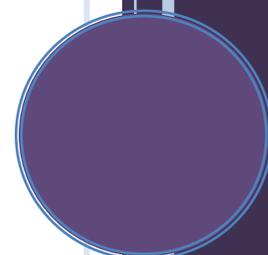


The Provincial Transgender Health Program (THP): Feedback from Transgender Community Members



November 2013



Vancouver Coastal Health would like to thank all those individuals who took their time to help develop this survey and to provide their feedback through completion of the THP survey. This feedback is critical as we move forward in our efforts to improve services and supports for trans and gender diverse people.

The Transgender Health Program (THP)

The provincial Transgender Health Program (THP)¹ is a province-wide program whose main function is to provide transgender and gender diverse individuals with information as to where services can be accessed as well as knowledge about navigating the medical system and related supports. The THP also provides 'consumer information' for transgender and gender diverse people and their loved ones, guidelines for clinicians, and access to some support groups. Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH) currently funds the program and the office is located in Vancouver.

Survey Background

The THP is planning to offer new programming in 2013. In order to ensure that changes are made that meet the needs of transgender and gender diverse individuals across the province, a survey was implemented in the spring of 2013. The focus of the survey was to gather feedback regarding the program's potential future direction, particularly around groups and educational opportunities that Vancouver Coastal Health may be able to provide or partner around in order to offer these services across the province.

The survey was designed to collect feedback from those who identify as transgender and gender diverse. Transgender is a term used to include anyone who has a gender identity that is different from the gender assigned to them at birth or who expresses their gender in ways that differ from society's expectations of the range of possibilities for men and women. This may include people who self-identify as androgynous, bi-gender, cross-dressing, drag king/queen, female-to-male, genderqueer, intersex, male-to-female, multi-gender, non-binary gender identities, transgender, transsexual or Two Spirit, as well as people who do not identify with any labels. In this report, the terms 'transgender' and 'gender diverse' have been used as umbrella terms meant to reflect a range of possible identity descriptions people may choose.

Key findings from the survey are presented on the next two pages. Then beginning on page 6, the full report provides a more in-depth presentation of the feedback that individuals provided about their service needs, availability of services in their area and the gaps that they have experienced as they looked for appropriate services and supports across the province. An email address is provided at the end of this report in order that individuals can continue to provide feedback as the program evolves in the future.

¹ For more information about the Transgender Health Program, please visit: <http://transhealth.vch.ca/>
Please note that as of September 2013, the program has been renamed as the 'Transgender Health Information Program' (THIP).

Key Findings

Survey Participant Demographics6

- ◆ 398 individuals from across the province participated in the THP feedback survey during the spring of 2013. Of the 398 individuals, 63% (n=252) completed the survey in its entirety.

Access to Transgender Health Information7

- ◆ Currently, most individuals access information about transgender health from the Internet. This information-gathering strategy is followed by face-to-face interactions, peers, written materials and healthcare providers.
- ◆ When asked about the preferred method for accessing information, individuals indicated the Internet followed by face-to-face interactions, healthcare providers and written materials.
- ◆ The top three reasons for accessing information on transgender health are to find out information about services, discover what services are available in the area and to learn about the process of transitioning.

Support Needs8

- ◆ Having opportunities to receive support from peers who have undergone training in peer support was seen as highly valuable.
- ◆ The five most cited areas in which support would be welcomed are assistance with navigating the medical system; emotional support; social support; mental health support; and employment assistance.
- ◆ Programs that are trans-friendly include key features of providing access to positive peer support, support from allies and having a location that is safe and accessible.

Transgender Health Program Experiences11

- ◆ Current programs offered through the Transgender Health programs have met needs for some of program participants. The 'Changing Keys' program has had the most positive feedback from participants followed by the Trans Youth Drop-In.

Future Support13

- ◆ Individuals voiced many topic areas in which they would like support and education. Among the most cited topics were groups that focused on the process of transitioning and how to navigate relationships in general and after transitioning.
- ◆ By far, groups held during the weekday evenings were the best for individuals.

- ◆ For closed groups that limited the number of participants, 49% indicated that they would be willing to be on a waitlist for up to three months. An additional 31% indicated that they would be willing to be on a waitlist for up to six months.

Regional Services for Transgender Health16

- ◆ Services across the province varied a great deal. Those living in Vancouver had much greater access to trans-friendly services and supports. Outside of Vancouver, access to services and supports varied a great deal with many people having tremendous struggles to have their needs met and at times having to travel great distances to receive care, having long waits for care, or having to go without certain aspects of care.

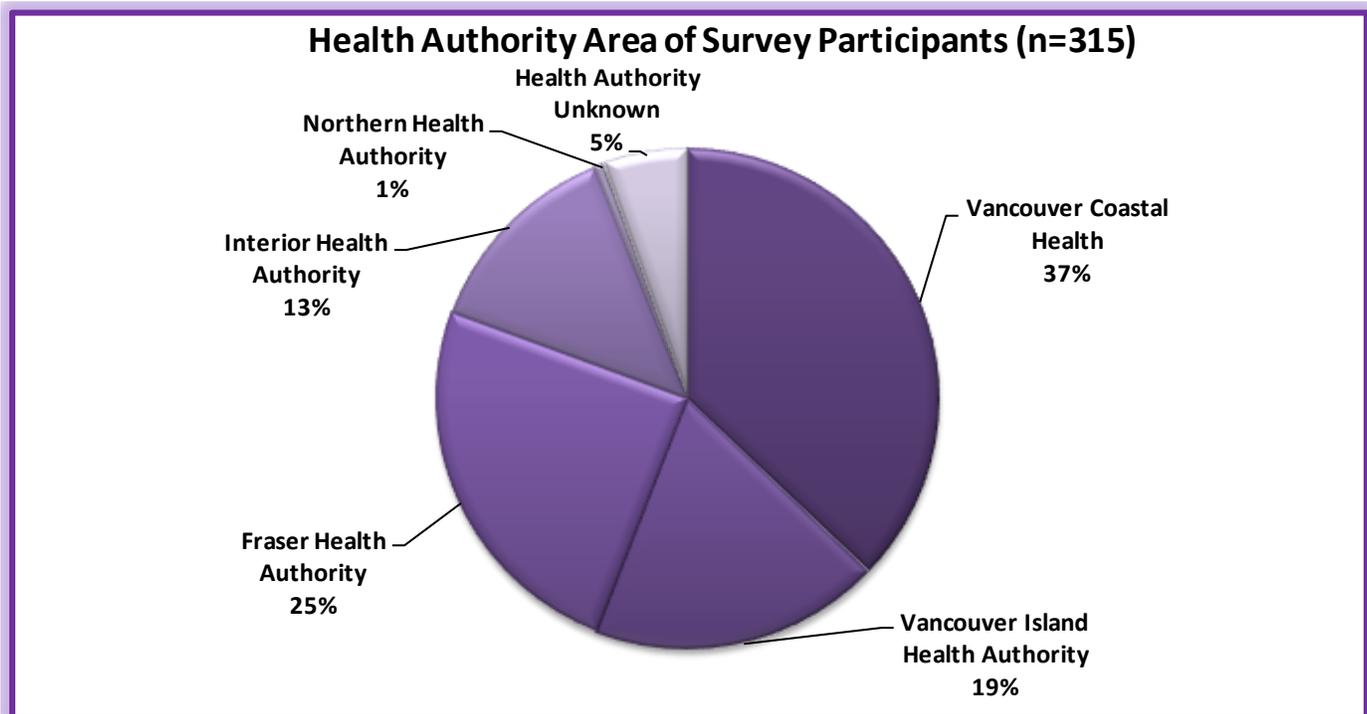
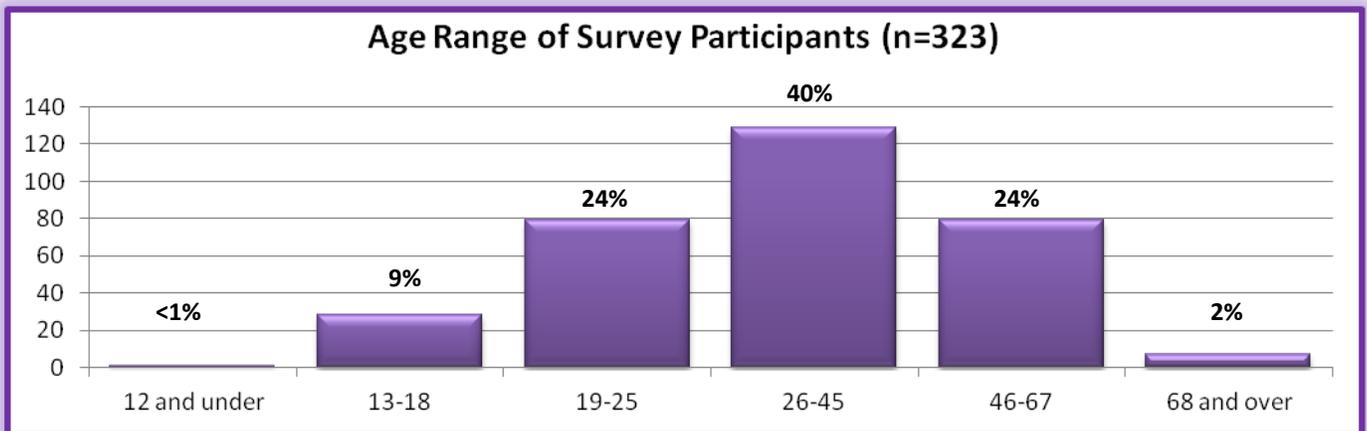
Gaps in Transgender Health19

- ◆ Providing a broad and inclusive education to healthcare providers about trans issues, improving timely access to services and supports required to successfully transition and re-evaluating who and under what circumstances one is eligible for services and supports appear to be the most pressing needs.

What You Told Us

398 individuals from across the province participated in the THP feedback survey during the spring of 2013. Of the 398 individuals, 63% (n=252) completed the survey in its entirety.²

Survey Participant Demographics



****Please see page 27 for a map outlining the Health Authority regions in B.C.**

² Note that not all of the questions may have been applicable to some individuals who participated in the survey.

Access to Transgender Health Information

Individuals were asked how they have accessed information, in the past, related to transgender health. Responses highlighted eleven different ways in which individuals have accessed information. Further to this, individuals were also asked how they prefer to access information related to transgender health. Results are presented in the table below.

Information Access Strategy	Percentage (%) of Individuals Currently Using This Strategy (n=276 responses)	Percentage (%) of Individuals Preferring This Strategy (n=278 responses)
Via the internet	87%	72%
Face-to-Face	61%	63%
From peers	59%	45%
From written materials	58%	53%
Through a doctor or other health professional	54%	59%
From a group setting	43%	32%
Through the Transgender Health Program (VCH)	43%	40%
Through friends and family	31%	23%
From a person on the phone	30%	19%
Through the Catherine White Holman Wellness Centre (www.cwhwc.com)	18%	22%
A family member was present with the individual seeking information	8%	6%

Website-Based Transgender Health Information

Individuals were asked to indicate reasons for accessing a website related to transgender health.

Reasons for Accessing a Website Related to Transgender Health	Percentage (%) of Individuals Indicating this reason (n=269 responses)
To get information about services	78%
To find out what services are available in the area	73%
To get information about the process of gender transition	55%
To download pamphlets or brochures about issues related to transgender health	38%
To ask a question	33%
Other reasons (i.e., access link for patient feedback; find out how others experienced the services of specific doctors; find workshop templates; and access facilitator emails)	3%

Support Needs

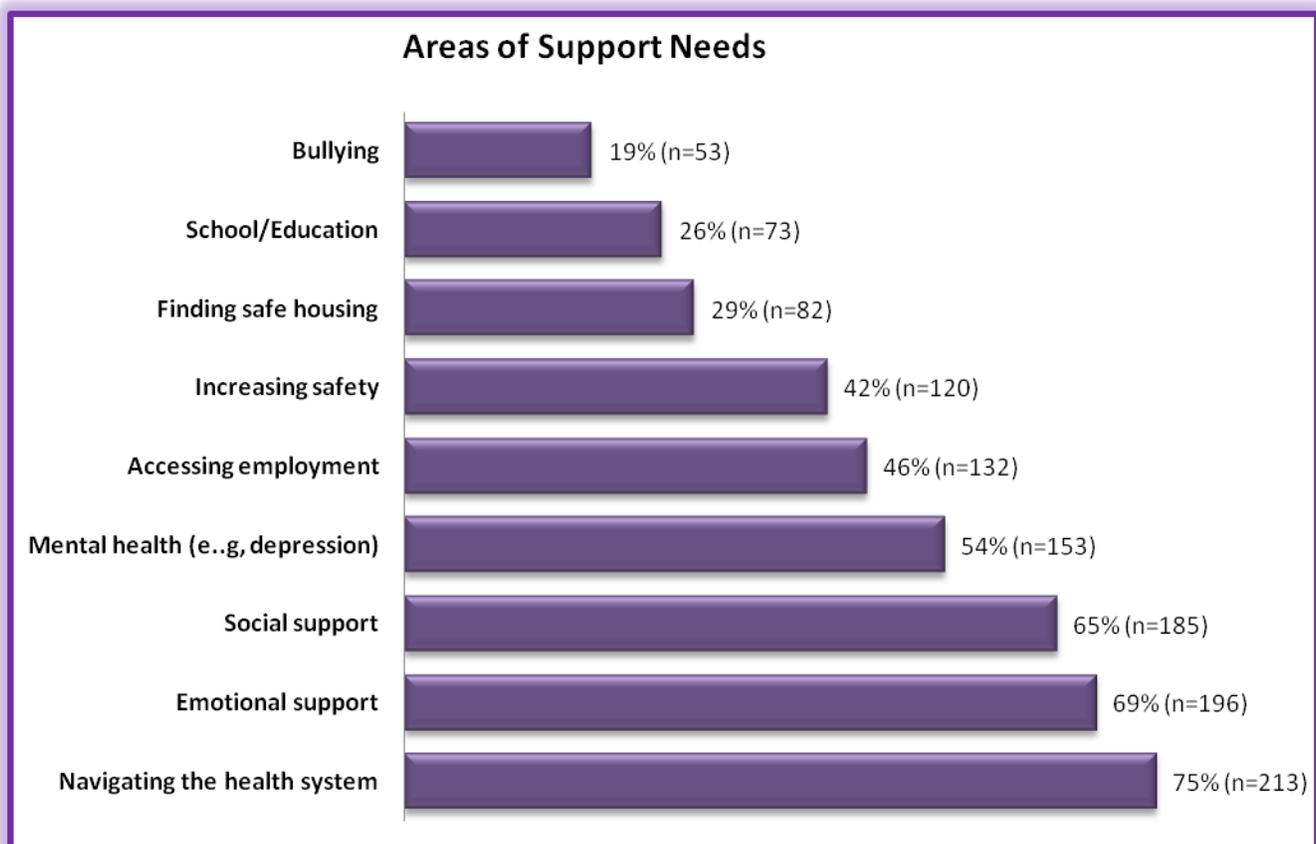
Individuals were asked if they would be interested in accessing support and information from peers who have undergone gender transition and have received training in peer support. 90% (n=246) of the 273 individuals who responded to this question indicated that they would be interested in this option. Specifically, individuals (n=266) indicated that the following supports would be useful.

- ◆ One-on-one support by peers (75%; n=200)
- ◆ Support groups co-facilitated by peers (66%; n=175)
- ◆ Education sessions delivered by peers (63%; n=168)
- ◆ Other types of support (4%; n=11)

Other types of support noted included: internet discussions, social events, resource sharing, health advocacy, access to written and oral stories that share the experiences of transgender individuals, accompaniment for health appointments and access to trans-friendly education materials to share with healthcare providers.

Areas of Support

Next, individuals were asked to indicate the issues for which they would like support. 285 individuals responded to this question by selecting areas of support for which they would like assistance.

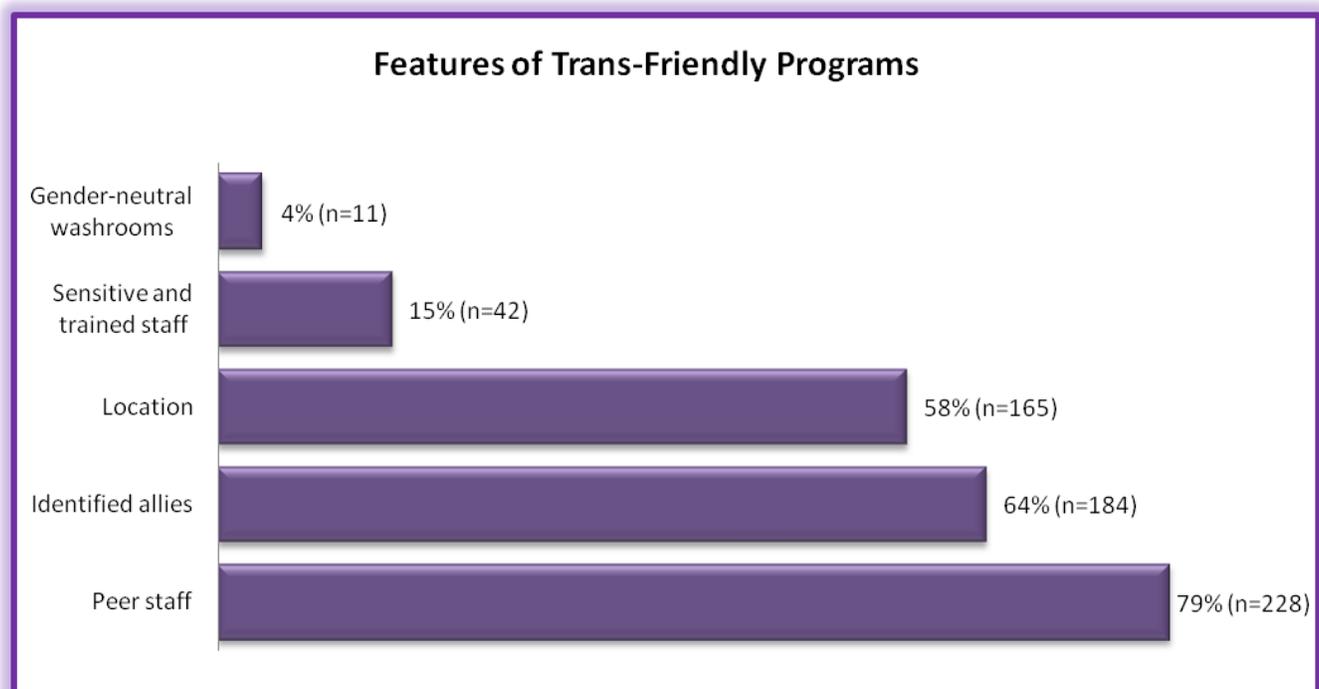


In addition to the above areas, 15% (n=44) of those who responded to the question indicated additional areas for which they would like support.

- ◆ Information about specific aspects of transitioning (e.g., hormones, surgery);
- ◆ Assistance finding trans-friendly healthcare providers;
- ◆ Health advocacy support;
- ◆ Access to funding for transitioning;
- ◆ Health information (e.g., HIV);
- ◆ Support around substance use;
- ◆ Information about nutrition;
- ◆ Vocal training;
- ◆ Support to help with transitioning in the workplace;
- ◆ Family support to assist with relationships with family members, children and/or spouse;
- ◆ Support around dating and sexuality issues;
- ◆ Guidance to help individuals build a trans community in their area;
- ◆ Access to inclusive physical recreation activities;
- ◆ Legal assistance for issues such as the name change process and passport applications; and
- ◆ Strategies to support trans and gender diverse individuals.

Welcoming Programs

Individuals were asked to identify factors that help make a space, service or program feel trans-friendly, welcoming and respectful to program participants. 286 individuals responded to the question.



There were several comments regarding the importance of all staff receiving adequate training in order to understand and relate to trans-specific issues. Comments regarding sensitive and trained staff included:

“Support staff/ professionals who have a broad understanding of trans identities and the acknowledgment that there are many different ways to be trans and/or transition. Providers must have an understanding that to many trans identified people, gender is non-binary, i.e. it is a spectrum much broader than simply male or female; not wanting to go strictly from ‘point A to B’ should not hinder one’s access to ‘transitional’ tools such as hormone therapy and gender confirming surgeries.”*

“Knowing that the front desk staff are going to treat me respectfully.”

“Sensitivity training and expertise in cisgender service providers.”

In addition to the above, 12% (n=33) of responses highlighted a variety of other ways in which a service or program can feel trans-friendly, welcoming and respectful to program participants. These responses included:

- ◆ Having visible trans-friendly materials (e.g., brochures, pamphlets etc.) in the meeting place;
- ◆ Creating a physically warm atmosphere (e.g., comfortable surroundings);
- ◆ Hearing positive things about supports and services from others;
- ◆ Including snacks at meetings;
- ◆ Ensuring that there are explicit policies for dealing with transphobia and other forms of oppression;
- ◆ Having only trans individuals in the space;
- ◆ Providing a quiet space so that an individual can have some time away from the group if needed;
- ◆ Having the program affiliated and recognized by medical providers;
- ◆ Having the support and services open to others;
- ◆ Limiting the length of waitlists;
- ◆ Providing parking;
- ◆ Providing trans-friendly resources;
- ◆ Creating trans inclusion in paperwork; and
- ◆ Offering a full range of services.

Transgender Health Program Experiences

Individuals were asked to indicate if they had ever participated in one of the Transgender Health Program groups. 23% (n=59) of the 255 individuals who responded to the question indicated that they had attended a support group offered by the Transgender Health Program. Individuals indicated which group they had attended and whether or not the group had met their needs.

Group	Number of Individuals who attended this group	Percentage (%) of individuals who indicated that the group met their needs
The Thursday Group	37	49%
The Trans Youth Drop-In	20	70%
Changing Keys	13	92%
Taking Care of Business	3	33%

Individuals were then asked how the groups could have better met their needs. A brief description of each group and the suggestions for improvements are noted below.

'The Thursday Group'

Weekly social gathering drop-in space for all variation of trans-identified and gender diverse folks. It is an opportunity to connect, share, discuss and learn in a safe and supportive environment.

Individuals who participated in the 'Thursday Group' noted that the group experience depended on who participated in the group in a given session. One of the most cited concerns was trans men reporting that the group was more heavily attended by trans women which resulted in trans men not making the hoped for social connections with other trans men. They suggested creating a separate group for trans men. In addition, other suggestions included:

- ◆ Having a closed group format with pre-screening for participants;
- ◆ Ensuring that everyone has a chance to speak and be heard; limit cross-conversations;
- ◆ Creating a more welcoming space (e.g., more positive conversations; safety guidelines);
- ◆ Including peer facilitators in each group; and
- ◆ Providing handouts of local resources.

'The Trans Youth Drop-In Group'

Weekly drop-in group for trans-youth, ages 13-24, and loved ones. The group includes recreation and snacks.

Suggestions for the 'Trans Youth Drop-In Group' included:

- ◆ Including more facilitated discussions about trans issues;
- ◆ Offering handouts of community resources;
- ◆ Ensuring a clear understanding of group guidelines in order to support feelings of safety; and
- ◆ Ensuring the avoidance of assumptions of people's identity based on presentation.

'Changing Keys'

Seven session voice assessment and voice conditioning program. The program works with individuals through voice exercises that encourage flexibility of voice production.

Suggestions for the 'Changing Keys' Group included:

- ◆ Increasing the number of sessions to allow time for more practice (it was noted that some individuals had no one outside of group with whom they could practice);
- ◆ Offering Female-to-Male (FTM) assistance;
- ◆ Reducing the waitlist time; and
- ◆ Including follow-up sessions.

'Taking Care of Business Group'

Weekly drop-in group for trans-identified sex workers where individuals gather for information, support and food.

Suggestions for the 'Taking Care of Business Group' included:

- ◆ Providing clearer information about the group; and
- ◆ Creating opportunities to access more transgender social connections.

Future Support

Individuals were asked about their interest in other support or educational groups that may be offered in the future. 252 individuals responded to this question by endorsing various groups that would be of interest to them.

Other support or educational groups	Percentage (%) of Individuals who would be interested in the group (n=252)
A 'How To' group on Gender transition –Hormones, paper work, requirements for sex reassignment surgery (SRS)	57%
Relationships	53%
Relationships after transition	50%
Healthy coping strategies	44%
Exploring gender identity and gender fluidity	41%
Employment counselling and support	40%
Surgical considerations for female to male (FTM) – process, before and after, outcomes	39%
Alternatives to transitioning: alternatives to the medical model	34%
Transgender 101: Exploring trans identity	33%
Hormones male to female (MTF)	31%
Making a wellness plan	31%
'Coming Out'	30%
Hormones female to male (FTM)	28%
Surgical considerations for the MTF – process, before and after, outcomes	27%
Parent, partner, and sibling groups	25%
Coping with grief and loss	17%
Two Spirit group	12%
Other	11%

Other areas of focus for groups were:

- ◆ Coping with depression;
- ◆ General long-term support related to the social-emotional aspects of transitioning;
- ◆ Supports for allies of trans people;
- ◆ Substance use support groups;
- ◆ Legal issues;
- ◆ Groups for genderqueer/fluid non-binary individuals;
- ◆ Housing support;
- ◆ Spiritual support; and
- ◆ Support for trans and gender diverse individuals with a variety of other needs (e.g., disabilities, chronic illnesses).

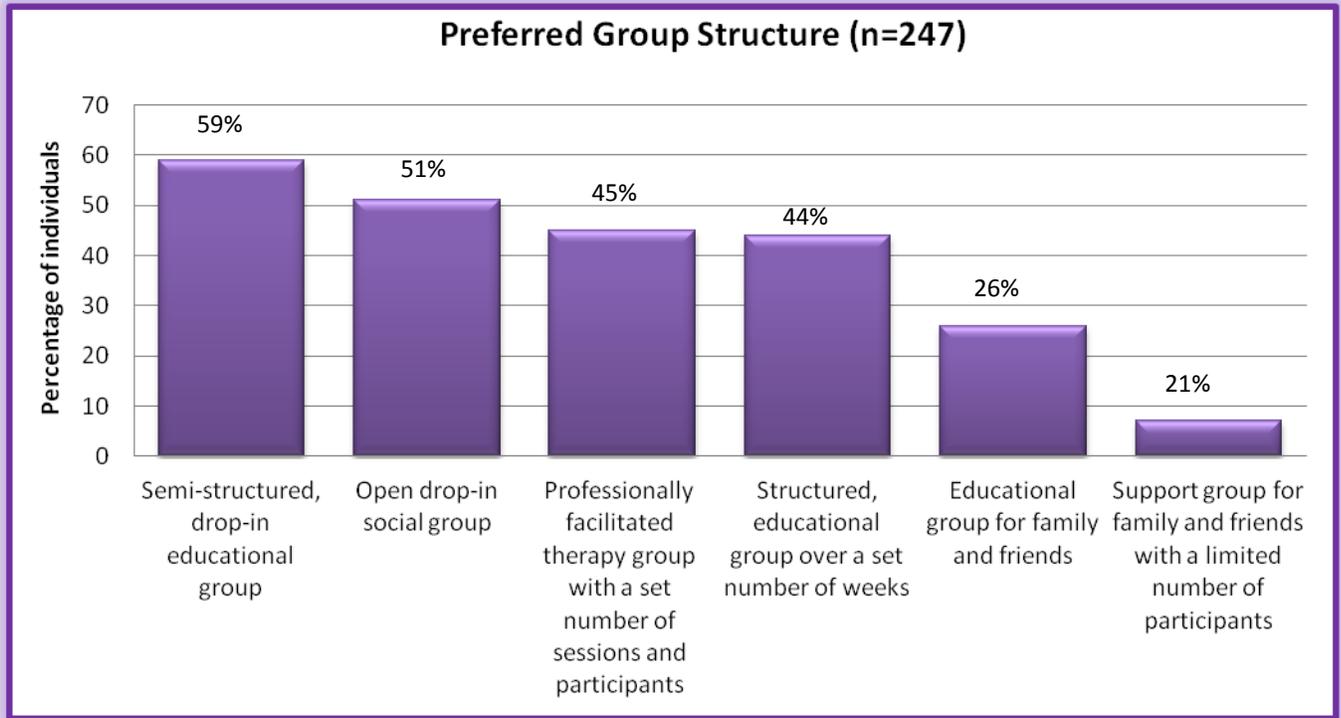
Topic Priorities of Future Support Groups

Further to this, individuals were asked to rate which topics were their highest priorities for support. 279 individuals responded to this question.

Priority Topics for Support	Percentage (%) of Individuals who indicated topic as one of their top three priorities
A 'How To' group on Gender transition –Hormones, paper work, requirements for sex reassignment surgery (SRS)	34%
Surgical considerations for FTM	30%
Relationships	22%
Exploring gender identity and gender fluidity	21%
Healthy coping strategies	18%
Relationships after transition	18%
Surgical considerations for MTF	17%
Transgender 101: Exploring trans identity	17%
Employment counselling and support	16%
Alternatives to transitioning: alternatives to the medical model	15%
Making a wellness plan	15%
Hormones for FTM	14%
Parent, partner, siblings group	14%
Hormones MTF	13%
'Coming Out'	12%
Coping with Grief and Loss	6%
Two Spirit group	5%

Group Structure and Timing

Individuals were asked about preferred group structure, waitlists and timing of groups.



Waitlists for Groups with limited enrollment

- ◆ 49% of individuals were willing to be on a waitlist for up to three months;
- ◆ 31% of individuals were willing to be on a waitlist for up to six months; and
- ◆ 20% of individuals were not willing to be on a waitlist.

Group Timing

- ◆ 80% of individuals indicated that they would be able to attend a group on a weekday evening;
- ◆ 65% of individuals indicated that they would be able to attend during weekdays; and
- ◆ 32% of individuals indicated that they would be able to attend during the daytime on the weekend.

Regional Services for Transgender Health

Vancouver Coastal Health Authority: Vancouver-based individuals (n=46 comments)

Individuals were asked to identify transgender healthcare services in their area. In the Vancouver Coastal Health region, 33% (n=15) of individuals made comments that reflected that because they lived in Vancouver, they had access to many services. Among the remaining individuals, they noted the following services.

Service	Number of Individuals noting this service
Trans-friendly and experienced healthcare providers ³	13
The Catherine White Hollman Wellness Centre	11
Support Groups (general)	9
Three Bridges Clinic (includes education and access to trans-friendly healthcare providers)	9
General support	7
Clinics (e.g., Raven Song, Pender)	6
Transgender Health Program	5
Education	5
Qmunity	3
Youth groups	2
Saige Community Food Bank	1
Dragonstone Counselling	1
Trans-friendly therapists	1
Community acupuncture	1
Community resources	1
A&D counsellors	1

Outside of the City of Vancouver

There were comments from 12 individuals who lived within the Vancouver Coastal Health catchment area but who lived outside of the City of Vancouver. 50% (n=6) of these individuals indicated that they must travel into Vancouver to access services and 8% (n=1) indicated that they only have their family physician as healthcare support in their area. Among the remaining five individuals, they noted that they had access to support groups, trans-friendly physicians, trans-friendly therapists, education, allies, access to HRT, and counseling.

³ A common theme that emerged among survey participants was that healthcare providers are in one of three general categories: very knowledgeable and sensitive to trans issues; overall supportive but not very knowledgeable about trans issues; neither knowledgeable nor supportive of trans individuals. This theme cut across all health authorities but was more pronounced in areas outside of Vancouver.

Fraser Health Authority (n= 43 comments)

Individuals were asked to identify transgender healthcare services in the Fraser Health Authority area. 35% (n=15) of individuals made a comment indicating that there are no services in their area. A further 21% (n=9) indicated that they were not sure what services were available in their area. 16% (n=7) indicated that they go into Vancouver to access services. Of the remaining 12 individuals who made comments, they noted the following services close to them.

Service	Number of Individuals noting this service
Trans-friendly and experienced healthcare providers	11
Support groups	3
Psychologist/psychiatrist	2
School District resource counsellor	1
MCFD youth group	1
Education	1
General support	1

Vancouver Island Health Authority (n= 41 comments)

Individuals were asked to identify transgender healthcare services in the Vancouver Island Health Authority area. 27% (n=11) of individuals made a comment indicating that there are no services or very limited services in their area. A further 10% (n=4) indicated that they were not sure what services were available in their area. Of the 41 comments, 16 of the comments came from individuals outside of the Victoria area. A dominant theme was that there were limited services outside the Victoria area. Those who did have services named specific trans-friendly doctors. Three individuals identified a trans-friendly youth group in Nanaimo. Among the 26 individuals who identified services in the Island Health Authority region (including the Victoria area), they noted the following.

Service	Number of Individuals noting this service
Trans-friendly and experienced healthcare providers (specific GPs but primarily specific endocrinologists)	19
University of Victoria (e.g., Pride Collective; researcher; Anti-violence project)	6
Support groups in the Victoria area	6
Healthcare providers who are supportive but have limited knowledge about trans issues	5
Informal peer support groups (e.g., meet in bars, people's homes)	3
Youth group in the Nanaimo area	3
Psychiatrist/ Therapist; substance use counsellor	3
Centres (Sex-Positive Art and Resource Centre, Camosun Pride Centre)	2
GSA; alternative school	2
Website (islandsexualhealth.org)	1
Education	1
Support group outside of the Victoria area	1

Interior Health Authority (n= 33 comments)

Individuals were asked to identify transgender healthcare services and other supports provided in the Interior Health Authority area. 9% (n=3) of individuals made a comment indicating that there are no services in their area. A further 45% (n=15) indicated that while they were able to find some services and supports in their area, these supports and services were inadequate in that there were long waitlists and they could only find specific services (e.g., trans-friendly GP, endocrinologist). Based on the comments, individuals appear to be most satisfied with services and supports in Nelson compared to other areas located in the Interior Health Authority. Among the 30 individuals who identified services, they noted the following.

Service	Number of Individuals noting this service
Trans-friendly and experienced healthcare providers (limited in number overall and difficult to access due to long waitlists)	25
Support groups ⁴	16
Psychiatrists/other mental health professionals	10
Trans Connect	5
Changing Keys	2
Website (www.sogala.com)	1
Trans-friendly clinic	1
Transgender Health Program	1

Northern Health Authority (n= 1 comment)

There was only one survey participant located in the Northern Health Authority who commented on services and supports. They commented that there was one trans-friendly family doctor and one support group that met infrequently. Aside from those two supports, they did not know of any other supports and services.

⁴ Four individuals made comments about a support group that has had leadership problems and a perceived lack of oversight from the governing organization. This has negatively impacted the support that the group can offer individuals.

Gaps in Transgender Health

Vancouver Coastal Health Authority (n=54 comments)

Identified Gaps/ Barriers in the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority Region		Number of Individuals noting this gap
Healthcare - related	Low-cost or free mental health support	7
	Long wait times to access SRS surgery	4
	Access to specialized health services for individuals who do not want SRS	4
	Long waitlists for accessing trans-friendly doctors	4
	Information on where to find trans-friendly and experienced doctors	3
	Medical system navigation support	2
	Limited surgery options with coverage	2
	Inadequate number of trans-friendly doctors	2
	Limited trans-friendly healthcare located outside of Vancouver	1
	Substance use counselling	1
	Unavailable informed consent approaches to hormone prescribing	1
Support-related	One-on-one peer/mentor support	5
	Support for partners and families	5
	Support groups (general); peer support groups	4
	Advocacy groups	2
	Semi-structured drop-in groups	2
	Support for trans youth	2
	Non-gender binary support	2
	Safe spaces to meet	2
	Employment/vocational support and counselling	2
	Name change support (e.g., workshop, funding)	2
	Social gatherings and recreational opportunities	2
	Closed therapeutic support groups	1
	Support for trans adults	1
	Housing support	1
Network of trans individuals who have navigated the transition process while working (assist with workplace issues related to transitioning)	1	
Awareness, education and information – related	Education and training in trans issues for healthcare providers	5
	Information that is easily accessible and updated regularly	5
	Well-being information and workshops (e.g., nutrition, fitness etc.)	2
	Information on FTM surgery	1
	Well-designed and user-friendly website with trans information	1
	Education for employers about trans issues	1
	Education on caring for trans seniors	1
	Information about the emotional side of transitioning	1

Fraser Health Authority (n=41 comments)

41% (n=17) of the comments from individuals who identified Fraser Health Authority as their health region indicated that there were no services and supports for trans or gender diverse individuals. Many indicated that they had to go to Vancouver to have any services. Among the remaining 24 individuals who made comments, the following was their experience with gaps/barriers in supports and services.

Identified Gaps/Barriers in the Fraser Health Authority Region		Number of Individuals noting this gap
Healthcare - related	Access to trans-friendly and experienced healthcare providers	7
	Mental Health support	2
	Long waitlists for accessing trans-friendly doctors	1
	Access to reasonably priced hormones	1
Support-related	Support groups (general); peer support groups	4
	Support for trans youth (including pre-teens) and families	2
	Safe spaces to meet	2
	One-on-one peer support	1
	Support for partners and families	1
	Support for individuals who identify as non-binary	1
	Employment/vocational support	1
	Funding for clothing	1
	Therapeutic support groups	1
	Support for trans seniors	1
Awareness, education and information – related	Education and training in trans issues for healthcare providers	1
	Information in schools	1
	Information on surgery requirements and process	1

Island Health Authority (n= 35 comments)

23% (n=8) of the comments from individuals who identified Island Health Authority as their health region indicated that there were no services and supports for trans or gender diverse individuals. Among the remaining 27 individuals who made comments, the following was their experience with gaps/barriers in supports and services.

Identified Gaps/Barriers in the Island Health Authority Region		Number of Individuals noting this gap
Healthcare-related	Access to trans-friendly and experienced healthcare providers	10
	Affordable or no cost mental health support	3
	Long waitlists for hormone therapy/limited access to affordable hormone therapy	2
	Substance use counselling	1
Support-related	Support groups (general); peer support groups	8
	Support groups that are inclusive (i.e., welcome families, allies)	2
	Safe spaces to meet	2
	Housing support	2
	Support for partners and families	2
	Legal support (e.g., police assistance; other legal services)	2
	Employment/vocational support	2
	Recreational programming	1
Helpline	1	
Awareness, education and information – related	Clear, updated and accessible information as to how to access trans supports and services	7
	Education for healthcare providers	5
	Trans awareness in the alternative health fields (e.g., massage, chiropractic etc.)	1
	Information on FTM transition	1
	Education on trans issues for the general public	1
	Education in schools	1
	Information on non-binary transition	1

Interior Health Authority (n= 32 comments)

25% (n=8) of the comments from individuals who identified Interior Health Authority as their health region indicated that, while there were limited services for trans and gender diverse individuals, the waitlists to access medical care related to transitioning were extremely long. 6% (n=2) indicated that there were no services or supports. Among the remaining 30 individuals who made comments, the following was their experience with gaps/barriers in supports and services.

Identified Gaps Among Individuals Located in the Interior Health Authority Region		Number of Individuals noting this gap
Healthcare-related	Access to trans-friendly and experienced healthcare providers	11
	Affordable or no cost mental health support	4
	Fair access to medical services (e.g., no jumping in the waitlist; being denied services if transition was started under informed consent model or if self-medicating)	2
	Limited surgery options (i.e., not being able to choose type of surgery)	1
	Adherence to WPATH guidelines for medical care	1
	Effective communication among healthcare providers	1
	Trans-friendly ERs	1
Support-related	Social support; general support	2
	Support for individuals who identify as transsexual	1
	Funding for ongoing programs	1
	Family counselling	1
	Support groups	1
	Support for individuals who identify as non-binary	1
Awareness, education and information – related	Professionally facilitated support groups	1
	Education for trans individuals	3
	Education and support for healthcare professionals	3
	Education for the general public about transgender issues	1
	Openly displayed information, at relevant locations, about transgender supports and services	1
	Easily accessible information on trans services and supports	1
Central locations where one can access information and services	1	

Northern Health Authority (n= 1 comment)

There was one comment from an individual who identified living within the Northern Health Authority region. This individual indicated that there was a gap in having access to information as to how one goes about transitioning.

Survey Participant Comments: Supports and Service Gaps

In order to better understand perspectives related to gaps/barriers in services and supports for transgender health, comments that highlight nine of the themes that emerged in the survey are provided below.

A Need for Inclusion of Trans and Gender Diverse Individuals

"There is no education offered for trans individuals. The 'T' in LGBT is very silent here, and unfortunately, that's the reason our support group is less than helpful. The hetero/cis community, I would say, is by far more accepting of my trans status, than those in the LGB community. And I believe it is because of the giant trans education void."

"Nobody ever remembers the T in LGBT."

A Need for Healthcare Provider Education

"Only specific doctors are educated in The Process of gender transition, and without the knowledge to go to those specific doctors, it is easy to be led astray by those who do not know The Process."

"I am educating my own GP on the transgender process."

"General knowledge, honestly. My GP had never worked with a trans patient (to her knowledge) until I came out to her in 2010."*

"It is so hard to navigate the system - knowledge is disseminated by trans patients to other trans patients. Doctors don't know anything - they have to search and dig and dig to find out how to help their trans patients."

"Ignorant judgmental doctor - When asked about testosterone, said 'No, I won't do that.' Was rude and acted horrified."

"There are a few 'trans-friendly' physicians, but only one was taking new patients, and they are not that trans-friendly or trans-knowledgeable. Generally, the health system is very non-trans-friendly in several ways - health professionals are trained in a gender binary and do not understand gender fluidity, many health professionals claim to be 'trans-friendly', but they are merely 'trans-curious' and want to know all the juicy details, and/or do not have any knowledge that can help their trans clients. Just being willing to see trans* clients is not enough if they have no expertise."*

"Trans 101 program recommended for local physicians, nurses and technicians."

A Need for Mental Health and Substance Use Support

"A lack of substance use support (from both abstinence and harm reduction perspectives). For about 6 months I was regularly attending PRISM's trans substance use support group and really feel like that was the best therapy I've ever received."

"Professional counsellors in this city are expensive, and mostly not covered by benefits (for those who have benefits), and are very hard to find. Some professional counsellors who say "queer friendly" are NOT trans-friendly."

A Need for a Variety of Support and Educational Opportunities

"Support groups for adult trans men (not just youth), FTM etc. Lukas Walther did run such a group for trans men once a month out of Raven Song and having been helped immensely by this group I would strongly encourage THP to offer some funding to FTM etc. so this group can continue long term."

"Lack of educational and support peer groups that are open to all (i.e. not just for youth)."

"We need a trans group that is not horrible."

"It would be nice to see a professionally facilitated support group active closer to home."

"For me personally there should be an exclusive trans group for anyone that is trans or parents/family of said trans* people."*

"Would like to see more one-on-one peer counselling type support (though maybe this exists and I haven't found it yet?). Especially matching up people with similar views and expressions of gender or issues with respect to gender (i.e., more binary identified vs. more queer or fluid, etc.)."

A Need for Support for Non-Binary Gender Identities

"Transgender care is aimed at people that want to undergo medical transitions and who identify within binary gender models. There doesn't seem to be medical programming for those who do not want hormones but still need to access healthcare in a trans-centered and friendly venue. The need to lie to doctors to get hormones if you do not fully identify as MTF or FTM is problematic. We are forced to segment our lives and identities to get the health care we NEED or want, because if we are honest about how we identify, we may be barred from medical intervention. Can we educate more doctors to be more open to genderqueers?"

"I see a lack of support for non-binary gender identities. The gender binary is still the default template. There needs to be more education about options other than medical transition to the so-called opposite gender."

A Need for Equality in Access to Care

“As a result, in the fear of being rejected [for] surgery or hormone access by the gatekeepers, myself and many of my trans and my genderqueer/variant friends lied about the way they experience gender (both growing up, as well as currently). It’s no secret that a trans guy who is hyper masculine and straight is going to jump through all the hoops a lot faster than a one who appears more feminine and is attracted to men. And its 1000x worse for trans women...the current system in place is simply viewed as a series of hoops to jump through by whatever means necessary to obtain support.”

“I have had VERY poor luck in finding a GP (doctor) who is willing to help me with transition-related needs (making referrals, giving me names of other medical professionals I could contact myself, etc.). My family doctor is essentially refusing to help me based on her personal beliefs because I am young and VERY early in my transition (having only recently come out to my family, though have been out to friends/employer for years, and only JUST having had my first psychological assessment). I have actually been turned away from the local trans peer support group! I have also found it extremely difficult when trying to report assaults that have happened to me when trying to use public restroom facilities.”

“Because I am in Coquitlam I have gone through living hell trying to get a doctor for myself. I still do not have a GP. I am NOT allowed to use 3 bridges or any other doctor or service downtown. This is unacceptable. I should be allowed to use ANY doctor that does not consider me a freak and truly wants to help me out.”

A Need for Supports Across the Province

“It sucks that all the services are for trans care are stuck in Vancouver. Whether public or private. I had to access a "private" Psychologist prior to commencing hormones. They were even based in Vancouver!”

“We NEED accessibility. It doesn't have to be in every little town but should be distributed throughout the province. In Sparwood they have a wellness center...there should be pamphlets and materials openly displayed and accessible. They should also have a trans trained professional counsellor to help people who feel the need to explore any trans issue including how to start transition and where to access good therapists and endocrinologists etc. They could have group meetings ...all kinds of ideas come to mind. Example....Trans Connect sponsors come to communities and hold group meetings.”

“It’s [Trans healthcare] all centred in Vancouver.”

“We can't fix everything in one fell swoop should be counselling fairly close to most communities ...every clinic should have a brochure in their racks about VCH online.”

“The state of trans services in the province is terrible and inequitable. People in the north are so disadvantaged compared to people in the south.”

“There are none [services] locally. Typically, I have to travel to Victoria to access services. The nearest peer support group is in Courtenay.”

A Need for Current and Easily Accessible Information

“Everything is a gap. The Vancouver Transgender Health Program has out-of-date information for trans folks, meaning that we feel helpless and defeated. According to your website, we need to go through the RLE process in order to access surgery. NOW, we don't have to for top surgery - all we need is an assessment. AND WHY HAS NO-ONE LET US KNOW ABOUT THIS? I WAS WAITING TO SEE [assessor] FOR AN ASSESSMENT. NOW, MY TRANS FRIEND TOLD ME THERE ARE OTHER ASSESSORS IN THE PROVINCE AND I CONTACTED [Assessor] AND SHE CAN ASSESS ME WAY SOONER THAN [original assessor]. WHY WAS THIS NOT COMMUNICATED TO DOCTORS? WHY IS IT SO HARD TO JUST FIGURE OUT THE SYSTEM? NOT ONLY DOES THE TRANSGENDER PROGRAM WEBSITE HAVE INFORMATION THAT IS OUT OF DATE, IT'S WRONG AND MAKES TRANS FOLKS START PURSUING THE RLE PROCESS AND RISK LOOSING THEIR JOBS BY COMING OUT TO THEIR EMPLOYERS (IF THEY DON'T PASS, WHICH NOBODY DOES IF THEY HAVEN'T HAD SURGERY). IF YOU CAN'T GIVE CORRECT INFORMATION, JUST TAKE THE INFORMATION DOWN. I appreciate you doing this survey and trying to make things better (even though it seems helpless still). Apologies for the above all-caps, but I want to make sure the reader sees it and doesn't gloss over participants written responses.”

“The gaps are not in the care but rather in the difficulty in navigating the system; perhaps more readily available information relating to the logistics of applying for MSP funding for top surgery, gender marker changes, etc. Could be helpful if it was all in one place.”

“There's a lot of things available in Vancouver, however, I just moved here, so I have no idea where to start, where to go for help. I don't know how to begin the medical transition. I don't have any support at all and it's difficult when you don't really know anybody.”

A Need for More Timely Access to Care

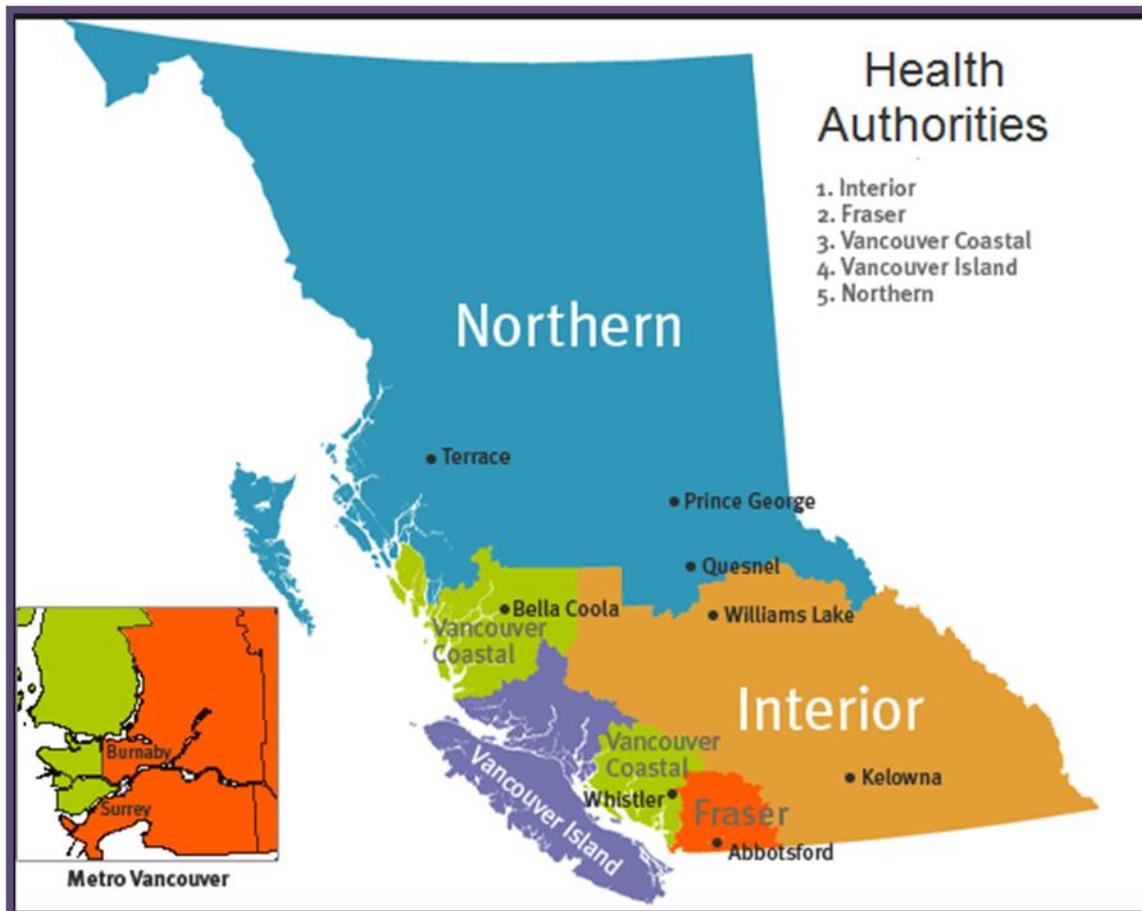
“The extremely lengthy waitlists for the single transgender therapist makes people go to Vancouver as it is literally heart breaking to be told '8+ months' before being able to access psychotherapy, especially if you've firmly figured out that you wish to transition and are increasingly highly emotional, feeling like you're going nowhere. An informed consent clinic like the Catherine White Holman Clinic would be highly valuable for this community in my opinion as in the Standards Of Care V7 recommends no waiting for accessing hormones/psychotherapy/etc. I believe so long as a person is assessed and has any mental [health] issues addressed, well informed on the effects of hormones and risk factors as well as being physically well enough to take hormones that it should be their choice, not the choice of gatekeepers like psychiatrists.”

“I had a severe problem dealing with gatekeepers and waiting for approval interview etc. I am now years behind schedule waiting for gatekeepers to catch up. I mean 3-5 years. I'm still waiting for surgery. I've been approved but still waiting for MSP to contact me.”

“Because there seems to be only one doctor for hormones, the wait list is just INSANE. I really don't like to complain, but it takes a lot of courage and self-discovery for some people to finally admit they are transgendered, but then they have to wait even longer because there is only one doctor? I was told I would have to wait probably 10-12 months just to see the doctor. Then I have to see her for at least another 3 months before I can even begin hormones. This is quite literally detrimental to the care of Trans people. Sorry, I'm just really frustrated.”

Conclusions

Community feedback is essential to supporting the THP program in moving forward with direct service and resource development that will best meet community needs. It is the intent of THP to be responsive to the changing needs of the community. The results of this survey will be utilized in determining strategic direction and priorities for the THP program⁵ over the coming years. Please feel free to email us your ongoing input at transhealth@vch.ca.



⁵ As of September 2013, the program name is the Transgender Health Information Program (THIP).