

Who does conversion therapy affect?

A recent Canadian study* found that **nearly 10%** of non-heterosexual people who identified as men, non-binary, or Two-Spirit had experienced conversion therapy at some point in their lives.

Conversion therapy experiences were found to be more common among **people with lower incomes**, among **non-binary and transgender people**, among **immigrants**, and among **racialized minorities**. Of the people who had experienced conversion therapy, **72%** had first experienced it **before age 20**.

*"Experiences with sexual orientation and gender identity conversion therapy practices among sexual minority men in Canada, 2019–2020", Travis Salway et al.



Effects of conversion therapy?

There is **no reliable evidence** to suggest that conversion therapy is effective. Many studies from around the world suggest that trying to change a person's sexual orientation or gender identity simply **does not work**. Most studies also show that conversion therapy actually causes **psychological damage** to people who are subjected to it.

This includes:

- an increased risk of **suicidal thoughts and attempts**,
- higher rates of **depression and anxiety**,
- increased **drug or alcohol abuse**, and
- **sexual problems**.

What can I do about it?

If you or someone you know is being pressured into conversion therapy, you can **file a report with the police**.

Klinic offers a free, 24/7 confidential crisis line: **204-786-8686** in Winnipeg, or toll-free outside Winnipeg at **1-888-322-3019**. You can call this number for support, or to find a referral to another service that better suits your needs.

Trans Lifeline has a support hotline for (and staffed by) transgender people: **1-877-330-6366**.

Rainbow Resource Centre offers support groups and counselling for LGBTQ+ people. Visit rainbowresourcecentre.org for more information.

For legal information, or for help finding a lawyer:

Community Legal Education Association

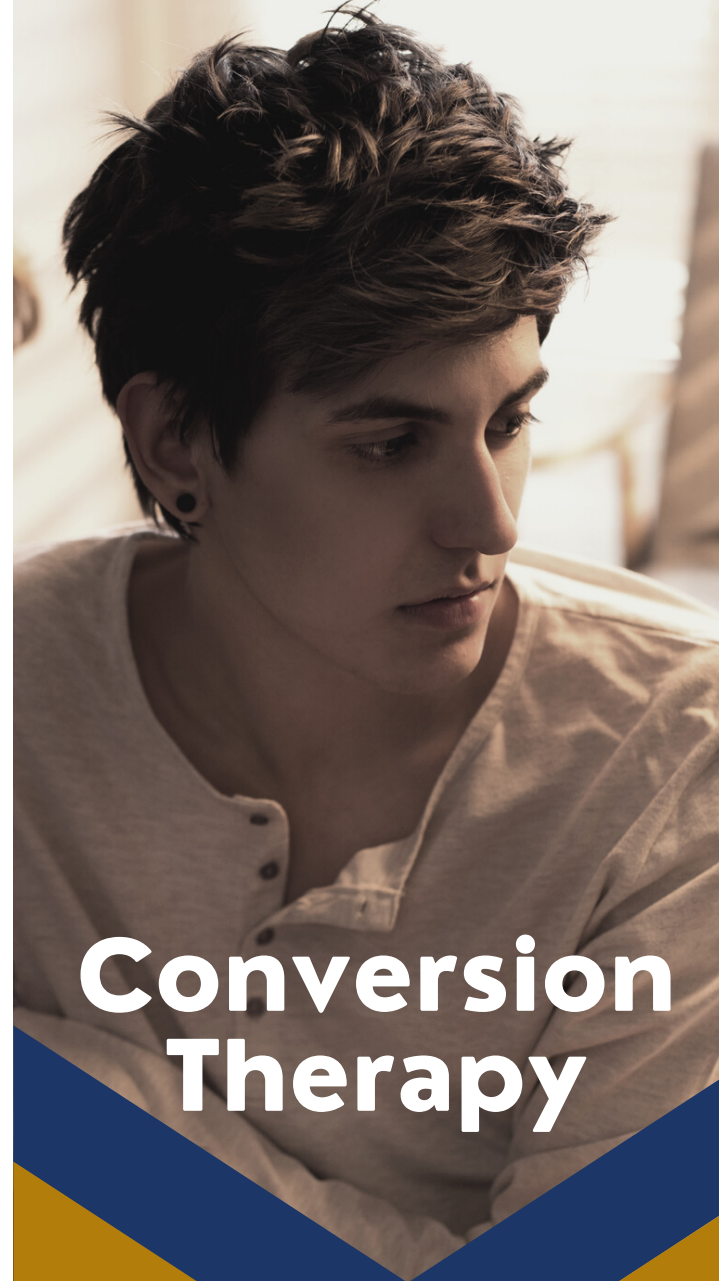
Law Phone-In and Lawyer Referral Program:

204-943-2305

1-800-262-8800
(toll-free outside Winnipeg)

communitylegal.mb.ca

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Conversion Therapy

Community Legal Education Association



What is conversion therapy?

The Criminal Code defines conversion therapy as any practice, treatment or service, or any formalized intervention generally offered to the public, or a segment of the public, that is designed to make a person conform to heteronormative or cisnormative standards, provided that the intervention is based on the false assumption that a particular sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression is preferable to another.

In Canada it is illegal to **provide, promote, advertise, or profit from** conversion therapy.

Conversion therapy **does not include** practices and treatments that help people with gender transitions or exploring their gender identity.

Conversion therapy has been **discredited by medical professionals** around the world, as well as the United Nations, World Health Organization, and Amnesty International.

What does conversion therapy look like?

Conversion therapy is not scientific, and can take many different forms. Doctors and psychologists tried to suppress homosexuality with **lobotomies, chemical castration**, and **aversion therapy** techniques like giving electrical shocks or drugs that caused nausea whenever a "homosexual tendency" was shown. These methods are not as common today.

Today, conversion therapy may look like a normal therapy session, with a practitioner having a one-on-one session with a client, or group session with several clients. It may involve talking about feelings and working on changing thought patterns. However, these sessions focus on the idea that being attracted to the same gender or not identifying with your birth gender is **unnatural, wrong, or undesirable**. The client may be taught to **suppress their feelings or urges**. They may be **bullied** into feeling worthless or broken.

Many conversion therapy programs are religion-based. Religious conversion therapy may include practices like **exorcism, ritual cleansing, self-harm** as a form of penance, or calling on a higher power to change thoughts or desires (sometimes called "**praying the gay away**"). In more severe cases, people undergoing conversion therapy may be **starved, isolated from other people, or assaulted**.

What does the law say about conversion therapy?

Sections 320.101 – 320.104 of the Criminal Code make conversion therapy **illegal in Canada**.

Under the Code, you can be charged for **providing** conversion therapy, or for **causing someone to undergo** conversion therapy, even if you are not the one providing it.

You can be charged for **promoting** or **advertising** conversion therapy services, even if you are not actually suggesting anyone do it.

You can be charged for **profiting from** conversion therapy, which means receiving some kind of benefit from it. This could be money or something else, like a job promotion.

Courts can issue warrants that allow police officers to **seize any materials** that are believed to advertise or promote conversion therapy, including written materials, audio or video recordings, digital files, and photographs.

Conversion therapy offences can lead to time in prison. The maximum sentences for conversion therapy offences are:

- **Promoting or advertising conversion therapy: 2 years**
- **Profiting from conversion therapy: 2 years**
- **Providing conversion therapy: 5 years**
- **Taking a person under 18 years old out of the country for conversion therapy: 5 years**