

# REIMAGINED AND REDESIGNED: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GENDER-NEUTRAL WASHROOMS AND CHANGEROOMS ON CAMPUS

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## Abstract

Gendered washrooms and changerooms are sites of tension for many transgender and/or gender non-conforming users. However, these are not the only groups impacted by the exclusive provision of gendered spaces. As gender-neutral facilities become increasingly standardized across multiple sectors, we consider how the rising trend of *universal design* can be realistically adapted within post-secondary institutions. This article proposes the concept of *inclusive design* and provides specific recommendations to improve user experience in gendered and gender-neutral facilities alike on campus.

**Keywords:** education, post-secondary, Ontario, trans studies, architecture, universal design

## Résumé

Les toilettes et les vestiaires genrés sont des lieux de tension pour de nombreux utilisateurs transgenres et/ou de genre non conforme. Cependant, ce ne sont pas les seuls groupes touchés par une offre se limitant aux espaces genrés. Alors que les installations non genrées deviennent standard dans de nombreux secteurs, nous nous demandons comment la tendance croissante de la « conception universelle » peut être adaptée de manière réaliste au sein des établissements d'enseignement postsecondaire. Cet article propose le concept de « conception inclusive » et fournit des recommandations pour améliorer l'expérience des utilisateurs dans les installations genrées et non genrées sur les campus.

**Mots-clés :** éducation, postsecondaire, Ontario, études trans, architecture, conception universelle

## Introduction: The Rise of Gender-Neutral Facilities and Their Practical Application

Most public washrooms and changerooms are designated for a single gender, namely, “men” or “women.” However, the last decade has seen a significant shift in the gendering of public spaces, with “gender-neutral” options appearing across educational institutions, government bodies, and recreational sites (Barkowsky et al., 2019; Brock University, 2019; City of Toronto, 2021; City of Vancouver, 2016; Government of Nova Scotia, 2014; Stanford University, 2017; Trans Focus Consulting, 2020; University of California San-

ta Cruz, 2016). The worlds of architecture and design have undergone a related shift, resulting in the rise of *universal design* (HCMA Architecture + Design, 2018).

This article begins by reviewing academic and trade literature on gendered washrooms and changerooms (referred together as *facilities*) and their accessibility to multiple and overlapping social groups, including transgender and/or gender non-conforming (TGNC) people, men, women, non-heterosexual people, and disabled people. Our review findings challenge common assumptions such as gender-neutral facilities only serving the needs of TGNC users, or that TGNC people necessarily prefer gender-neutral facilities. We also share findings from an environmental scan of multiple Ontario universities to identify the state of gen-

der-neutral facilities in the sector. We conclude with specific recommendations for transforming universal design into what we dub *inclusive design*, an approach that recognizes the particularities of post-secondary campuses.

## The Impacts of Exclusive Gendered Facilities: Including but Not Limited to TGNC People

While gendered washrooms and changerooms are frequently sites of anxiety, harassment, and discrimination for TGNC people (Faktor, 2011; Laidlaw, 2020; Scheim et al., 2014), this section reviews academic literature on the widespread impacts of exclusive gendered facilities (washrooms or changerooms) within public institutions: either male or female, with no gender-neutral option nearby. Our review focuses on both single-user and multi-user washrooms and changerooms, and demonstrates the need for inclusive design that we substantiate in the following section. We primarily review sociological studies conducted in Canada and the United States. Given that gender-neutral facilities remain a relatively new concept and an emerging research topic, we supplement our review with an examination of how *universal design* is being articulated in trade publications and design guides.

It is well-documented that concerns about harassment cause many TGNC individuals to avoid gendered facilities altogether. Laidlaw's (2020) survey of 54 TGNC students at two Ontario post-secondary institutions found that approximately half (49%) of respondents avoided using campus washrooms due to a fear of harassment for being perceived or being "outed" as trans. Close to half (48.1%) of the respondents also reported negative experiences in campus facilities, suggesting these fears were informed by lived experience. A survey conducted by the Trans PULSE Project of 400 TGNC Ontarians found two-thirds of respondents had previously avoided public facilities (especially washrooms) due to concerns over harassment and exclusion (Scheim et al., 2014). The 2015 United States Transgender Survey found that over half of respondents had avoided a public restroom within the past year (James et al., 2016).

Chronic washroom avoidance can have long-term physical health consequences such as an increased risk for urinary tract and kidney infections (James et al., 2016; Scheim et al., 2014). Avoiding public changerooms can also limit TGNC people's access to gyms and health clubs, reducing overall chances for physical activity (Barkowsky et al., 2019;

Laidlaw, 2020). A lack of safe, accessible washrooms and changerooms can exacerbate mental distress and social isolation for many TGNC people (Seelman, 2016; Weinhardt et al., 2017).

TGNC people have consistently prioritized washroom and changeroom access as a foremost point of concern (Goldberg et al., 2019; James et al., 2016; Laidlaw, 2020). Educational institutions—among others—appear to have listened to these concerns, as gender-neutral options are becoming increasingly common (Laidlaw, 2020; Barkowsky et al., 2019; Brock University, 2019). However, many TGNC people still continue to use gendered spaces and/or continue their avoidance of all public facilities due to a variety of factors, such as ineffective communication of gender-neutral options by institutions (Laidlaw, 2020), a social desire to remain with their peer group (Beese & Martin, 2018), and/or a sense of affirmation from accessing gendered spaces congruent with their gender identity (Herrick et al., 2020; Oakleaf & Richmond, 2017).

An inclusive approach to facilities design would support TGNC people making the choices that best suit their needs for safety, privacy, and self-identification (Pirics, 2017; Porta et al., 2017). Even in cases where gender-neutral facilities are available, restrictive access policies can still produce a hostile environment; for example, if all TGNC students at a school are expected use the gender-neutral changeroom, increased access to gender-neutral options will not address social isolation (Murchison et al., 2019; Porta et al., 2017). TGNC people are diverse in their facility usage needs. Decisions may vary day-to-day based on personal assessment of comfort and safety and may correspond with the experiences of additional (and sometimes overlapping) populations including cisgender men, cisgender women, non-heterosexual (LGBQ+) people, youth, disabled people, and others. Our review found that TGNC individuals face unique challenges when navigating gendered facilities but are hardly the only impacted group.

In an essay on sites of gender insecurity, Alex Faktor (2011) makes the argument that manhood is strictly policed within most male-designated public washrooms. The pressure to be perceived as appropriately masculine can be overwhelming, Faktor argues, particularly when combined with a lack of personal privacy. Multi-user changerooms can similarly foment gender policing among users, leading some men to perform masculinity through the vocal disrespect of women and/or LGBTQ+ people (Leahy, 2020; Roper & Halloran, 2007). This phenomenon is often described colloquially as "locker room talk" (Leone & Parrott, 2019, p. 43). This

behaviour in gendered spaces may go so far as to see involve men harming themselves or others to prove their masculinity, as in analyses of “hazing” rituals (Fogel & Quinlan, 2020). TGNC people who identify as men and/or use male-designated facilities are often acutely aware of these pressures (Johnston, 2016). Expectations of masculinity performance are exacerbated in multi-use facilities lacking private stalls (Oakleaf & Richmond, 2017).

Given these factors, gender-neutral facilities may be beneficial to many men—cisgender and transgender alike—wishing to avoid the pressures of masculinity performance. Furthermore, should male-gendered and gender-neutral facilities be offered alongside one another, an inclusive approach in both spaces would prioritize privacy measures such as closed-door stalls and accommodations for users who are menstruating or pregnant. Washroom and changerroom designs frequently fail to account for the needs of pregnant people and people who menstruate, even in female-designated facilities (Frank, 2020; Greed, 2016). Male-designated facilities frequently lack any menstrual products at all, nor do they have discreet methods of disposal for said products (Frank, 2020). Male-designated facilities also often fail to have change tables and related structural supports for users with small children (Olson et al., 2007; Pandya et al., 2021). Users who are pregnant and/or nursing children may also find gendered facilities to be uninviting on social and structural levels (Beese et al., 2020; Ferri et al., 2020; Kassam, 2016; Kukura, 2022; Moseson et al., 2020).

Due to unmet needs regarding consistent access, safety, and sanitation, many women choose to avoid public facilities to the detriment of their own health and social participation (Greed, 2016; Hartigan et al., 2020). Users of female-designated facilities face social stress in the form of increased wait times and greater usage frequency in comparison to male-designated facilities (Bovens & Marcoci, 2020; Moen et al., 2018). Users of female-designated facilities can also experience stress and anxiety when using multi-use facilities with open showers and shared changing areas, frequently because of body insecurities (Clark, 2011; Couturier et al., 2007; Moen et al., 2018). Among women who are concerned about public exposure and sexual violence, public facilities can also be spaces of isolation—disabled, racialized, older, and/or queer women are all statistically more at risk for stress and personal harm (Hartigan et al., 2020; Quinlan et al., 2010).

Transgender women are frequently and systemically excluded from many female-designated facilities. Part of this exclusion comes from a concern that cisgender men

may mask themselves as transgender women to illicitly enter a female-designated space. However, banning all trans women from all female-designated facilities is neither practical (as many transgender women may not be easily recognizable as transgender) nor does it ensure the safety of all women (trans or cis) from male violence. An inclusive approach would better meet safety needs in both gendered and gender-neutral facilities via an increase in user privacy infrastructure (e.g., increase in private stalls) and clear communication around intervention and support if violence should occur (Faktor, 2011; Herriot et al., 2018; James et al., 2016; Seelman, 2016).

Many lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer (LGBQ+) people report harassment and hostility within gendered washrooms and changerrooms (Cavanagh, 2011; Leahy, 2020; Roper & Halloran, 2007). A survey of bisexual women and lesbians with experience as student athletes reported discriminatory changerroom cultures defined by interpersonal surveillance, internalized pressure to conform to heterosexual standards, overt anti-gay comments, and homophobic graffiti (Shaw, 2013). Studies with male student athletes have also shown that homophobia is commonplace within team changerrooms (Roper & Halloran, 2007). As outlined in a 2017 survey of 3,673 LGBTQ+ teens in the United States, multi-user gendered facilities can increase the risk of experiencing sexual assault and violence (Murchison et al., 2019). For these reasons, an inclusive approach to facilities design would allow for greater personal privacy, including private stalls and/or abundant single-user washrooms/changerrooms to enable individuals to remove themselves from harm.

The provision of exclusively gendered facilities can pose practical barriers for disabled populations as said facilities may be inequitably maintained, inconsistent in their accessibility, and/or located at opposite ends of a building. For instance, Poggiali and Margolin (2019) found that New York City library restrooms were frequently on different floors and/or in uneven states of disrepair, making it more difficult for disabled users to access safe and accessible facilities with ease; these authors argue concerns over immediate accessibility could be mitigated if all facilities had been gender-neutral as prospective users could then simply access the closest, cleanest option. Relatedly gendered facilities can pose a serious challenge for disabled users with a care provider who does not share their gender (Faktor, 2011).

Disabled people and/or those whose bodies are otherwise non-normative can experience anxiety in multi-user changerrooms without private stalls or showers (Clark, 2011). Some disabled individuals go out of their way to ac-

cess single-user and/or gender-neutral facilities due to concerns over public scrutiny of their bodies and access needs (Hartigan et al., 2020; Laidlaw, 2020). Following the rollout of gender-neutral changerooms at the University of British Columbia, a campus survey found that increased personal privacy options in washrooms and changerooms improved the likelihood that an individual would access campus physical activities (Barkowsky et al., 2019).

While the full development of disability-centred design is beyond the scope of this article, we argue that robust gender-neutral options offer opportunities for individual agency. Concerns over sharing space with care-providers also call to mind challenges posed to mixed-gender social groups—such as a mother and son, a father and daughter, etc.—attempting to access gendered facilities; this has been highlighted by scholars whose work crosses gender and disability studies (Davis, 2018; Faktor, 2011; Poggiali & Margolin, 2019).

In summary, the challenges of public scrutiny and risk of harassment in gendered multi-use facilities appeared as recurrent themes in the literature on different groups' experiences in gendered facilities. For Laidlaw (2020), the solution is clear—institutions should adopt single-user, gender-neutral facilities whenever possible. However, we observe that this solution may have drawbacks, in sites including but not limited to university campuses. Single-user facilities can also increase social isolation and reduce opportunities for interpersonal connection (Herrick et al., 2020). Multi-user facilities can be important spaces to socialize with peers (Cunningham et al., 2017; Herrick et al., 2020; Kjaran, 2019). Furthermore, while multi-user gender-neutral facilities could arguably allow for peer socialization, some users may require a private gendered space for cultural or religious reasons—for instance, Muslim women who veil may need to adjust or remove their veil without the presence of men (Roy, 2016). Even among TGNC people, some users find multi-user gendered spaces to be affirming of their identities (Herrick et al., 2020; Oakleaf & Richmond, 2017).

A wealth of research confirms that many populations are ill-served by the exclusive provision of gendered washrooms and changerooms. While presence of this research confirms a growing awareness and social concern, this does not mean clear solutions are on offer. Faced with conflicting needs among distinct yet overlapping communities, architects of public washrooms and changerooms face unique challenges. In the next section, we survey trade and other grey literatures in order to identify current best practices for what is commonly called *universal design*.

## The Rise of Universal Design

Universal design is a set of principles that aim to curate consistent experiences for all users of a public space by emphasizing safety, privacy, and accessibility (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2019; Cunningham et al., 2017; Dick-Agnew & Baker, 2017; Entro, 2016). Gender-neutrality is an appealing quality of universal guidelines as works to remove an individual's gender identity or outward gender expression as a factor in facilities access (HCMA Architecture + Design, 2018; Entro, 2016). For this reason, gender-neutral facilities are frequently found within newly built or recently upgraded public buildings (Kollie, 2017; Petrillo, 2020; Steinbach, 2017; Vence, 2021a, 2021b). In what follows, we discuss universal design guidelines, connect them to the preceding scholarly literature review, and suggest a comprehensive path forward for what we term *inclusive design*.

In 2016, the City of Vancouver released a report recommending that public buildings develop “universal” washrooms and changerooms that—among other aspects—are not exclusive to any specific gender. Canadian and American YMCA organizations have developed similar recommendations, emphasizing that a move toward gender-neutral options can improve overall user experiences (Hightower, 2019; YMCA, 2018), as we saw in the preceding literature review. Beyond North America, the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) has recommended that all athletic facilities adopt the principles of gender-neutral *universal design* when developing washrooms, showers, and changerooms (AHRC, 2019). Evidently, universal design is a rising global trend in both washroom and changeroom design.

Practical schematics have been created to assist with efficient and cost-effective facilities updates toward universal design. A report published by HCMA Architecture + Design (2018) entitled *Designing for Inclusivity* notes that single-user facilities allow for a greater degree of privacy, as they are designed for one user at a time. To allow for increased privacy in multi-user facilities, HCMA recommends fully enclosed stalls for individual use, each with floor-to-ceiling dividers. In the case of a washroom, these stalls would contain toilets, whereas in a changeroom they could be designed for individuals to change clothes and/or shower in private. Within multi-user facilities, users would then reconnect in common areas such as shared sinks and/or shared lockers.

The HCMA Architecture + Design (2018) recommendations are echoed by other documents on facilities design. The Australian Human Rights Commission (2019) recommends that all athletic facilities provide gender-neutral options with

increased privacy, specifically mentioning the need that shared spaces feature curtains, dividers, and/or private stalls (AHRC, 2019, p. 40). The Stalled! project (n.d.)—an online guideline for the adaptation of gendered facilities into gender-neutral facilities—also suggests converting existing change areas to full privacy, providing a series of schematics demonstrating how such “low-budget retrofits” might be easily applied to existing gendered washrooms and changerooms. Retrofits allow for near-immediate gender-neutral adaptation, rather than the much more arduous process of building new facilities.

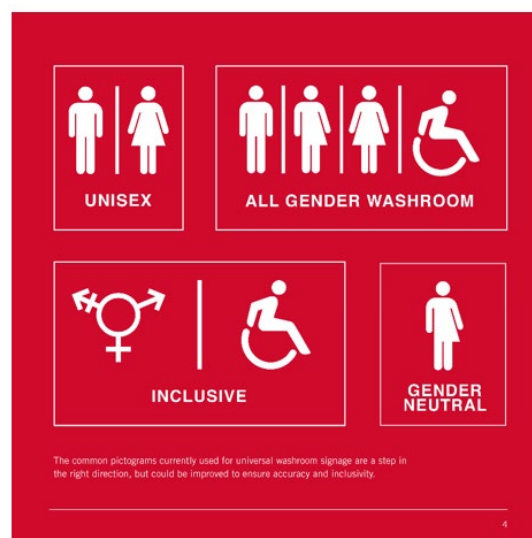
The HCMA Architecture + Design (2018) guide recommends that designers consider their users’ various ages, gender expression, cultures, and abilities; to this end, it suggests that all private stalls—be they in a single-user facility or nested within a multi-use facility—include clear locked/unlocked indicators, waste receptacles (e.g., for menstrual products), and clothing hooks so that washrooms can serve as changerooms if needed. Others stress the need for a mirror in each stall (Garbow, 2020c; Kwun, 2018), placed at a strategic angle to accommodate wheelchair users (Broyer, 2020). Multiple guides also recommend wide stalls capable of accommodating multiple people should an individual require a carer (Faktor, 2011; HCMA Architecture + Design, 2018; Stalled!, n.d.). Sinks, soap dispensers, hand-dry-

ers, and/or lockers should be designed to accommodate a variety of physical abilities (HCMA Architecture + Design, 2018). Wherever possible, single- and multi-user facilities alike should provide infant change tables that are accessible to users of varying heights and abilities (Frank, 2020; Greed, 2016). All facilities—be they gendered or gender-neutral—should freely provide menstrual products, in gender-neutral packaging, with private disposal options in each stall (Frank, 2020). In terms of location, gender-neutral single- and/or multi-use facilities should be easy to access from the entrance of the building, available on each floor that is open to the public, and clearly demarcated to potential users (Hartigan, 2020; HCMA Architecture + Design, 2018; Laidlaw, 2020; Poggiali & Margolin, 2019).

To ensure these facilities are easily recognizable, many design guides include an outline of recommended signage. Gendered facilities are frequently identified by an image of their intended user, most frequently a “male” silhouette (a standing human figure with visible arms and legs) and a “female” silhouette (a standing human figure with visible arms and a triangular shape that indicates they are wearing a dress). These silhouettes may be accompanied by text stating the intended user’s gender—male or female, respectively. Figure 1, found below, contains examples of such *identity-based* signage.

**Figure 1**

*Incorrect (Identity-Based) Bathroom Signage for Gender-Neutral Washrooms*



*Note:* Sourced from Entro (2016, p. 4) signage standards, these identity-based designs for gender-neutral washroom signage are to be avoided.

Identity-based signage standards negate the goals of universal design as they do not prioritize clear, accessible, and consistent experiences for all users. For instance, a “male” symbol does not indicate whether a washroom contains a changing table, and a “female” symbol does not indicate that a changeroom contains private showers. A move to gender-neutral signage that remains focused on the user’s identity—such as a figure wearing half a dress—would also not address these concerns. For these reasons, identity-based signage is receding in contemporary facilities design. These gendered symbols are increasingly being replaced by *use-based* signage, a design style that focuses on amenities over identities. Recommendations for use-based signage appear across many design guides, trade publications, and scholarly studies (e.g., Barkowsky et al., 2019; City of Vancouver, 2016; Dick-Agnew & Baker, 2017; Goldberg et al., 2019; HCMA Architecture + Design, 2018; Stalled!, n.d.; Stanford University, 2017; Trans Focus Consulting, 2020). Use-focused pictograms more accurately describe a facility’s amenities, ideally accompanied by descriptive text and/or braille (Entro, 2016; Toronto Metropolitan University, 2019; The 519, 2015; University of California Santa Cruz, 2016). Below, Figure 2 shows use-based signage options for gender-neutral washrooms as outlined by the architecture firm Entro (2016). Use-based signage can also be accompanied

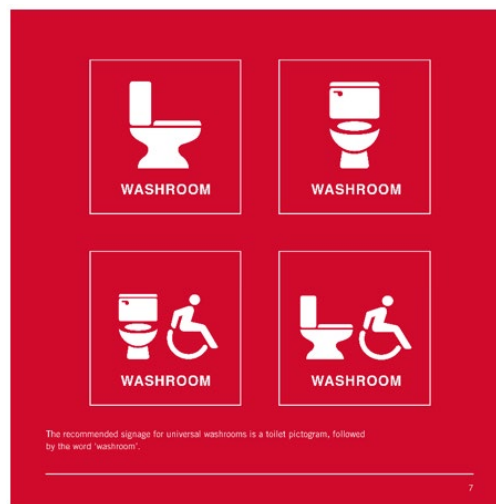
by identity-based signage, as shown in Figure 3.

The provision of gender-neutral facilities often requires an adaptation of physical space and/or signage, and changes are often accompanied by policy development and user education campaigns. As it stands, policy and education are often an afterthought for institutions upgrading their facilities (Bartholomaeus & Riggs, 2017). Indeed, few of the industry guidelines reviewed for this article included robust policy and education recommendations. In addition, the creators of Stalled! recently worked with the International Plumbing Code (IPC) to develop new recommendations for gender-neutral facilities in the 2021 IPC (Garbow, 2020b; Laidlaw, 2020; The National Center for Transgender Equality, 2019). This updated IPC is crucial as many local building codes do not account for the plumbing layout required in gender-neutral facilities with, for example, complete single-user stalls with toilet and sink. In fact, local building codes frequently pose a challenge in the adoption of gender-neutral facilities—for instance, the Ontario Building Code requires a specific number of gendered washrooms per building occupancy and makes no mention of multi-user gender-neutral washrooms (Laidlaw, 2020).

Institutions moving toward universal design in washrooms and changerooms should simultaneously develop and/or revisit existing non-discrimination policies, espe-

**Figure 2**

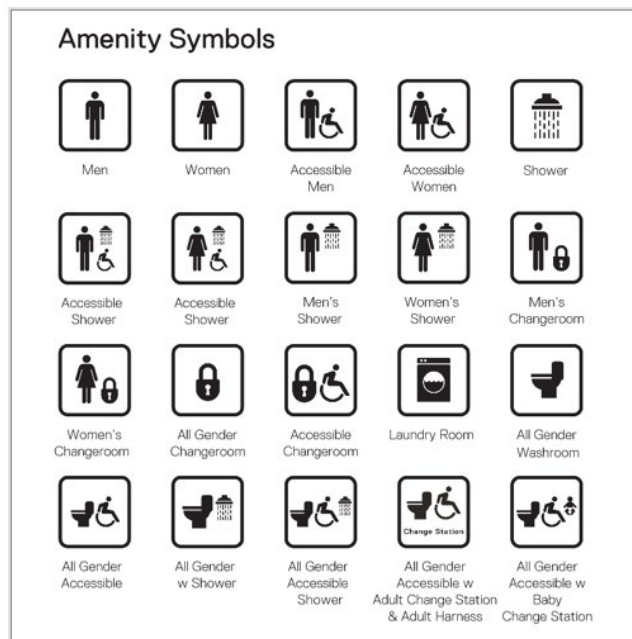
*Correct (Use-Based) Bathroom Signage for Gender-Neutral Washrooms*



*Note:* Sourced from Entro (2016, p. 7), these designs for gender-neutral washroom signage focus on the usage of space rather than the identity of the user.

Figure 3

Ryerson University's Amenity Symbols



Note: Sourced from Ryerson University (2019, p. 10), these pictograms feature multiple gendered and gender-neutral options to communicate campus amenities.

cially those focused on gender identity and gender expression (Goldberg et al., 2019; Leahy, 2020). Relevant policies should be explained with direct language through community education campaigns (Bartholomaeus & Riggs, 2017; Brock, 2019; Laidlaw, 2020). Educational campaigns should be ongoing and directed toward both staff and the broader user community to assist in normalizing gender-neutral facilities (Barkowsky et al., 2019).

The transition to universal design is underway in the architectural field, and is certainly needed in order to respond to the problems identified in the literature review that began the article. However, universal design may be challenged by aspects of the post-secondary context; in order to identify aspects of this context that may necessitate a specific approach to providing more inclusive washrooms and changerooms on campus, we offer a snapshot of how Ontario university campuses are proceeding at the time of publication.

## The State of Facilities on Ontario Post-Secondary Campuses: An Online Snapshot

To create this snapshot, we reviewed all publicly available online information about known gender-neutral facilities at 22 universities in Ontario, and situated our own campus (Queen's University) in relation to others. Our online-only approach was reflective of the general layperson's level of accessibility to university information on campus facilities to reflect what a prospective or existing student may find when seeking information about facilities in different buildings on campus.

Nearly all ( $n = 21$ ) of the listed Ontario universities were identifiable as having gender-neutral washrooms on campus. In contrast to the significant presence of gender-neutral washrooms, less than half ( $n = 10$ ) of the universities had evidence of gender-neutral changerooms. The remaining universities may also have gender-neutral changerooms but this information is not easily located in public-facing content.

Of the scanned universities, most ( $n = 17$ ) had webpag-

es with content related to their gender-neutral washrooms and/or changerooms. The University of Toronto Mississauga Campus (UTM), for example, provides a webpage (n.d.) with a detailed statement on the importance of gender-neutral spaces, a list of campus facilities, ongoing updates, and contact information for their Equity and Diversity office. Other universities had websites with sections for “frequently asked questions” or links to institutional policies. However, some of these webpages appeared to be incomplete and/or neglected since their original creation as they sported broken links, outdated information, and/or simply promises of content “coming soon.” These gaps and errors indicate a need for frequent updating to ensure the efforts put into these campaigns remain accessible to the community and maintain capacity for positive impact.

Of the 21 universities with gender-neutral facilities, a variety of images and terminology were used to communicate the presence of gender-neutral facilities as shown in Figures 4, 5, and 6. Only 15 universities had use-based signage for gender-neutral facilities.

Of the universities scanned, 18 posted lists and/or maps of gender-neutral washrooms across campus. This num-

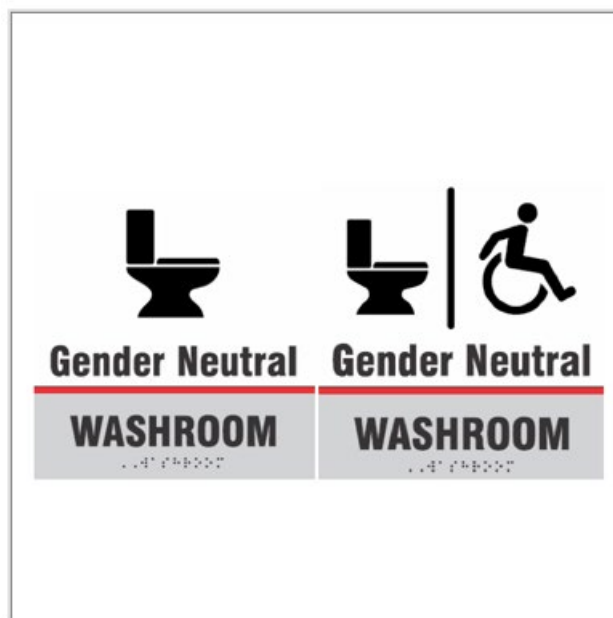
ber is notable as it exceeds the number of universities with webpages that describe inclusive facilities. In contrast, only one-third ( $n = 8$ ) provided accessible information on the locations of gender-neutral changerooms. Some universities (such as Ontario Tech University) stated that there was a gender-neutral changeroom available, but the location and access code for changerooms must be requested of an administrator.

While we found some evidence of relevant policies and educational campaigns, this varied widely; some universities offered detailed documents while others included one or two lines on the topic within otherwise unrelated materials, and/or plain-language statements posted to public webpages yet no detailed institutional policies. Only one-third ( $n = 8$ ) of the universities had any public-facing policies related to gender-neutral washrooms. Even fewer—five in total—had public-facing policies on gender-neutral changerooms.

Few universities had posted statements on inclusion in washrooms, and these varied in design and content. The most robust of these statements is Figure 7. Here, Toronto Metropolitan University’s 2019 policy is communicated through permanently installed posters in gendered and gen-

**Figure 4**

*“Gender Neutral” Sign at the University of Guelph*



Note: Sourced from the University of Guelph’s website, found in their instructional document on “Gender Neutral Bathrooms” (2020).



**Figure 5**

*“All Gender” Sign at Trent University*



*Note:* Sourced from Trent University's online list of "Gender Inclusive Restrooms" (n.d.).

**Figure 6**

*“Washroom” Sign at Brock University*



*Note:* Sourced from The Brock News (Brock University, 2014). This signage may have been updated following the release of Brock University's "Transgender Inclusion Guide" (2019), but any public images of new signage were not found at the time of this environmental scan.

der-neutral washrooms. Each poster explains the (un)gendering of the space and explicitly states that “trans\*” people may use whatever facility suits them best. The asterisk directs toward a fine-print section that explicitly welcomes transgender, transsexual, two-spirit, non-binary, gender-

queer, and/or gender-diverse individuals.

At the time of the scan, we were not able to locate any ongoing (not ad hoc) institutional structures for managing the change process toward what we are calling inclusive facilities design. However, we can offer some reflections on

Figure 7

Posted Statements in/around Washrooms at Ryerson



Note: Sourced from Ryerson University (2019, p. 31), these posters demonstrate the inclusion of “trans\*” individuals in all campus washrooms and changerooms.

the need for such a structure based on a close examination of one institution in particular: Queen’s University in Kingston, Ontario.

Like many of its counterparts, Queen’s University has taken initial steps toward inclusive washrooms and changerooms; in fact, it is home to one of the first gender-neutral washroom policies in Canadian higher education (Queen’s University, 2012). Nonetheless, Queen’s has thus far not maintained consistent standards, demonstrated by a patchwork of signage and gender-neutral washroom availability, and little to no publicly available information on gender-neutral changerooms.

The “Gender-Neutral Washroom Policy” at Queen’s University (2012) states that there should be at least one gender-neutral facility on every floor of each “new constructed or significantly renovated building on campus” (p. 3). However, the policy’s limited scope has resulted in no centralized university mandate to fund changes to buildings that are not new or undergoing significant renovation, and any inclusive facilities were funded by individual capital projects. There are gender-neutral washroom deserts on campus: buildings that are not slated for major renovation, and therefore no funds to make changes. The limited focus on long-term solutions often fails to address the immediate needs of students, faculty, and staff currently on campus. At the time of publication, there are efforts underway at Queen’s Univer-

sity to centrally manage and fund inclusive design upgrades, as well as change policy to remove the renovation or new build clauses.

From our review of publicly available online information about gender-neutral facilities at Ontario universities, we observe that the post-secondary sector may differ from other sectors in the shift toward universal design. Building or modifying all facilities to be gender-neutral can be a challenging task for large institutions made up of a disparate units, offices, departments, and faculties. The transition to universal design is unfolding unevenly across these institutions, such that a singular transition cannot be argued and may not be possible. Therefore, in the article’s conclusion to follow, we share an adaptation of universal design that we term *inclusive design*. This approach to design uses a series of partial and process-based methods to adapt existing campus washrooms and changerooms as well as new builds (see Tables 1 and 2). We welcome similar institutions to review this checklist and assess its applicability to their own campuses.

## Inclusive Design: A Proposal for Post-Secondary Campuses

In their most ideal form, gender-neutral washrooms and changerooms allow all users equal access to clean, public amenities that minimize difference of individual experience

**Table 1**

*A Pathway Toward Inclusive Facilities: Checklist*

## Recommendations

The present review of scholarly and trade literatures, along with the online environmental scan of Southern Ontario universities, supports the following recommendations for taking action at Queen's:

- 1. Implement the short-term and long-term measures described in this report**
- 2. Create a structure and process to guide implementation**
- 3. Update the Gender-Neutral Washrooms Policy**

Each of these is fleshed out below.

### 1. Implement the short-term and long-term measures described in this report

The following list briefly summarizes the preceding section for ease of reference:

#### Short-term accommodations:

- 1.a • Adopt and implement an inclusive signage standard for all facilities.
  - 1.a.i - Follow guidelines for signage that communicates the amenities of facilities rather than the identity of users.
- 1.b • Convert remaining gendered single-stall facilities to gender-neutral spaces.
  - 1.b.i - Can be achieved with a simple signage update, in most cases.
- 1.c • Create private areas in shared changerooms.
  - 1.c.i - Use curtains or similar barriers to allow private changing and showering.
- 1.d • Incorporate resources and educational material into all facilities.
  - 1.d.i - Add resources such as menstrual products and disposal bins to gendered and gender-neutral facilities.
  - 1.d.ii - Incorporate posters and related educational material to communicate the move towards new inclusion practices.

#### Long-term updates:

- 2.a • Convert at least one-third of all multi-stall washrooms across campus to gender-neutral spaces.
  - 2.a.i - Place strategically across the building(s) available, to support easy access at all levels at locations.
- 2.b • Convert remaining multi-stall gendered washrooms to an inclusive format.
  - 2.b.i - Recognize the presence of transgender and/or GNC people in all facilities.
  - 2.b.ii - Make all changerooms gender neutral.
  - 2.b.iii - Include private stalls for changing and showering.
- 2.c • Adapt all washroom stalls to inclusive format.
  - 2.c.i - Lengthen walls; provide lockable doors.
  - 2.c.ii - Include a mirror, menstrual products, and a disposal bin in each stall.
  - 2.c.iii - Provide wide stalls to accommodate a variety body sizes, pregnant people, people with disabilities (including wheelchair users), and/or multiple users (such as a caregiver and care-receiver).
  - 2.c.iv - Provide changing tables within all facilities.
- 2.d • Update points of access.
  - 2.d.i - Provide a point of access for gym and recreation spaces that do not require passing through any gendered changerooms.
- 2.e • Continue ongoing community education.
  - 2.e.i - Post statements and/or codes of conduct in all facility locations.
  - 2.e.ii - Mount educational campaign and associated webpage to inform all internal and external members of the organization about the move towards inclusivity.
  - 2.e.iii - Update materials on a regular basis.

and maximize accessibility (Faktor, 2011; Poggiali & Margolin, 2019; Stalled!, n.d.). However—as demonstrated in our literature review—not all gender-neutral facilities are created equal, nor do all users necessarily prefer them. Inclusive design applies universal design principles related to safety, access, and consistency of experience to campus facilities users while recognizing differences among user groups as well as the decentralized, in-process nature of university renovation and implementation of facilities-relat-

ed policies. As such, short-term and long-term guidelines are provided so that campus-wide change is not limited by one-time capital investments in new builds.

Inclusive design recognizes the realities of a gendered world in which binary-gendered facilities remain dominant on campus, while allowing for the adaptation of both gendered and gender-neutral facilities to become more inclusive to all users. We suggest a series of short- and long-term changes to increase accessibility, safety, and privacy, accompanied

**Table 2**

*A Pathway Toward Inclusive Facilities: Detailed Recommendations*

**2. Create a structure and process to guide short-term and long-term implementation**

Implementing the short- and long-term changes in the previous section is a significant undertaking that requires both funding from and coordination among several units at Queen's. A key concern is prioritizing particular washrooms and changerooms for updates, both initially and on an ongoing basis, according to community needs and current facility conditions. One possible approach among many is a **yearly funding allocation** that is overseen by a **committee** that includes representation from PAGGAS (staff, faculty and student), Facilities, and other key units on campus. The work of allocation might begin with a **comprehensive audit** of all washrooms and changerooms on the Queen's main and west campuses, using a tool that reflects the evidence and best practices summarized in this report. The audit, combined with stakeholder feedback and other available data such as the Student Experience Survey, could inform the committee's yearly allocation.

The rationale for a separate yearly funding allocation is informed by the necessity of updating buildings on campus that are not slated for renovation. This is expanded upon in the next recommendation to update the Gender-Neutral Washroom Policy.

**3. Update the Gender-Neutral Washroom Policy**

While the current Gender-Neutral Washroom Policy was a landmark document in Canadian post-secondary education, it requires updating on several fronts: removing the policy's limitation to new builds or significant renovations; adding changerooms to the policy's scope; aligning with contemporary language use; and other updates as required in order to align with the short- and long-term measures included in this report and as supported by research.

First, **the scope of the Gender-Neutral Washroom Policy is limited in that it is only "applicable to major renovation and construction of buildings on campus."** This removes responsibility for funding washroom (and conceivably changeroom – see below) updates from general university budgets and instead situates responsibility within one-time capital projects. The vast majority of Queen's community members access older buildings and buildings that are not slated for renovation in the near future. As such, the policy's scope as it is limited to major renovation and construction is a significant barrier to necessary change. Further, the Facilities Department has been in conversation with our research team and is currently drafting a new Inclusion for the Built Environment Standard that aligns with many<sup>9</sup> of the recommended measures in this report; the Standard would only apply to major renovations and new construction. As such, the Gender-Neutral Washroom Policy is best-suited to mandate changes on a wider scale, including in existing buildings that are not currently slated for renovation.

Second, **the current policy is limited to washrooms**, whereas the literature reviewed throughout this report clearly demonstrates the risk posed to transgender, GNC, and other populations by the provision of non-inclusive changerooms.

Third, the ongoing re-emergence of gender diversity into public life in Canada has been accompanied by shifts in the language used to describe how different people—whether transgender or cisgender—experience gender. For example, the term 'gender variant' is used in many places in the existing policy but is no longer in common usage. As policy ought to reflect experiences of the communities in which it is enacted, it is important to **update the terms and concepts used within the Gender-Neutral Washroom Policy.**

by changes to physical space and signage along with policy development and educational campaigns.

Gender-neutral facilities are one requirement of inclusive design, but they do not need to be the only option provided across a large post-secondary campus. We recommend that campuses convert at least one-third of all current and future facilities to a gender-neutral format. This number reflects the recognition of the two dominant options for public facilities (i.e., male or female) and the rise of gender-neutral facilities (as a third option). Our recommendation that one-third of public facilities convert to a gender-neutral is

an attempt toward equal distribution of access, with recognition that many users (cisgender and TGNC alike) may still prefer to use gendered spaces. This one-third ratio is a minimum, not a maximum; in cases where only two facilities are available, we recommend both become converted to a gender-neutral format. Most single-user washrooms and changerooms can become gender-neutral through a simple signage update with use-based symbols (Bovens & Marocchi, 2020; Davis, 2018; Entro, 2016). Multi-user facilities may need retrofitting, renovation, and/or altogether new builds (Stalled!, n.d.).

A move toward inclusive design would require updates for greater privacy and safety in all facilities, gendered and gender-neutral. In the short-term, facilities with open areas (such as changerooms) can use curtains or other temporary barriers to strategically increase privacy (Moen et al., 2018; Toronto District School Board, 2011; Trans Focus Consulting, 2020). In washrooms and changerooms with partially stalled areas, walls and doors may be lengthened (City of Toronto, 2021; Government of Nova Scotia, 2014; HCMA Architecture + Design, 2018; Trans Focus Consulting, 2020; Stalled!, n.d.). Additional recommendations for inclusive facilities are: menstrual products and in-stall disposal bins should be offered in all gendered and gender-neutral facilities (Frank, 2020); wide-stall options should be readily available and each stall should include an appropriately angled mirror (Broyer, 2020; Laidlaw, 2020); and use-based signage should be applied wherever possible, even in gendered facilities (Barkowsky et al., 2019; City of Vancouver, 2016; Toronto Metropolitan University, 2019; Stanford University, 2017). Additionally, athletic and recreational facilities should not require passing through a gendered changeroom of any kind (Cunningham et al., 2017); and institutions adopting inclusive facilities design should develop and/or update relevant institutional policies and codes of conduct and initiate user and staff educational campaigns (Bartholomaeus & Riggs, 2017).

These short- and long-term changes often require centralized funding and coordination among several campus units. We recommend that post-secondary institutions form an internal change management body with representatives from relevant departments. Such a body should receive a yearly funding allocation and invite members of impacted groups to participate in the allocation process. We recommend an initial audit of campus washrooms and changerooms, and fund short-term accommodations as soon as possible to help meet the needs of their community urgently, while long-term projects are planned, resourced, and executed.

The exclusive provision of gendered washrooms negatively affects many groups of people, vastly exceeding the transgender people who are typically centred in discussions on this topic. Our work in this article has hopefully defeated the common impulse to “other” transgender people by asserting—however implicitly—that our needs and experiences are completely different from those of other campus community members. We challenge the relegation of “transgender issues” to specialized equity, diversity, and inclusion forums as our work throughout the article has shown that

facilities barriers affect many populations. We recommend that all Canadian universities and similar institutions undertake efforts toward inclusive design through both short- and long-term changes. We hope that our framework is used not only to update campuses, but to create durable coalitions among diverse groups of people impacted by university systems and structures that do not yet imagine their/our presence here.

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