

Nova Scotia

## Group aims to reduce barriers to health care for 2SLGBTQ+ elders

Elderberries Social Group wants members to know pharmacies can do more than fill prescriptions

[Giuliana Grillo de Lambarri](#) · CBC News · Posted: Nov 22, 2024 6:00 AM AST | Last Updated: 5 hours ago



Dalhousie pharmacist **Kyle Wilby** has helped to develop a gender-affirming curriculum and cultural safety training for healthcare professionals. (Hans Banny/CBC)

An organization that works to support 2SLGBTQ+ elders in Nova Scotia says all too often people who have experienced discrimination put off and avoid seeking health care, so they're trying to make members feel more comfortable going to pharmacists.

The Elderberries Social Group held an information session on Nov. 17 in Halifax to educate seniors on services they can obtain at pharmacies.

Daniel McKay, the group's secretary, said many people are unaware that pharmacists can do more than just fill prescriptions. He said it's important to know they can treat certain bacterial infections, administer vaccines and even provide mental health support — all things that can save seniors a visit to the doctor.

"These days the barrier to getting face-to-face health care is extremely high," he said. "When you want to stand in front of someone and ask them a question ... having a physical person in front of you, there's nothing like that."

There were about 145,000 people on Nova Scotia's the [need-a-family-practice registry](#) in October.

But having a family doctor isn't the obstacle. The group discussed how for 2SLGBTQ+ individuals, additional barriers may lead to people avoiding medical interactions, resulting in poorer health outcomes.

- [Lack of education for doctors on LGBTQ health 'medically harmful,' researchers warn](#)

According to a University of Toronto [study published in the Canadian Medical Association Journal](#), a lack of training for medical staff about 2SLGBTQ+ issues contributes to "suboptimal experiences" for members of those communities.

Sunday's session touched on these challenges, including a history of discrimination against the 2SLGBTQ+ community in the medical field, and highlighted some efforts underway to improve service.



The Elderberries enlisted the help of **Kyle Wilby**, a researcher at Dalhousie's College of Pharmacy. (Hanny Banny)

**Kyle Wilby**, a professor at Dalhousie's College of Pharmacy, spoke to the group about ongoing efforts to develop a gender-affirming curriculum and cultural safety training for health-care professionals.

He acknowledged that barriers for 2SLGBTQ+ people persist and gave the example of speaking with a patient who had to commute for more than an hour to reach a pharmacist who knew about hormone therapy instead of just going to the pharmacy next to their house.

He said it's important for pharmacists to have knowledge about sexually transmitted diseases, hormone therapy and gender-affirming care.

## Building trust

As a gay man himself, Wilby said he welcomed the chance to talk to the seniors about services they can get from their local pharmacy and the changes happening in his field.

"Some of these topics are new, some of these topics we're just still learning about. And so what we wanted to do is to get ahead of that to teach pharmacists and pharmacy students about gender-affirming care and about sexual health for LGBTQ+ people," he said.

McKay said he hoped sharing information about this shift within pharmacy would help rebuild trust for individuals who had lost it due to previous experiences.

"There's lots of organizations that would say 'Everyone is welcome, we don't discriminate.' But it's a completely different thing to say 'We know there's a problem and we are working against it,'" he said.

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