



# Coastal Queers Health Care Resources



The traditional and unceded territory upon which these resources were created are the same lands on which we live, work, learn, and play. We acknowledge that the western medical system which takes place on traditional and unceded  $\lambda a?uukwi?ath$  territory, like all systems of western medicine, has been founded upon colonial violence which disproportionately impacts Indigenous communities, and we strive to support cultural safety and humility in our healthcare practices. We acknowledge this land as one that has systems of care that have always existed outside of western medicine. We recognize that there are many diverse and expansive practices of care, and believe that care looks different for everyone. We believe systems of care are most impactful and relevant when they are created by and for community, and we are grateful to work alongside folks to amplify and uplift culturally-sensitive and intersectional care.

## Background and Project Overview

Coastal Queer Alliance is a non-profit organization that emerged as a response to the lack of support and representation for the queer community in the Tofino region. We strive to support, educate, and cultivate safety and joy for queer folks in our region by actively breaking down barriers that exist for the queer community. The lack of inclusive healthcare resources available to queer folks in Tofino has long-been identified as a barrier to queer wellbeing in our community.

As an organization, we have heard multiple testimonials of community members who have experienced challenges in accessing healthcare. These challenges range from experiencing systemic queerphobia through assumptive & binary intake processes; to a lack of engagement and knowledge from the physician group on queer specific healthcare such as gender affirming care or safer queer sex (including preventative HIV options); to community members moving to larger centers (i.e. Victoria) because they were unable to access adequate care on the coast. Through these testimonials and lived experiences, a theme of feeling overwhelmed, uncomfortable, and under-supported while accessing healthcare in our community has emerged.



To respond to these challenges, Coastal Queers has developed educational documents that provide support in accessing PrEP, top surgery, intersex care, vaccines, and STI testing. These documents utilize the lived experiences of local queer folks to provide proactive, solution-based support to break down barriers that others may encounter in trying to access the same care.

Educational documents for patients were chosen as the most appropriate platform to address this gap in care. We recognize that the western healthcare system was founded through colonial violence that disproportionately impacts Black, Indigenous, queer, disabled, fat, neurodivergent and chronically ill individuals. We believe in a future where healthcare is proactive, culturally sensitive, trauma-informed, patient-led, and intersectional. To achieve this framework for healthcare, the medical system would require a complete reconstruction, and to achieve this requires capacity, resources, and time beyond the scope of this project. Therefore, this project is not intended to focus on physician education or upstream efforts in systemic change. Our aim is to service the queer folks in our community who need immediate access to care. These documents were developed as a downstream interim effort to help promote patient autonomy through education about what barriers might exist while accessing care in Tofino, and provide solutions for how to navigate challenging care systems.

## **Regional Context for Document Development**

The compounding challenges of accessing rural healthcare and queer specific healthcare must be considered at a local level to address the intersection of barriers. Larger centers throughout British Columbia such as Vancouver, Victoria, and Nanaimo have developed similar healthcare resources for queer folks. However, these resources do not accommodate for rural specific accessibility barriers, such as long wait times for physician visits or lab work appointments, rotating locum physicians, a lack of access to specialists or specialty clinics, difficulty accessing the local clinic by phone, issues with cell phone service for over-the-phone physician visits, drug supply chain delivery issues resulting in inconsistent inventory, etc. Despite having many unique challenges, Tofino has not developed region-specific support to help patients navigate these additional barriers. Further, local access to queer-specific specialists, queer health programming, and physicians who follow best-practices for queer-safe healthcare is not available. Along with an absence of queer resource centers and no local queer health network, these compounding barriers can make accessing queer specific health care in Tofino feel impossible.



## How Resources were Developed

These resources were developed by the community, for the community. The aspects of care that these resources address (access to PrEP, intersex resources, access to vaccines, top surgery, and alternative access to STI testing) were chosen based on community testimonials and through conversation with community members.

We developed these manuals to address the specific regional barriers that queer folks had encountered while accessing this care within our community. To do so, we consulted with local queer folks in our community who had accessed this care personally and were willing to contribute their experiences to the project. The consultation process included a community survey as well as interviews with local queer folks.

An identified barrier in queer folks' experience accessing care in Tofino lies within a lack of pathways available to connect with other queer individuals who may have accessed the same care. While BC has health organizations that have created systems for accessing care and connecting community members, these standardized systems have yet to reach our community. As a result, each queer person that looks to access care in Tofino, whether it be gender affirming surgery or sexual health care, must go through the process individually, without access to support from community members who have already accessed this care. With this project, Coastal Queers hopes to facilitate the beginnings of a queer health network within our community. Access to healthcare is a basic need; a lack of access to care drives queer folks to move away from our community in order to access care. Coastal Queers hopes that by beginning to connect members of our community, queer folks will be able to access the support they deserve in the community where they live, and decrease the number of folks who leave town due to a lack of access to care.

**"I believe there should be more access to healthcare education for all folks in Tofino/Ucluelet... In addition, the access to [STI] testing should be more accessible. Many folks work 2-3 jobs and can't make it to one of the few scheduled lab times at the hospital or even get an appointment."**

**"Besides seeing a doctor that appears to have little to no knowledge outside the binary system, other resources are extremely limited."**

*-Anonymous Community Testimonials*



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