

# Pronouns In The Workplace: Normalizing Conversations Around Gender And Inclusivity



This week marks International Pronouns Day, which seeks to make respecting, sharing and educating about personal pronouns commonplace. Pronouns are connected to gender expression and are important as they are one way in which individuals refer to themselves or are identified.

With the day commemorating pronouns, employers are asking important questions.

## **When Does Misgendering, Outing and Incorrect Use of Pronouns in the Workplace Amount to Discrimination?**

Gender identity and gender expression are protected grounds under human rights legislation both provincially and federally in Canada. Tribunals in both Ontario and British Columbia have addressed the lived experiences of 2SLGBTQIA+ people in the workplace and found that:

- Misgendering or the use of incorrect pronouns is adverse treatment with respect to employment;
- Transphobic slurs in the workplace can make employees fear for their safety; and
- An employer's failure to adequately respond to misgendering and outing in the workplace constitutes an adverse impact.

The decisions are a reminder to employers that reports of discrimination and harassment in the workplace must be taken seriously. An employer's failure to reasonably investigate and appropriately address a complaint of discrimination can also constitute an adverse impact, and lead to monetary and non-monetary liability.

## **How Can Employers Facilitate Discussions Around Pronoun Usage in the Workplace?**

The best way to facilitate discussions around pronoun usage is to host learning and education sessions in conjunction with providing resources. This might include bringing in an external speaker with expertise in the area for a lunch-

and-learn or incorporating brief 2SLGBTQIA+ educational components into weekly or monthly staff meetings. Implementing an equity, diversity and inclusion committee is also another option to create a space for employees to ask questions, provide suggestions and ideas or voice any concerns.

## **How Else Can Employers Normalize Discussions Around Pronouns and Gender in the Workplace?**

In keeping with the purpose behind International Pronouns Day, employers might also consider other ways in which they can facilitate opportunities to recognize the day within the workplace. This may include:

- identifying your pronouns on your email signature, biography, business cards, or including them when introducing yourself. It not only informs others of how you wish to be referred, but also signals to the recipient that you are respectful and welcoming of their pronouns and identity;
- if in doubt, ask a person how they wish to be addressed, preferably after sharing your own pronoun. This might include personal pronouns or more formal methods of address such as Ms./Mrs./Mr./Mx (pronounced “mix”);
- educating employees about the 2SLGBTQIA+ community generally;
- officially recognizing, and encouraging employees to include pronouns in their everyday language;
- considering developing and implementing a Pronoun Policy or Pronoun Resource Guide; and
- developing and/or reviewing existing workplace policies and practices with the lens of equity, diversity, inclusion and reconciliation.

Employers may want to provide employees with information and resources, including specialized support services, which may be useful to 2SLGBTQIA+ employees.

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