who suffered through years of oppression and bigotry, and whose struggles for liberation meant the difference between living in the closet and living in freedom is an essential part of equality. Quality elder care is an integral part of equality for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people.