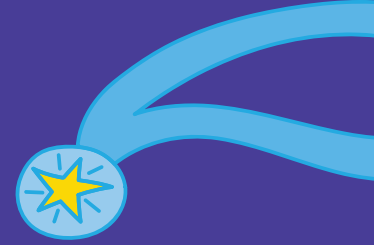


# Health Care Self-Advocacy Tip Sheet for 2SLGBTQIA+ Community



From January to April 2022, the Investigaytors<sup>1</sup> ran a survey, focus groups, and interviews with 2SLGBTQIA+ Albertans to gain a deeper understanding of what leads to positive, affirming healthcare experiences. One of the things we looked at was what strategies community members were using to self-advocate and create space for their needs and desires within their healthcare experiences. Now we are sharing these tips back with you, our community.

## How can I support myself in appointments?

There is no shortage of stories of 2SLGBTQIA+ folks having less-than-ideal interactions with healthcare providers, and it can feel overwhelming to feel empowered to advocate for yourself. Here are some strategies to have autonomy in healthcare that the community shared with us:

- Have a supporter attend appointments with you. They can advocate on your behalf and also help you remember what happened during the appointment.

*“Earlier on my former partner was regularly with me.. that was a good buffer because if I was afraid to say something, they weren’t.”*

- Bring a notebook. You can make a list for yourself prior to your appointment of anything you'd like to discuss with your provider. You can also write down any research you've done you want to bring up. If you make notes during your appointment you'll have something to reference later.
- Do your research. While it is *absolutely* not your job to educate your healthcare provider, doing some background research will allow you to ask critical questions and make sure you are getting the right care for you.
- Don't be afraid to speak up! It can be intimidating to stand up for yourself but you have every right to quality, affirming care, and every right to say something if that isn't happening. You can tell your provider how you want your appointment to go.

*“When I finally had doctors that treated me as a person instead of just as a patient, I learned that I could ask for things...I could ask a doctor to let me know where they are going to touch me before they're going to touch me. Like just knowing that I do have more autonomy in medical situations than it feels like I do.”*

- Use self-care strategies alongside health appointments. As much as we'd love every healthcare interaction to be 2SLGBTQIA+ affirming, we're unfortunately not there yet, so it's important to have strategies in place to take care of yourself if you do have a negative experience. Here are some of the tips for self-care we heard:
  - ★ Set aside time for yourself after appointments. This might look like going home to unwind or spending time with someone supportive.
  - ★ Journal, do something artistic, or spend time in nature. Try to re-centre yourself.
  - ★ Have the support of a professional therapist or counsellor if this is accessible to you.

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<sup>1</sup> Investigaytors is a research mentorship program run by and for the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, which equips participants with the skills to conduct an original research project.

## What can I do if I have a negative experience?

- You have the right to leave a provider! We acknowledge that there are challenges finding affirming providers who are accepting patients and wait times can be long, but at the end of the day you deserve respectful, quality healthcare.

*"I guess for me, I'm not always the best for advocating at that time if I'm in an uncomfortable environment or having an uncomfortable experience with a healthcare provider. But I guess I advocate by choosing not to go there again in the future and choosing to find out a different place to go that is more affirming."*

- You can file a complaint against a provider:
  - ★ [AHS Patient Relations](#)
  - ★ [College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta](#)
  - ★ Other regulating bodies or professional colleges depending on the type of healthcare provider.

## How can I lean on my community for support?

- Other 2SLGBTQIA+ folks are a great source of knowledge and experience!
  - ★ Seek out online community - Facebook groups, discords, etc. can be a great place to hear about experiences with providers. We also found that a lot of folks were using these groups to find providers who were accepting patients.
  - ★ We found the most common way of vetting a provider before an appointment was through word of mouth.

*"I ask [queer and trans] and/or BIPOC community, either friends or through relevant online groups."*

- Try reaching out to your local 2SLGBTQIA+ community organization to see if they have a list of affirming healthcare providers.
- If you've had a negative experience with a provider, connecting with community can be a great way to get support and understanding.

*"Just community itself, right? Like being able to share these stories... [asking] how do we deal with it when our doctors don't take that seriously, or whatever, right?"*

For more information about this project, contact the Alberta Investigaytors Program Coordinator at [finn.st.dennis@ourhealthyeg.ca](mailto:finn.st.dennis@ourhealthyeg.ca).

