



BLACK LEGAL
ACTION CENTRE

EMPOWERMENT TIPS

for Black LGBTQ+ Newcomers in Canada

02

Healthcare

Introduction

This tip sheet was developed as part of the **Black LGBTQ+ Newcomer Leadership and Capacity-Building Project**, a four-week workshop series that brought together community members to share lived experiences, name systemic barriers, and design practical solutions for safer, more inclusive services in Ontario. The project was made possible through the support of the **Black Legal Action Centre (BLAC)**, whose dedication to fighting anti-Black racism and advancing racial justice has ensured that the voices of Black LGBTQ+ newcomers are centred and amplified.

This guide helps Black LGBTQ+ newcomers learn their rights and take action against discrimination. It covers:



Each section has advice on **“Know Your Rights,” “Your Responsibilities,” “Steps You Can Take,” “Support Services to Contact,”** and example **“Language You Can Use”** to speak up.



Disclaimer

The information provided in this tip sheet is intended to help you understand your rights and offer guidance in common situations. It is not legal advice and should not be relied upon as a substitute for professional legal or medical counsel.

If you need specific advice or support, please contact a lawyer, healthcare provider, or relevant professional. Every situation is unique, and the steps you take may depend on the details of your case.

This tip sheet is designed to empower you with knowledge and is meant to be a tool to assist you in navigating difficult situations. Always seek personalized support when needed.

Understanding Your Rights and Laws

- **Know your rights:** Take time to learn about protections under the **Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms** and the **Ontario Human Rights Code** (e.g., protections against discrimination based on race, gender, sexual orientation, and gender identity/expression).
 - **Stay informed about laws:** Be aware of federal, provincial, and municipal laws. For example:
 - **Federal laws:** immigration requirements, criminal code.
 - **Provincial laws:** employment standards, tenancy laws, health coverage rules.
 - **Municipal by-laws:** noise, smoking, recycling, pet ownership.
 - **Understand your immigration process:** Refugee claimants and newcomers are responsible for following Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) rules, attending appointments, and submitting truthful information.
 - **Respect community rules and norms:** In community spaces, this includes respecting others' safety and dignity, not harassing others, and following posted guidelines.
 - **Seek reliable information:** Do not rely solely on word-of-mouth or social media. Always confirm rules and rights with trusted organizations (e.g., The 519, settlement agencies, legal clinics).
 - **Ask questions:** If you don't understand your rights or responsibilities, it's your duty to ask for clarification from a service provider, lawyer, or official agency.
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Healthcare

You deserve fair, respectful, and affirming medical care. Here's how to assert your rights and take action if you experience discrimination.

Know Your Rights

Canada's healthcare is based on need, not identity. No one can refuse or worsen your care because you're Black, gay, or trans. Ontario's Human Rights Code explicitly forbids discrimination in services like hospitals and clinics. This covers race, sexual orientation, gender identity, HIV status, disability, and more. For example, it is considered illegal discrimination if a doctor or nurse keeps calling you by the wrong gender or name on purpose. You have a right to respectful, patient-centered care: to be treated with dignity, to have your privacy respected, and to have information explained clearly. You also have the right to interpreter services if you need help with English or French. You can refuse a treatment (except in some emergencies) and get a second opinion. If a healthcare professional tries to deny you medically necessary care just because you're trans (like hormones or surgery) or gay, that could be discrimination.

Find out more:

- Ontario Human Rights Commission – Healthcare Rights – Explains protections in medical services.
 - ohrc.on.ca/en
- Rainbow Health Ontario (RHO) – LGBTQ+ affirming health resources and provider directory.
 - rainbowhealthontario.ca
- Steps to Justice – Health Coverage for Refugees – Plain-language info on OHIP and IFHP.
 - stepstojustice.ca



Your Responsibilities

- **Be honest with providers:** Share accurate details about your health, history, and medications.
- **Bring documents:** Carry your health card, IFHP papers, or other coverage proof.
- **Attend or cancel appointments:** Keep your appointments or call ahead to cancel/reschedule.
- **Follow treatment plans:** Take medications as prescribed; ask questions if instructions are unclear.
- **Respect clinic rules:** Follow safety rules like mask use, hygiene, and visitor policies.
- **Pay attention to costs:** Some services may not be covered. Ask in advance to avoid surprise bills.
- **Respect others' privacy:** Keep waiting rooms and group sessions respectful and confidential.
- **Be patient:** Long wait times can happen. Advocate politely for urgent care if needed.
- **Refill medications:** Track prescriptions to avoid running out.



Steps You Can Take

Advocate during appointments.

Speak up about your needs and identity as they come up. If a nurse or doctor uses the wrong pronouns or name, calmly correct them: "Actually, I go by [Name] and I use [she/her or he/him/they]. Please use those." If you feel your health concern is being dismissed, you can say: "I feel my concerns aren't being taken seriously. Can we please discuss my symptoms carefully?" A calm but firm reminder often redirects the care. If possible, ask for a provider who understands LGBTQ+ issues (some clinics, like LGBTQ+ community health centres, have such staff).

Bring a support person. If you worry about bias, bring a friend, partner, or community health worker to the appointment. They can help you speak up, take notes or speak for you if needed. A trusted person can also help you feel safer and supported

Escalate to a supervisor. If speaking to the provider doesn't work, ask for the department manager, the Patient Relations office, or a social worker. Every hospital has a Patient Relations department. You might say: "I need to report that [Name/role] refused to treat me after learning I'm trans, which I believe was due to bias. I want this documented and want to see a different doctor." Hospitals usually will arrange a different provider and will investigate. For clinics, ask the clinic coordinator or director.

File a formal complaint. You can complain to the professional college of the provider (e.g., College of Physicians and Surgeons for doctors, College of Nurses for nurses) if you experienced bias or misconduct. For instance, refusing gender-affirming care without medical reason or using slurs could violate professional standards. The college will investigate and can discipline the provider. Check their website for "complaints."

Human rights complaint. If you were clearly discriminated against (for example, a sign says "we don't serve trans patients," or a counselor outright refuses to treat you for being gay), you can file an application with the Human Rights Tribunal. You usually should have tried internal complaints first. The HRLSC can advise you on this process too. A tribunal can order the clinic or hospital to change its policies and even award compensation.

Patient Ombudsman (Ontario). If this happened in a public hospital, long-term care home, or home care in Ontario, and you couldn't fix it with the hospital, you can call the Ontario Patient Ombudsman at 1-888-321-0339 or visit patientombudsman.ca. They investigate patient complaints and try to resolve issues fairly. (For private clinics or doctors' offices, go to the colleges or human rights instead.)

Steps You Can Take

Emergency situations. If a healthcare provider refuses necessary treatment in an emergency (very rare, but imagine a paramedic refusing to help), focus on getting safe care first – for example, ask for a different medic or go to another ER. After you're safe, you can file complaints.

Take care of your mental health.

Being treated poorly by health workers can be traumatic. Seek support from community counselors or services that understand racism and homophobia. For example, many LGBTQ+ centers offer counseling, and groups like Across Boundaries (Toronto) support racialized people's mental health. If you feel overwhelmed, look for victim or trauma support services that offer culturally sensitive help.



Support Services to Contact

Patient Ombudsman (Ontario)

Helps resolve hospital, long-term care, and home care complaints. Phone: 1-888-321-0339, or online at patientombudsman.ca.

Rainbow Health Ontario (RHO)

RHO helps find LGBTQ-friendly health providers in Ontario. They have an online directory of queer-positive doctors and information on gender-affirming care. Website: rainbowhealthontario.ca.

HIV & AIDS Legal Clinic Ontario (HALCO)

If you have HIV and face healthcare discrimination, HALCO offers free legal help. For example, if a dentist refuses to treat you, they can intervene. Phone: 416-340-7790.

Human Rights Legal Support Centre

Again, HRLSC can advise on any health-related discrimination case and help with Tribunal applications. Phone: 1-866-625-5179.

Community Health Centres

Many CHCs serve marginalized groups. For example, Toronto's Sherbourne Health Centre and Access Alliance have programs for LGBTQ+ and newcomer clients, offering primary care, counseling and referrals in a safe space. Website: accessalliance.ca.

LGBTQ+ Helplines (Health & Mental Health)

- **Trans Lifeline (peer support run by trans people):** 1-877-330-6366 (Canada/USA).
- **LGBTQ YouthLine (Ontario, up to age 29):** 1-800-268-9688 or text 647-694-4275. They offer peer support and referrals.
- **Black Creek Community Health Centre (Toronto):** They have specific programs for African, Caribbean and Black LGBTQ folks. Contact them for culturally appropriate health services.
- **Across Boundaries (Toronto):** Provides mental health support for racialized communities, including trauma from discrimination.
- Many cities also have general victims' services or counseling that can help anyone who's been through a traumatic hate incident.

Language You Can Use

Clear, respectful but firm words work best in healthcare settings:

Correcting pronouns:

"Doctor, I'd like to remind you that my name is [Name] and my pronouns are [she/her, etc.]. Using my correct pronouns is important for my care. Continually using the wrong pronoun can be harmful and is a form of discrimination."

During harassment:

If a staff member or technician makes a slur or joke, respond firmly: "That comment is inappropriate. I'm here for medical care and expect professional behavior. I will report this." Asking for their name or badge can often stop it.

Writing complaints:

If you later write a complaint to a hospital or college, state facts. For example: "On [date] at [Hospital], [Name] said '[quote]' after learning I am [trans]. This was discriminatory and made me feel unsafe. Please investigate." Keep it factual and mention your rights.

Refusal of care:

If a doctor seems reluctant, you might say: "I am here for a medically necessary treatment. If you cannot or will not provide it, please note in my records that you are refusing, and explain why. Then please refer me to a provider who will. I do have a right to timely care." This tells them you're aware of your rights and creates a paper trail.

Racism or dismissal:

If you feel a provider is ignoring your pain or symptoms due to bias, you could say: "I feel my concerns aren't being taken seriously. I expect the same attention as any patient. Can we discuss my symptoms fully? If not, I will seek a second opinion or further tests." This lets them know you expect equal care.

Trans healthcare:

"This gender-affirming care is medically necessary for me. Denying it just because of personal beliefs is not acceptable. If you can't provide it, I request a referral to someone who will. I know I am entitled to care based on need." (The Canada Health Act principle applies.)

Invoking policy:

If you're in a hospital or clinic with anti-discrimination policies, you can say: "I understand this facility has a zero-tolerance policy for discrimination. I do not feel respected right now. Could you please get a manager so we can address this?" Staff know a manager will take it seriously.

Remember: staying calm and clear often works best. You deserve respectful, compassionate care and these phrases can help ensure you get it.



Conclusion

These aren't just sections of a tip sheet – they are tools you can carry with you in daily life as you navigate Canada as a Black LGBTQ+ newcomer. You now have concrete examples of how to handle discrimination in housing, healthcare, work, immigration, and public spaces. You have names of laws that protect you (like the Ontario Human Rights Code, Canada Health Act, Occupational Health and Safety Act, etc.) and agencies that can support you (from the Human Rights Legal Support Centre to Black Legal Action Centre to community programs).

Armed with this knowledge, we hope you feel **more confident and empowered** to assert your rights and seek help when needed. Discrimination and bias can be deeply hurtful, but they thrive in silence and ignorance. By knowing how to respond and who to call, you break that silence and challenge the ignorance, not just for yourself, but for others who will come after you.

Keep this tip sheet handy; maybe save it on your phone or in your email. You might not need all of it now, but situations can arise unexpectedly. When they do, take a deep breath, recall these tips, and remember: **you have every right to be here, to be yourself, and to be treated with dignity**. Canada's laws are, in theory, on your side, and there are many people in the community on your side too. You are not alone in facing these battles.

Stay strong, and never hesitate to **stand up for yourself** and also to **reach out for help**. As a Black LGBTQ+ newcomer, you are part of multiple communities; the immigrant community, the Black community, the LGBTQ+ community; and there are allies in all of them ready to fight alongside you. Your existence and success here matter; your rights matter. Welcome to Canada, and may you thrive as your authentic self!

Prepared with contributions from current Canadian laws, community resources, and human rights guidelines to ensure accuracy as of 2025.

Contact Information



The 519 is a Toronto-based 2SLGBTQ+ community centre dedicated to advocacy, service provision, and creating inclusive spaces for queer and trans communities, newcomers, and marginalized groups.

Phone 416-392-6874

Website The519.org

Email Info@The519.org

Address 519 Church St,
Toronto, ON M4Y 2C9



The Black Legal Action Centre (BLAC) is a non-profit community legal clinic in Ontario that provides free legal services to address anti-Black racism and advance the rights and dignity of Black communities.

Phone 416-597-5831

Website blacklegalactioncentre.ca

Email info@blac.clcj.ca

Address 180 Dundas St W unit 1509,
Toronto, ON M5G 1Z8
