

# Episode 1 Transcript

Leo

Hello everyone and welcome to the Trans Pulse Canada COVID-19 podcast miniseries. My name is Leo Rutherford, and I'll be hosting this podcast. This series will describe results from a research project about the impact of COVID-19 on trans and nonbinary people in Canada and the public health related lessons learned from the pandemic's impact on this community. If you'd like to read the paper associated with these results, it's freely available online from BMC Public Health and is entitled impacts of COVID-19 on trans and nonbinary people in Canada: a qualitative analysis of responses to a national survey.

If you're not familiar with the term trans, transgender, or non-binary, I'll explain what these mean first. Trans is an umbrella term which usually means someone whose gender identity differs from the sex assigned to them at birth. It's the antonym of cisgender or non-transgender. Which describes a person whose sex and gender are the same. Nonbinary is a term that refers to someone whose gender identity does not fall within the typical gender binary of man/ boy or woman/ girl. Trans people face health disparities that cisgender people do not. Health disparities are differences in health outcomes or access to healthcare services between different populations or group. These disparities can be influenced by various factors, such as socioeconomic status, race or ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, geographic location, housing stability, access to healthy food, and many others. For trans and nonbinary people, health disparities occur in several areas. These include poor mental health challenges, getting employment, or enough income issues with healthcare access, sexual health concerns and increased substance use. These are largely due to living in a culture where transphobia exists and violence and discrimination against trans people is common and frequent. Some trans people access gender affirming care. This means taking hormones or having surgeries that reduce dysphoria and overall improve gender related joy or happiness, often called euphoria. Accessing gender affirming care and having social support have been demonstrated to improve mental health for trans people and can reduce negative impacts of transphobia and discrimination.

Since I'm hosting this podcast series, I'll tell you a little bit about me. I'm a PhD candidate at the University of Victoria and the School of Public Health and Social Policy. I came to be involved in the research project. Trans Pulse first as a research assistant. I've held a few other hats. Beyond being an RA, including being part of the data Analysis Working group, the Steering Committee, and COVID-19 qualitative data collection. I'm also a trans community member and I'm passionate about research by and for the trans community.

In this series, we talk about some topics which can be challenging to listen to or think about, including mental health challenges, isolation, suicidality, housing instability and safety concerns for trans and nonbinary people. Take care of yourself while listening. If you need to access any resources, there are links below each episode to mental health crises and suicide hotlines. You can text thrive in all capital letters to trans lifeline at +1313-662-8209 from anywhere in Canada or the United States. If you experience any suicidal thoughts or ideation, please reach out to Canada's suicide prevention service, available 24/7. At 1-833-456-4566. Or you can text 45645. You can also find a suicide hotline for any country at [www.opencounseling.com](http://www.opencounseling.com) back slash suicide dash hotlines.

In the rest of this first episode, I'm going to summarize the work of Trans Pulse Canada and describe the COVID-19 specific survey that was launched in 2020. I'll also tell you a little bit about the team, the process of designing the survey, recruitment and data collection, how data analysis is going and what's upcoming. We'll focus on the methods and results of the COVID-19 survey, data collection and analysis of that research.

My co-authors on the paper about this research include Hannah Kia, Randy Jackson, Alisa Grigorovich, Carol Lopez Ricote, Ayden Scheim and Greta Bauer. Trans Pulse Canada was the first national survey of trans and nonbinary people across Canada. It followed the Ontario specific Trans Pulse, which collected focus groups, surveys and interview data from trans people in Ontario. That first survey was in 2009 to 2010 and the results were produced into reports, E bulletins and academic papers. These findings were influential in healthcare delivery and advocacy for trans people in Ontario and across the country. After receiving funding for transpulse Canada, the team conducted community consultations through 11 priority population consultation teams. These include consultations with groups like racialized people, immigrants and newcomers, sex workers, nonbinary people and trans slash, non-binary older adults, to name a few. Community members joined each one of these teams to provide ideas for survey questions, give feedback on ways to improve questions related to their PBTC's focus and design outputs for research data. For a community-based research project, it was important to get input from people with diverse lived experiences in order to ensure the research was inclusive and can benefit all members of the trans and non-binary community.

The survey data was collected over the course of 10 weeks in the summer of 2019. The survey is freely available on our website [transpulsecanada.ca](https://transpulsecanada.ca). Check it out if you're interested in all the questions participants were asked. Those who participated had to be 14 years or older, live in Canada and be trans, non-binary or have another gender identity than what they were assigned at birth. You can find quick stats which are bar graphs or charts with descriptions of some findings on the transpulse website. There are also sections which link to academic articles, community reports, and community focused outputs of the work. There's even some video essays and a list of ways community members have used the transpulse results in their work.

So in this podcast series, we're primarily talking about results from the Trans Pulse Canada COVID-19, sure. This survey was created to understand how the trans community, who are already experiencing unique stressors or health disparities, were being impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey launched in 2020 and we collected data only for a few weeks, so some things may have changed for folks as the pandemic progressed.

Overall, we recruited 820 survey respondents. 697 of these people answered an open-ended question, asking them to reflect broadly on how they have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. It asked can you tell us how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted you as a trans or nonbinary person, whether positive or negative?

This was one of the first qualitative studies to look at what changed for trans and nonbinary people in Canada, specifically during the pandemic. We used thematic analysis to examine these freeform responses. If you're not familiar with it, thematic analysis is a qualitative research method which is used to identify and analyze patterns or themes and their meanings within and across data. It offers a systematic approach to extract rich and meaningful insights from qualitative data.

To start, we first organized responses into descriptive categories and then use these preliminary categories to construct more refined, in-depth themes that provided an account of the pandemic's impact on those who answered the question. The results of this analysis are focused around 5 themes that highlight the pandemic's impact. These include one, reduced access to both gender affirming and other health care. Two, heightened financial employment and housing precarity. Three, strained social networks in an era of physical distancing and virtual communication. Four, an intensification of safety concerns. And five, changes and experiences of gender affirmation.

This research has important implications for public health policy and interventions. First, trans and nonbinary people reported experiencing isolation and declining mental health as a result of the pandemic. Our study revealed that poor mental health may be an effect related to changes in healthcare access, socioeconomic stability, social network changes, and changes in safety and gender affirmation. We believe public health policy and intervention addressing the impacts of COVID-19 should work to reduce health disparities affecting trans people, specifically those related to mental health. This might include support for the government of Canada's mental health Promotion Innovation Fund, which supports community-based programs related to mental health promotion and has funded programs for the mental health of trans youth and their families. The Trans Pulse Canada team strongly supports the need for trans inclusive mental health services to help address the impacts of the pandemic. These services need to be designed and delivered alongside measures that reduce discrimination and add to trans affirming healthcare and also strengthen employment, housing security and improve the capacity of communities to thrive.

That was a quick summary of the Trans Pulse research team, the COVID specific survey results, and our findings from the thematic analysis. In later episodes, I will be speaking to trans folks from across the country with various other identities and hats. We'll discuss their experiences around the themes we found in our projects results and I'll share some quotes from our research participants. We'll also talk about how public health interventions can be tailored to trans people in the future to reduce health disparities.

That's it for today. Thanks so much for joining. Stay tuned for interviews with our guests about their experiences during the pandemic.