we deserve
**chlamydia
care**

Reclaiming Autonomy: A Community Outlook

Disabled IBPOC 2S/LBTQ+ Women and Gender-Diverse Communities' Experiences with Chlamydia Testing and Access in Ontario

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CIHR IRSC Canadian Institutes of Health Research Instituts de recherche en santé du Canada

cbrc Community-Based Research Centre

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Chlamydia remains the highest reported bacterial STI in Canada, disproportionately impacting women and femmes. Yet, much STI research has traditionally focused on cis men and masc-presenting people. In response to this burden and gap in understanding, the Community-Based Research Centre (CBRC), in collaboration with researchers from multiple Canadian universities, created the *We Deserve Chlamydia Care* study. Taking a disability justice and critical feminist approach, this work focused on the chlamydia testing and management needs of disabled, Indigenous, Black, and people of colour (IBPOC), Two-Spirit, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer (2S/LBTQ+) women and gender-diverse communities.

Between September 2024 and December 2025, 23 participants from diverse backgrounds were recruited across Ontario to share their experiences of seeking care through community-based research interviews. Their stories revealed the barriers they faced in accessing care and the strategies they used to receive care that suited their needs. A particular subtheme that emerged was the importance of self-advocacy in clinical sexual health spaces. This report highlights participants' experiences and recommendations for community members in navigating and reclaiming autonomy in these settings. Further information about the study and findings can be found on the CBRC website.

Self-Advocacy Experiences

Across interviews, participants described self-advocacy as a strategy they used in the face of systemic marginalization and/or dismissal by providers in order to receive the care they needed. For example, these participants described being primed to fight for care, either due to prior discrimination or experiences of being disregarded:

> *"I think I'm just so used to advocating. And so when it comes to my vision, I've unfortunately had to deal with some ableism at work before. And it's made me very fiery, so I speak up quite a bit if I'm having issues."*
>
> *"Yeah, I mean, the challenge, again, was feeling like I had to advocate for myself when I was already, frankly young and uncomfortable in general. It felt extra hard. Not understanding why I was taken less seriously. So that comes back to the advocacy piece…"*

For this Black participant, advocacy was further complicated by anti-Black stereotypes, requiring them to balance speaking up with the risk of being negatively perceived:

> *"…So that's another thing also when it comes to advocating for yourself as a Black woman, you don't want to seem like the angry Black woman… So it's very difficult to gauge what you can do and when. And then now that I'm at the age where I'm like… you're going to hear me. If you don't like what I have to say, that's fine. But you're going to test me for what I need to be tested for…"*

The two participants below described resistance from their providers after asking for tests their providers deemed unnecessary, explaining that they also had to push back on their providers' reluctance:

> *"I remember, for HIV testing, because they were saying that unless you have had a lot of unprotected sex or if you have had sexual relations with substance abuse and things like that, that is more likely for you to be put at risk for HIV, but I still wanted to get tested. So I do remember having to really push for that."*
>
> *"…I got pushback for asking for testing […]it wasn't until I asked for something that I found out that they don't do it both at once unless you push for it… I think that maybe was something that was what I had to push for because they were like, 'well, you don't… Why?' And I said, because I think I need it, so can we please do it?… But yeah, they've given it to me, but maybe after just a little prodding, poking."*

Advice for Community: Getting the Chlamydia Care You Deserve

The interview guide for this study was designed to not only document experiences, but to also gather recommendations from participants for community members navigating access to chlamydia care. Participants shared various strategies such as preparing in advance for appointments, being firm while advocating for oneself, and preparing for pushback:

Plan in Advance

> *"You really have to queue up and know exactly what you want to say because even their time is limited…"*
>
> *"Take a moment, write down questions, concerns before you go into an appointment. In terms of race or gender, unfortunately, advocate for yourself…"*
>
> *"I think actually just, you know, doing a little bit of your own research beforehand just because of how everything is set up and having maybe some questions prepared for when you go in and not really letting the doctor end the appointment before you're happy with the questions that you have and make sure you have the answers."*

Be Firm in Your Advocacy

> *"But I was like, you have to go in and be firm. That thing of, don't beat around the bush, go and say, I want this. And if they don't give that to you, call them out on it. Be like, 'I want this for my health. Why aren't you giving it to me? I need this'…"*
>
> *"Honestly, just advocate, advocate, advocate for yourself. Whether you think it's mild testing or minimal, even if they give you the same testing over and over again, I would say just advice is to make sure when you know what you're going in for and stick to that plan. Don't let them persuade you into not getting the help that you need or that you want, I would say. Don't let them talk you out of care. Yeah, don't let them talk you out of care… You have the option to tell them, if you're denying me this, you need to report it. So try to remember those things and go from there."*
>
> *"I think for those of us who are neurodivergent, we need to make their lives difficult. I think that we need to leverage all the AODA and disability rights that we have and make sure that they follow it."*

Stay Informed

> *"…Well, I guess I would say, like, yeah, definitely just remain as informed and, as optimistic and, not that you should have to advocate for yourself, but, if it comes to that, that's definitely an important thing. If you feel comfortable to do that…"*
>
> *"It's okay to ask all the questions. No question is a dumb question. Young or old, we're still all learning. That is amplifying the pride in self-care, the encouragement of self-care…"*

Prepare for Pushback

> *"I would say gear up for some resistance. You might have to just make that decision for yourself, whether you're comfortable with standing your ground and saying that that is what you need without disclosing whatever you don't want to disclose, or do you want to pass on it because you don't want to deal with that?… But I think it's just good to mentally prepare before you go in."*

Moving Forward

This report provided a subset of findings on the experiences of disabled IBPOC, 2S/LBTQ+ women and gender-diverse communities accessing chlamydia care in Ontario. For many of our participants, self-advocacy was a means of reclaiming autonomy and, at times, a necessity for receiving care. Navigating systems that are not built for many communities can be frustrating, but there are ways to take charge of one's sexual health. Plan in advance for appointments, ask questions, and be assertive when seeking the care you need.

Photos from ***Disabled and Here***