

COMMUNITY AGENCY ROUNDTABLE REPORT



Meeting the Needs of LGBTQ Youth in Edmonton and Area

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Meeting the Needs of LGBTQ Youth
in Edmonton and Area



Thank you to the Ministry of Human Services, City of Edmonton, and United Way of the Alberta Capital Region for making this consultation and report possible.

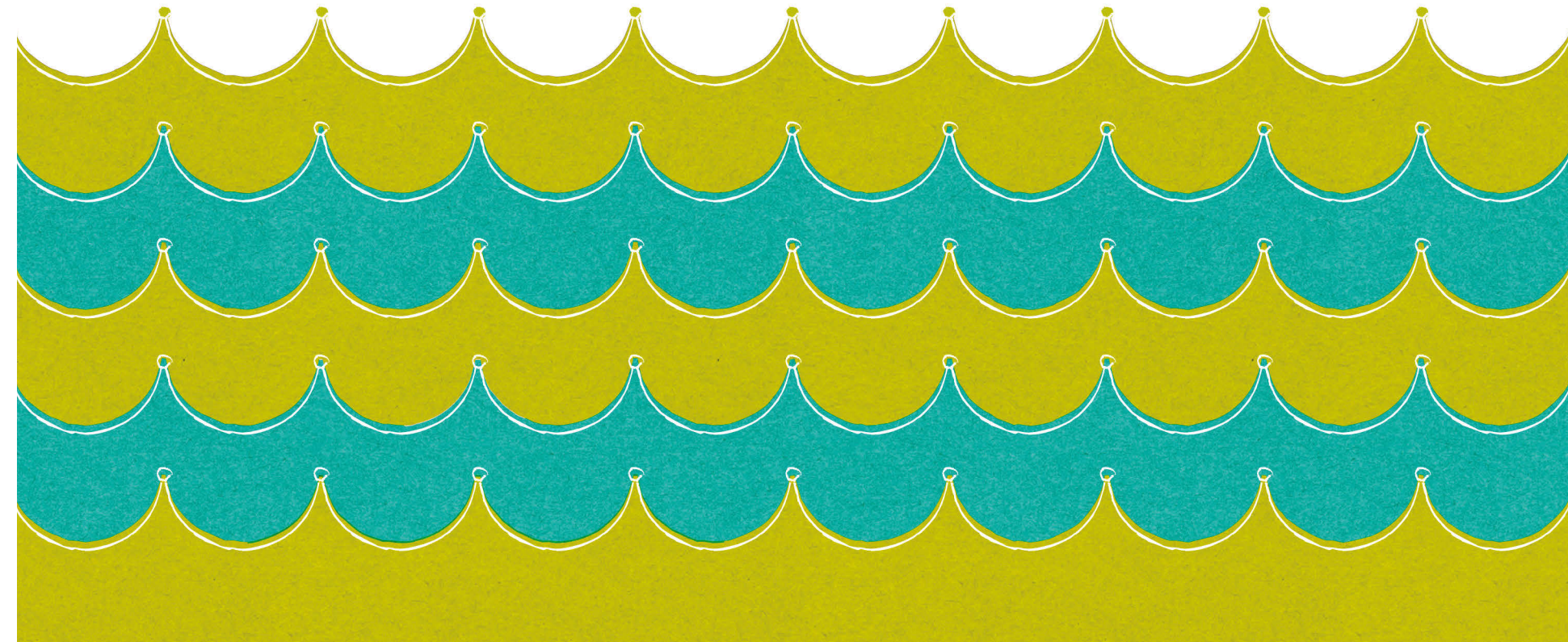
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Community Agency Roundtable Report:

Meeting the Needs of LGBTQ Youth in Edmonton and Area





This community agency roundtable was held on November 4, 2016 at Youth Emergency Support Services (YESS) and was convened by The Family Resilience Project, with support from the Ministry of Human Services, FCSS Edmonton, and the United Way of the Alberta Capital Region. The afternoon session was facilitated by Dr. Pieter de Vos, a Community Facilitator with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Approximately, 50 individuals from a variety of youth-focused agencies attended the consultation to provide feedback on current services, gaps, and opportunities to better serve the needs of LGBTQ youth in the Edmonton region.

The afternoon consultation was centered on three main areas of inquiry:

(1) Where we are today: The current state as it relates to LGBTQ youth in Edmonton

(2) What is working well: Opportunities and challenges (trends and realities)

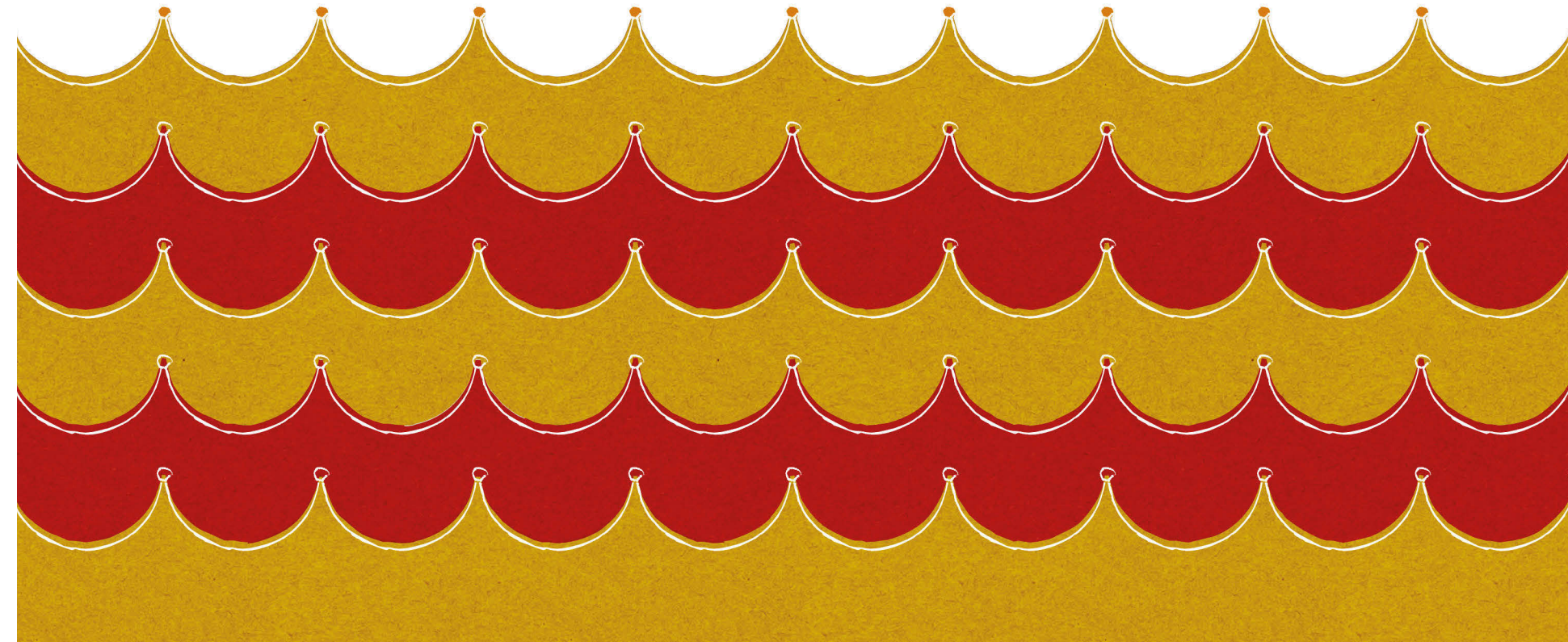
(3) Where we want to be: Strategies for collective action to improve the lives of LGBTQ youth in Edmonton



On January 19, 2017 we hosted a 2-hour follow-up focus group with 19 participants to further clarify, refine, and validate the data, themes, and recommendations generated from the roundtable discussions. This focus group was hosted at the University of Alberta and facilitated by Dr. Pieter de Vos, Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

In writing this report we attempted to stay true to the words and experiences of participants. The data collected is not intended to be exhaustive or representative of individual agencies, rather it is a reflection (a snapshot in time) of the individuals who participated in the consultation process.

Reflections on Change: Opening Brainstorming Activity





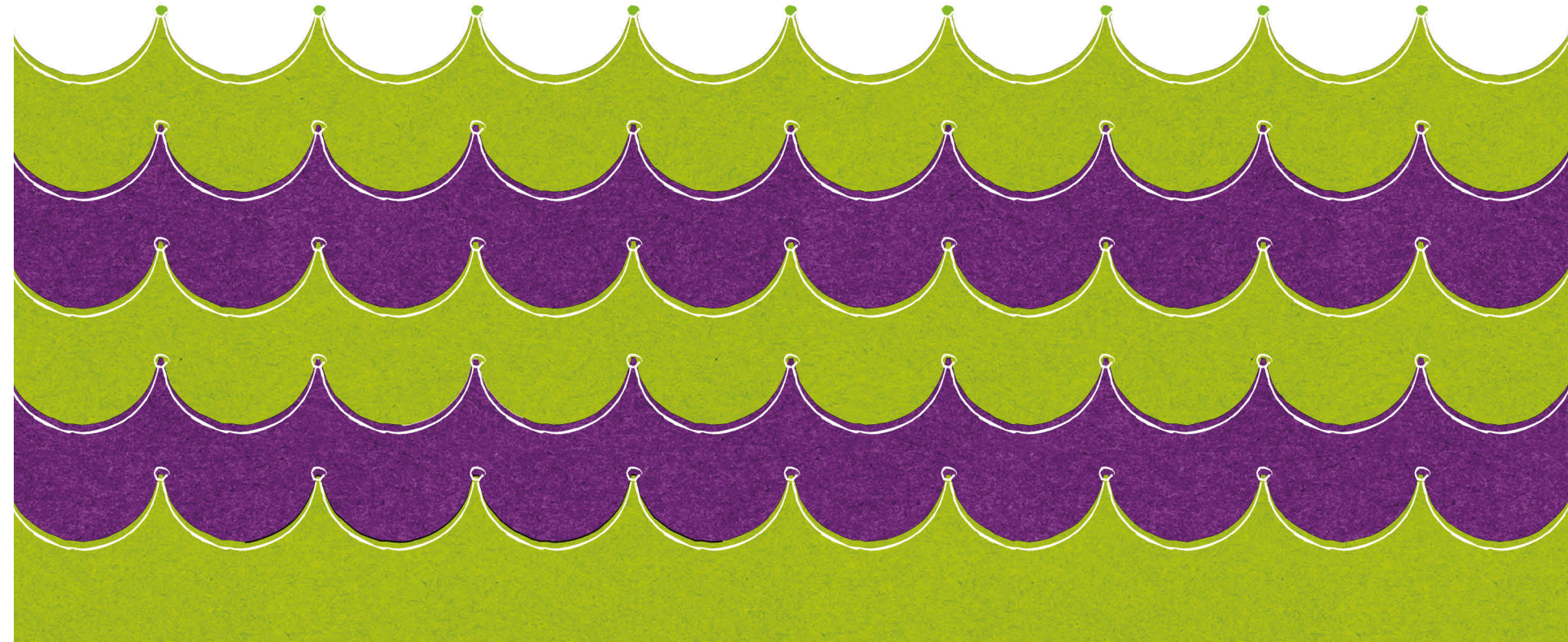
What are the most significant changes you've witnessed as it relates to supporting LGBTQ Youth in Edmonton?

- More acceptance of two-spirit youth on reserve and in community. More organizations are aware and willing to help.
- Still a large section of staff/service providers who are uncomfortable with LGBTQ issues.
- Youth are coming out at younger and younger ages. Fewer social, professional, and medical supports for these youth (e.g., play therapy groups).
- More parents are willing to be strong advocates for their children, which creates demands for inclusion, programs, and services.
- More communities are moving from outright denial to a reluctance to talk (e.g., religious, rural, ethnocultural). Not active engagement yet, but at least acknowledgment has started to occur.
- In many ethnocultural communities, LGBTQ youth are isolated and live in fear. They need strong supports. The gaps are becoming greater for ethnocultural communities. This gap was described as “an LGBTQ cultural divide.”
- More important conversations are becoming mainstream, including inclusive language. But there is still a real divide between activist/postsecondary institutions that have adopted inclusive practices (e.g., gender pronouns), and those that do not yet understand the importance of inclusive practices. This

is a privileged conversation and not everyone has equal access to this knowledge. Conversations are often divided by class/economic/educational lines.

- Increased peer support and involvement is happening in educational spaces (e.g., GSAs in K-12 schools, The Landing at University of Alberta).
- Access to spaces is happening based on identity and comfort/safety. For example, some individuals will be more comfortable going to iHUMAN, rather than to The Landing.
- Passage of Bill 10 is very positive, which allows students to start a GSA and also removed parental restrictions to opt out of learning about sexual orientation and gender identity. However, many teachers are still not aware of these important changes. For example, within Francophone community, Bill 10 enabled these conversations to move from behind closed doors to open conversations in schools with teachers, students, and parents. This is real progress.
- Knowledge growth is fantastic. LGBTQ information is shared freely. However, GSAs can still be seen as a “flavor of the month”. What are the main priorities for LGBTQ youth? High risk youth? Policies and programs are still not addressing systemic issues. There is still a capacity issue. This is the policy and practice implementation gap. For example, Bill 10 (GSAs) and Bill 7 (Gender Identity and Gender Expression) have opened the door to change, but much of the real work still has to be done.

The Current Reality: Charting the Landscape





What are the key challenges and barriers facing LGBTQ youth in Edmonton?

- Lack of understanding/competency of service providers (9)
- Cultural barriers lead to limited supports/services for culturally diverse LGBTQ youth, refugees, and newcomers (9)
- Parental attitudes/understanding (5)
- Systems navigation/knowledge of resources (5)
- Personal bias and unchecked privilege (4)
- Access to inclusive health care and counselling services (3)
- Lack of core competencies/mandated training for caring professionals in health, education, and social work in pre-professional programs (3)
- Lack of supports and programs for two-spirit youth (3)
- Impact of trauma, oppression, and internalized homo/transphobia (2)
- Lack of centralized access/coordination of services (2)
- Lack of intersectional supports/services (e.g., multiple and layered oppressions) (2)
- Complexity and needs of trans and gender diverse youth (2)
- Not enough peer supports, safe spaces, and programs (2)

- Lack of funding creates interagency competition for limited resources
- Workplace barriers/discrimination
- Non-inclusive agency policies and attitudes
- Services that exist are concentrated downtown or at University
- Lack of supports for LGBTQ youth with physical or cognitive challenges
- Non-accepting religious and/or cultural beliefs and communities
- Lack of awareness of changes to government laws and legislation (e.g., Bill 10 and Bill 7)
- Intimate partner violence

What is the barrier? How does it block or impede? What is being blocked?

- Fear of parental/caregiver/youth worker reactions and lack of education often leads to conflict, stress, and strained relationships, which can lead to homelessness, street involvement, intervention services, and precarious housing (6)
- Cultural/communication barriers lead to isolation and increased stress (4)
- Lack of senior leadership and inclusive policies limit the abilities of frontline staff and agencies to respond effectively (4)

- Unmet basic needs (e.g., food, shelter, health, safety) means identity-based issues are often left without supports (e.g., Education, peers, community connection/integration) (4)
- Lack of specific LGBTQ training/professional development leads to unsafe spaces (3)
- Having to prioritize parts of identity for acceptance depending on the community you are in (e.g., race, culture, religion, LGBTQ) leads to lack of culturally aware and safe spaces (3)
- Personal bias, fear of backlash, and lack of knowledge leads to critical gaps in services (3)
- Increased internalized homo/bi/transphobia, which can lead to negative health and safety outcomes (3)
- Limited access to health and mental health supports increases challenges and risks (3)
- Older infrastructure makes spaces exclusive rather than inclusive (e.g., Gender-inclusive washrooms) (2)
- Funding and outdated data limits the development of services that are inclusive and responsive to the evolving needs of youth (2)
- Lack of centralized coordination means services offered are often fragmented and disconnected (2)
- Fear of being “outed” is prominent in religious, cultural, and close knit communities, which leads to increased isolation (2)

- Parents/communities/schools do not understand what GSAs/QSAs are and why they are important
- Always being hypervigilant against violence and discrimination can compromise mental health
- Don’t know where to turn to for help increases vulnerability
- Need to move beyond binaries and allow for fluidity in identity
- We need more data about LGBTQ youth: How many are there, and what are their experiences?
- Can’t reach all youth with only educational programming. Need a variety of supports and services and outreach strategies
- Need to move from focusing only on intervention to longer term strategies for prevention (From superficial to structural change)
- Younger LGBTQ children are often left without any age-appropriate peer or community supports

What are the challenges in addressing these barriers?

- Need to educate society and normalize LGBTQ issues (e.g., linguistic, ethnocultural, Aboriginal, immigrant, and parent communities). How are current services meeting the needs of these groups?
- How do we create safe spaces that are responsive and inclusive? For example, there is a tension between safe spaces and inclusion. Need for more culturally safe spaces for youth





with different backgrounds and experiences. Safe spaces in many different environments (not just in schools, but also in community and religious spaces). When spaces are not safe, they can exclude youth from accessing treatment and other important services. Question: How do we create a space that is safe, but open to a variety of people/identities/experiences?

- Many youth do not know what resources exist and are safe to access. System navigation is a barrier.
- The need for a “gender binary” is a barrier for youth who express gender fluidity. This is different than supporting trans youth who often maintain the binary in their transition. Not understanding gender fluidity is a barrier for many. Gender normativity is a strong force. This leaves non-binary youth with very few resources or supports.
- Very limited training for health care professionals. Entrenched hetero- and gender-normativity is strong. This leads to barriers to access and increased health concerns for LGBTQ youth.
- Respectfulness (e.g., political correctness) in our services can be a barrier. Some service providers just avoid, rather than wanting to make a mistake or offending. They do not want to be socially awkward. As a result, services become very passive, rather than proactive. A key barrier is the lack of LGBTQ-sensitivity training for staff.
- How do we have awkward conversations without raising defensiveness? This awkwardness creates distance and perpetuates silences.

- Youth may feel they have to choose between their sexual or gender identity and religion or culture. This can leave them without any community of support.
- Almost no support for new immigrant or refugee LGBTQ youth. They cannot access formal supports until their claim is heard. This leaves them amongst the most vulnerable. These youth frequently come with other challenges like PTSD based on county of origin.
- There is no sustainability of funding (e.g., government).
- Silent funders can also be a barrier. They don’t want their support known and you can’t use their name/influence to leverage other funding.
- There is increasing information, but still a lack of understanding and fear. Heterosexual privilege is a barrier.

Focus group feedback indicated that these barriers and challenges are not new, but have existed for more than a decade. There still continues to be isolated services and supports, which indicate a lack of cohesion and traction to remove these ongoing barriers. Many programs/services operate in silos, which make them hard to access and limit reach and effectiveness. Mindsets need to shift not only among organizations doing the work, but also sustainable funding and coordinating leadership from government is needed. How can we improve data collection so clear evidence can be presented to policy makers and leaders to help lead systemic change that supports LGBTQ youth? Attention needs to include collective impact and how we measure and evaluate meaningful change, which directly includes the voices and experiences of diverse LGBTQ youth themselves.

What are the capacities and assets we can leverage? What is working well?

- Include LGBTQ clearly in agency value/inclusivity statements. Ensure hiring, performance management, and evaluation is based on these inclusive values. Important to make values explicit and accountable.
- Sharing youth experiences. Education as a process of humanization. Key role of empathy in building understanding.

Provide youth with a platform to speak for themselves (e.g., fYrefly in Schools). It builds leadership for youth that they can use throughout their lives.

- Partnerships are critical to support. Help to leverage existing successful programs into new ethnocultural communities (e.g., Francophone, Indigenous). The diversity of perspectives brings value to the programs.
- Not just outreach, but also in-reach to marginalized communities. Importance of establishing LGBTQ cultural brokers. Mobilize our own communities to make connections to other services and supports.
- Mentoring programs are important between organizations (e.g., Pride Centre and BBBS). How do we learn from these successful partnerships and share with others?
- Homelessness and precarious living conditions are major concerns. Shelters are creating a set of common guidelines for LGBTQ youth. They are also providing agency roundtables to discuss how to implement those guidelines.
- Collaboration with frontline agencies. Working to provide a survey for LGBTQ youth (e.g., RAYE) to get them engaged and have their voices impact services and supports.





- Importance of providing accessible mental health supports by qualified professionals for children, youth, and families (e.g., YWCA & Family Resilience Project). Agencies can work together to avoid duplication and help coordinate services to reduce wait times and share knowledge.
- Funders are increasingly supportive of LGBTQ youth programs (e.g., Human Services, FCSS, United Way, Edmonton Community Foundation). Grant recipients also want funders to be committed to sustainable and long-term funding. Community impact/change takes time and long-term commitment.
- Challenge of reporting to some funders that have gender-based requirements (e.g., only male/female reporting categories). Need to develop best practices for intake forms and services to be more inclusive of LGBTQ youth. Representation matters.
- Many agencies now have LGBTQ youth groups/programs. Youth are also increasingly technologically sophisticated. What resources exist online? (e.g., Rainbow Pages directory has listing of current local services)
- Mental health first aid for peers can be important in outreach efforts to vulnerable LGBTQ youth who cannot access direct services. Focus on eliminating stigma and strengthening connections to peers and inclusive supports.
- Important to also educate police, health care providers, and teachers who are “frontline responders”.
- Important to ask the LGBTQ community directly what they want

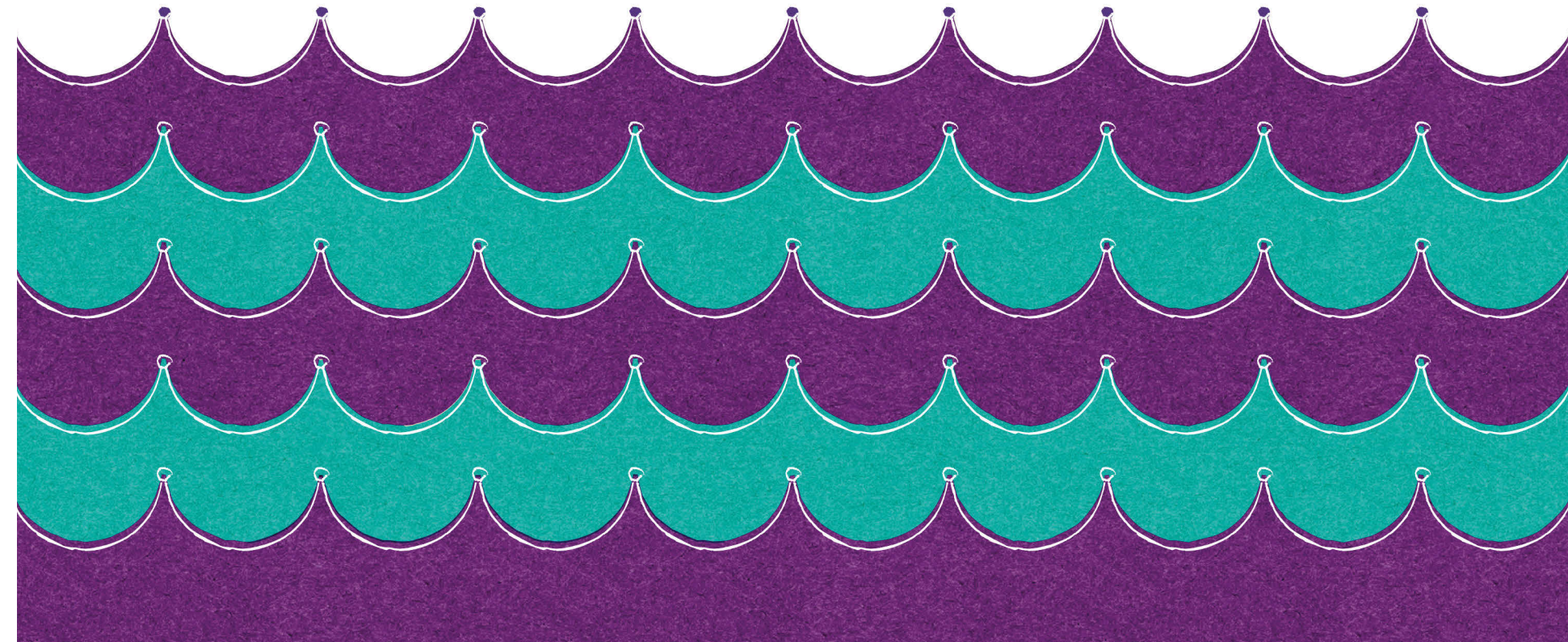
or need. Surveys and research also need to target parts of the LGBTQ community that are traditionally excluded or not heard from (e.g., RAYE survey).

- Pride Centre of Edmonton has a full-time LGBTQ youth worker to do outreach and provide support groups.
- Edmonton Public Schools has sexual orientation and gender identity consultants to connect with inclusive supports, provide training, and help navigate internal systems (e.g., name changes, forms, field trips, athletics).
- Many agencies and programs are doing excellent work to support LGBTQ youth. These include (but are not limited to): Pride Centre of Edmonton, The Family Centre, YWCA, iSMSS, Camp fYrefly, Family Resilience Project, Rainbow Alliance for Youth of Education (RAYE), YESS, Edmonton Public Schools, Compass, CHEW, Safe Accommodations for Queer Edmonton Youth (SAFQEY), iHuman, Alberta GSA Network, AltView, Big Brothers and Big Sisters/Boys and Girls Club of Edmonton, Homeward Trust, Human Services, Office and the Child and Youth Advocate, United Way, FCSS, Edmonton Community Foundation, Stollery Charitable Foundation, Two-Spirit Circle Society, Dancing with Egales Two-Spirit Society, Edmonton Men’s Health Collective, Francophonie jeunesse de l’Alberta.

Focus group participants highlighted the importance of community collaboration and mobilization. Intergenerational mentorship and capacity building were cited as critical to help build community conversation, knowledge, and ongoing growth and success. Community organizing was highlighted as a major factor necessary to enable innovative and adaptive approaches to current and future challenges. Participants emphasized the need for more opportunities to promote and support collaboration amongst agencies as an important way to improve dialogue and increase the coordination of services.

Employee and volunteer burn out was also described as a major concern for LGBTQ youth workers and agencies. Participants asked how we might provide better supports for workers to see the potential for long-term, fulfilling, and successful careers? LGBTQ youth need to be able to see themselves in the agencies and workers that serve them. How might we strive for more internal diversity within our agencies and amongst our employees?

Collective Impact: Identifying High Leverage Opportunities



Where might future efforts and resources be directed
to promote the well-being of LGBTQ youth in Edmonton?

01

What
might
we do?

02

What
might we do
differently?

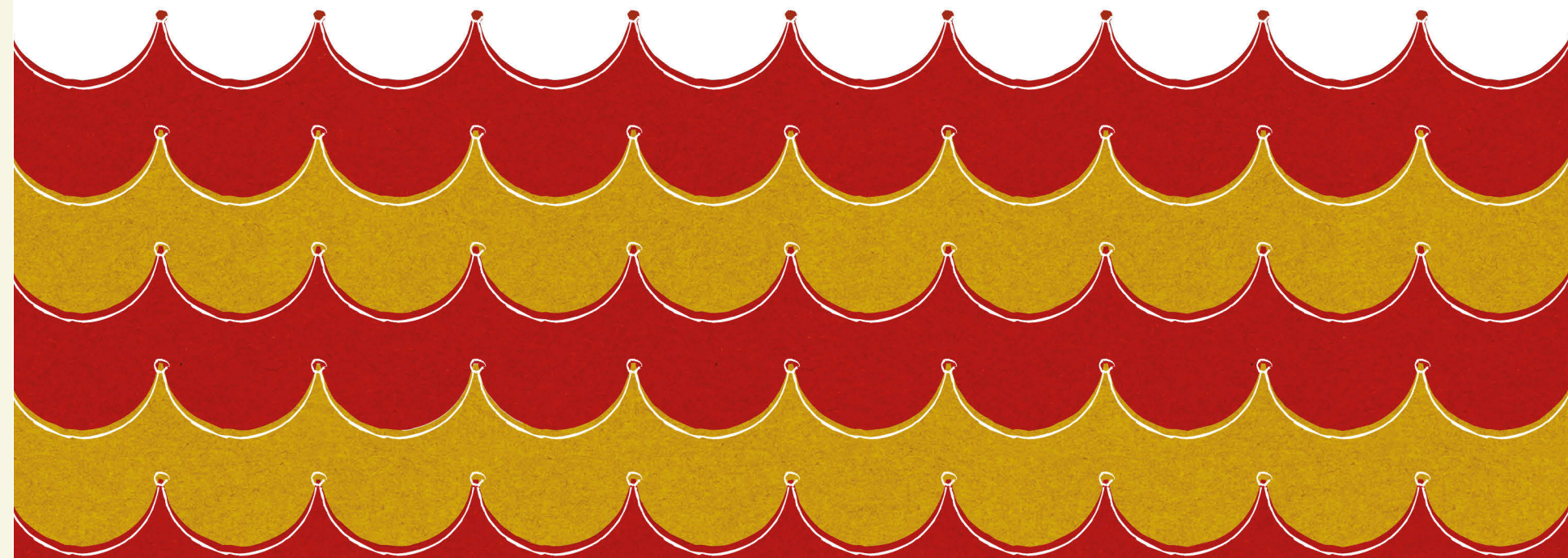
03

What
might we
stop doing?

04

Where
do we
start?

Emergent Themes





Set Goals For Improvement

1. Create Movement/Challenge Notions

- Develop a “Make it awkward” movement for LGBTQ youth
- Bring youth to the table at all forums to help steer the conversation so we can have an accurate picture of their needs and they are empowered to help develop solutions.
- Expand/challenge understandings of “cultural diversity” to

include LGBTQ youth and include a gender-based violence lens and analysis.

2. Protocols and Practices (Working with Funders)

- Leverage current workplace training protocols and practices. Require government and funders to ensure all agencies have LGBTQ-inclusive policies and practices. Make this part of a

credentialing process. Organizations need to be supported to examine their own biases and beliefs. For example, there is a pressing need to create safer environments for LGBTQ youth within the existing shelter system.

- Develop an LGBTQ readiness self-assessment tool to assist organizations to explore current practices and set goals for

improvement. This could lead to systemic change in facilities, forms, policies, hiring, and greater competence (and confidence) in service delivery.

- Hold funding agencies accountable in sharing expertise, funding dollars, and promoting collaboration. This would lead to a more integrated and coordinated approach to service delivery.



- Utilize Truth and Reconciliation Committee (TRC) recommendations and UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to guide agency practices. This will lead to increased recognition and accountability to serve the needs of two-spirit youth and other marginalized groups.

3. Creating Safe Environments

- Develop a community organizing group with high level representation to create actual safe spaces (including a committee with voices of youth).

- Offer a continuum of LGBTQ housing and placement options.
- Provide LGBTQ inclusiveness training for professionals, which includes teachers, students (in pre-professional programs), social workers, police officers, front-line staff (e.g., agency and government), health care providers, legal community (e.g., judges and prosecutors) and senior government decision makers and leaders.

4. Systems of Support (Linkages and navigation)

- Support the mapping of LGBTQ resources between government and community.
- Create a directory of services (e.g., Rainbow Pages). Create a queer 211?
- Cultural brokerage (Access to inclusive resources, training, and sharing promising practices). Build environments of trust and safety.
- Create spaces for agencies to network and come together

regularly to learn from and share with one another.

- Explore accessibility and location of LGBTQ youth services across Edmonton and region (e.g., outside of only downtown or university).

5. Education for Parents (and diverse communities)

- There is a great need to build awareness, empathy, and understanding among caregivers.
- Inclusive education is needed for parents, caregivers, group/



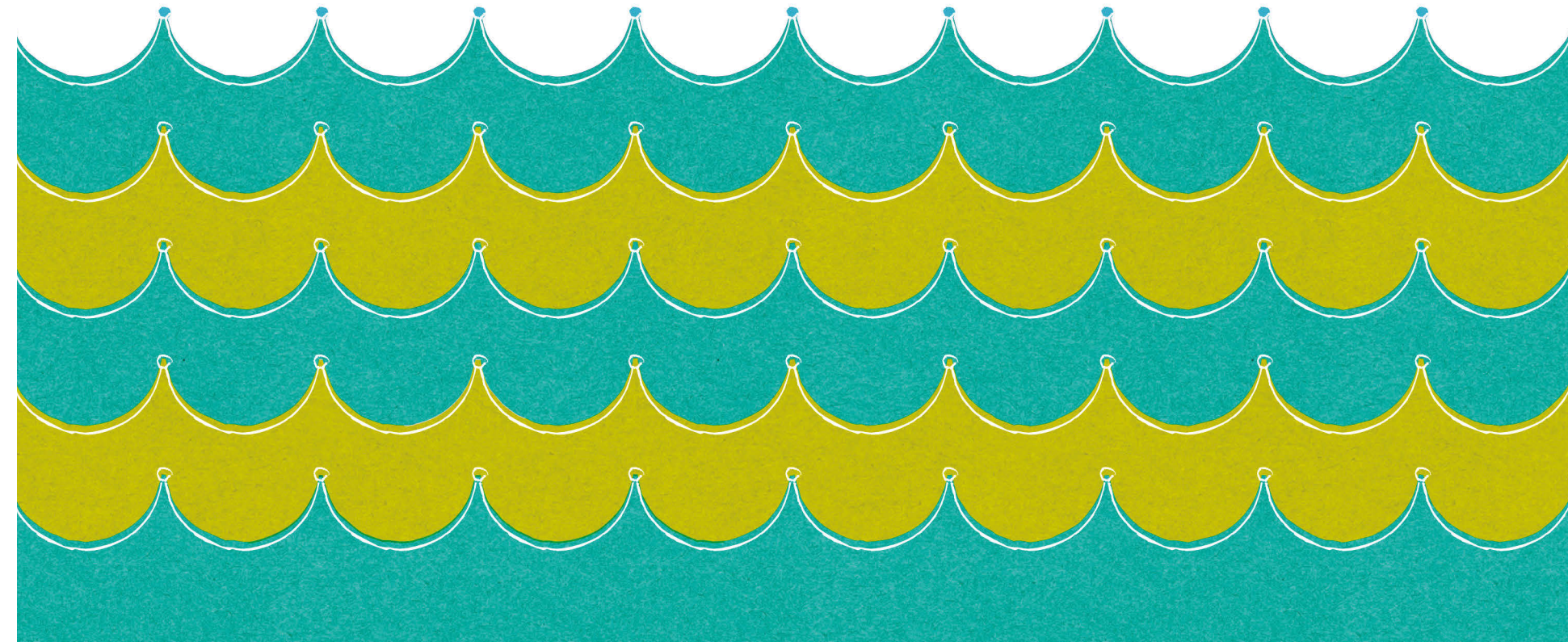
foster homes (e.g., Skill-building and professional development opportunities).

- This work should also target parent school councils, sporting associations, and cultural and faith institutions.

6. Professional Development

- Revise Alberta's provincial K-12 program of studies (e.g., Curriculum and approved resources) to reflect a diversity of LGBTQ identities, issues, and histories.
- Develop, maintain, and share a directory of LGBTQ competent health care professionals and services.
- Increase knowledge and capacity of front line workers (e.g., "Every door is the right door"). LGBTQ youth should receive immediate support, rather than being passed along, ignored, or forgotten. This work should include support for the development of trauma-informed practices.
- Specific LGBTQ training for culturally and religiously diverse communities is needed.
- Agency leaders and directors must ensure all staff attend mandatory LGBTQ-inclusive training. Develop certificate/credential training program to ensure high standards and key competencies are met.
- More focused formal education and training opportunities are needed for professionals in the health care system. This includes students in their professional programs and practicums.

Recommendations





1. Reaching the Hard to Reach

Support the development and delivery of evidence-based training, resources, tools, and service provision focused on meeting the complex health, safety, and educational needs of LGBTQ youth in culturally diverse, faith, Indigenous, and new immigrant/refugee communities. These priority populations are frequently ignored, forgotten, and underserved in existing services and outreach activities.

2. Supporting Frontline Workers

Provide frequent, accessible, experiential, and evidence-based LGBTQ-focused training opportunities for front-line service providers, teachers, government, and youth workers. Capacity-building is critical to reduce risk and build resilience among LGBTQ youth.

3. Connecting with Caring Professionals

Improve access to and coordination of evidence-based supports and services for LGBTQ youth in schools, communities, and health care. Caring professionals are “front line responders” who need to be equipped to positively support, affirm, and celebrate LGBTQ youth and their families.

4. Strengthening Families

Provide accessible educational and training opportunities and inclusive services and supports for parents, caregivers, and families of LGBTQ children and youth. Families are one of the most important resiliency factors for youth. While working with LGBTQ children and youth, we must also actively work to build understanding and acceptance among their families and caregivers.

5. Facilitating Community Cohesion and Connectedness

Improve interagency collaboration, community engagement, information sharing, and system navigation so LGBTQ youth needs are addressed holistically. Break down barriers, remove silos, and develop a continuum of supports and services for LGBTQ youth across the Edmonton region.

6. Building a Backbone for Collective Impact

Develop a central agency (e.g., LGBTQ youth bureau) to coordinate services, funding, and programs for the Edmonton region. This should include an explicit LGBTQ youth advisory committee. One focal point to coordinate all services and supports would

improve impact and has the potential to lead to systemic and systems-level change.

7. Thinking Seven Generations

Utilize Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) recommendations through a queer Indigenous lens to guide agency training, programs, and practices. Focus on seven generations by asking how the actions we take today, both individually and collectively, will affect LGBTQ youth seven generations from now. For example, costs for this work are not only financial, but also moral, political, social, and emotional. These “costs” should also be incorporated into our immediate and long range planning.

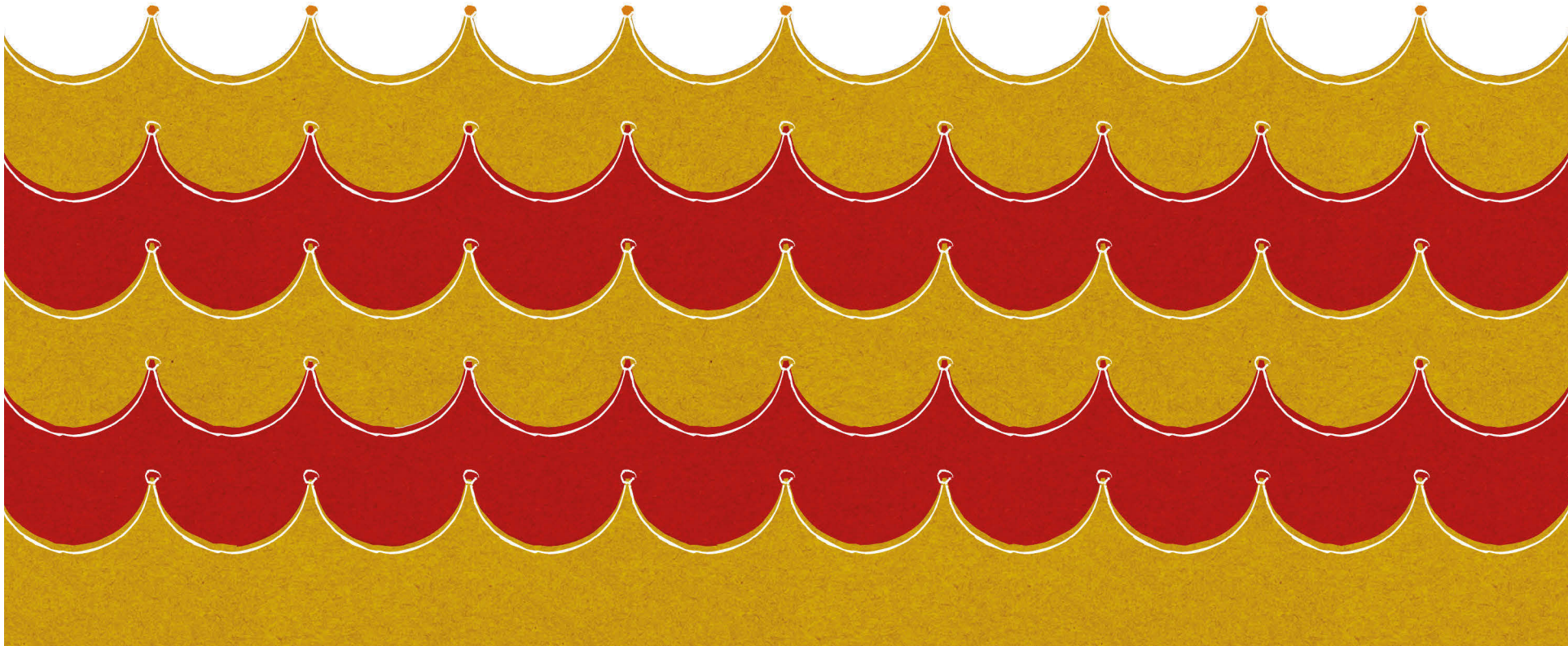
8. Developing Competencies

Create LGBTQ competencies for the development of training, professional development facilitators, and agency certification. This will ensure that all services and training offered is evidence-based and delivered by competent and experienced facilitators/workers.

A collective impact approach is critical to ensure these recommendations move forward in a sustainable and meaningful way. The changes we make today should reflect the generations of tomorrow.



Acknowledgements



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Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies (AAISA)

AltView

Big Brothers and Big Sisters/Boys and Girls Club of Edmonton

Catholic Social Services Immigration and Settlement

City of Edmonton – Family and Community Supports and Services (FCSS)

Compass Centre for Sexual Wellness

Counselling and Clinical Services, University of Alberta

Dancing with Eagles Two-Spirit Society

Edmonton and Area Children and Family Services

Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF)

Edmonton Men’s Health Collective (EMHC)

Edmonton Public Library (EPL)

Edmonton Public Schools

Edmonton Social Planning Council

Francophonie jeunesse de l’Alberta (FJA)

HIV Edmonton

Homeward Trust

iHuman Youth Society

Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services (iSMSS)

John Humphreys Centre for Peace and Human Rights (JHC)

Ministry of Human Services, Government of Alberta

Momentum Walk in Counselling

Multicultural Health Brokers

Office of the Child and Youth Advocate (OCYA)

Old Strathcona Youth Society (OSYS)

Pride Centre of Edmonton

Rainbow Alliance for Youth of Edmonton (RAYE)

Safe Accommodations for Queer Edmonton Youth (SAFQEY)

Terra Centre

The Family Centre

Two-Spirit of Edmonton Circle Society

United Way – Edmonton and Capital Region

Yellowhead Youth Centre (YYC)

Youth Empowerment and Support Services (YESS)

Boyle Street Community Centre

YWCA

