



## Research Points: Trans, Two-Spirit & Nonbinary People

Welcome to the *We Are Allies Research Points*. Here you will find research-based information about gender-affirming care and transgender, Two-Spirit, and nonbinary (TTNB) youth. These resources were developed to support the *We Are Allies project*.

In 2023, a team of researchers conducted an environmental scan to identify misinformation messages being shared online related to gender-affirming care for TTNB youth. The team reviewed published research to systematically gather accurate information that addresses common misinformation messages. These have been organized by topic and can be found in this series of Research Points. References are provided for people who would like to learn more.

If you have questions about accessing gender-affirming healthcare for yourself or a loved one, we encourage you to reach out to a trusted healthcare provider or organization.

## Introduction to Trans, Two-Spirit & Nonbinary People

Gender diversity has existed around the world for millennia and holds an important place in the histories of many cultures. These histories have often been shaped by colonialism, including attempts to violently erase Indigenous gender diversity.<sup>1</sup> One clear lesson from these histories is that TTNB people have been part of cultures on every continent, often playing important roles within their communities.<sup>2</sup>

## Research about TTNB People

The following summarizes some key historical research and teachings from Two-Spirit contributors about gender diversity around the world. The contemporary term TTNB is used in this document as an umbrella term, intended to respectfully include a diversity of genders from many cultures.



## **Indigenous transgender and Two-Spirit people**

**There have traditionally been diverse ways of understanding concepts similar to gender and sexuality in many Indigenous communities.** Examples of diverse genders can be found in Indigenous cultures across the place colonially known as North America.<sup>3</sup> At least 168 Indigenous languages have words for genders beyond male and female.<sup>4</sup> For example, the Ojibwe recognize four genders: inini, okwe, agokwe and agowinini.<sup>4</sup>

**As part of colonization, attempts were made to violently erase Indigenous cultures and force people to conform to western ideas of sex and gender.**<sup>1</sup> Colonization continues to disrupt knowledge-sharing about gender diversity in Indigenous communities.<sup>1,4,5</sup>

**Two-Spirit is an English-language term used by some Indigenous people.** The term Two-Spirit describes complex understandings of gender, sex, sexuality, and spirituality within some Indigenous worldviews.<sup>1,3,6</sup> This term was shared in 1990 at the Third Annual Intertribal Native American/First Nations Gay and Lesbian Conference in Winnipeg and gained popularity after this time.<sup>1,4,7</sup>

## **TTNB people have existed throughout history**

**TTNB people have existed around the world for millennia.** There are records of TTNB people existing since at least 1503 BCE (Before Common Era).<sup>8</sup> For example, Queen Hatshepsut of Egypt, who reigned until 1482 BCE, dressed like men typically did at that time.<sup>8</sup> There are similar records from the time of the Greek and Roman empires.<sup>8</sup> In the 13th century, the Aztecs understood the sexuality and gender of their gods could change.<sup>9</sup> During the 15th century, many European colonial invasions took place. European settlers documented, and at the same time tried to erase, gender diversity around the world.<sup>4,8</sup> Both traditional histories and writings of colonists serve to document the important roles gender diverse people have held across many cultures.<sup>10</sup>

**The term transgender started being used in healthcare in the mid-20th century.** Transgender is an umbrella term describing people whose experience of gender is different than what is expected based on the sex assigned to them. Gender-affirming medical care was offered in Germany as early as the 1920s.<sup>11</sup> In the early 1950s, Christine Jorgensen made history as the first American trans woman known to have gender-affirming surgery.<sup>12</sup>

## **TTNB people have existed in cultures around the world**

**TTNB people often serve important roles in their communities.** Some TTNB people have been believed to have unique qualities which enable them to fulfill special roles as spiritual leaders and caregivers.<sup>5</sup> For example:

- The Travestis of Peru played a role in traditional ceremonies.<sup>13</sup>
- The Hijras of India helped with births.<sup>14</sup>
- The Quimbandas of Angola were respected healers and diviners.<sup>15</sup>

**Gender diversity has existed throughout history and on every continent.** This includes places currently known as:

- Africa: Egypt<sup>8,16</sup>, South Africa<sup>2</sup>, Ghana<sup>2</sup>, Ethiopia<sup>2</sup>
- Asia: Vietnam<sup>2</sup>, Korea<sup>2</sup>, China<sup>16</sup>, India<sup>14</sup>
- Europe: France<sup>2,17</sup>, Germany<sup>18</sup>, Greece<sup>16</sup>
- North America: Canada<sup>3,4,6</sup>, the United States<sup>5,8</sup>
- Oceania: Australia<sup>19</sup>, New Zealand<sup>2</sup>
- South America: Venezuela<sup>2</sup>, Colombia<sup>2</sup>, Peru<sup>13</sup>

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