

improving sexual and reproductive health (SRH) programs and services for youth with disabilities: recommendations for service providers

Planned Parenthood Toronto conducted a community-based needs assessment exploring the sexual and reproductive health needs of youth (aged 13-29) with disabilities in Toronto. The assessment reached participating youth with a range of disabilities through an online survey, focus groups and interviews. The following recommendations have been developed based on the results of this project.

1 ask all youth about their access needs

The best way to find out how best to make SRH programs and services accessible for youth with disabilities (YWD) is to ask them. Getting feedback directly from those the services are intended for ensures that YWD will actually use them, and that they'll keep coming back.

2 provide staff training specific to youth with disabilities and SRH

Staff should be trained on SRH topics specific to the needs and experiences of youth with disabilities. Training should also cover trauma-informed care, addressing common misconceptions of youth with disabilities, inclusive language and making spaces accessible and anti-oppressive.

4 provide support around SRH costs

Cost can be a major barrier for youth with disabilities. This can be alleviated by providing free SRH products (birth control, condoms, prescriptions) as well as offering transit tokens and meals.

3 make your agency accessible to people with disabilities

Agencies should maximize the accessibility of their space. This includes physical accessibility - doors, ramps, washrooms, and lifts to access exam tables. Youth should also be provided with information about seating, lighting, loudness, and visual clutter of spaces. This also includes considerations such as making spaces inclusive and judgment-free so that youth with disabilities feel safe accessing them.

5 ensure programs and services are developed by and for youth with disabilities

Agencies should engage youth with disabilities and gather feedback on what they want and need from their SRH programs and services. This helps make sure that resources are useful and topics covered are relevant and interesting to youth with disabilities.