



**Minister of Canadian Heritage, House of Commons  
Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0A6**

**Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Canada (NGC)  
380 Sussex Dr, Ottawa, ON K1N 9N4**

March 6th 2017

Dear Minister Mélanie Joly and the NGC Board of Trustees,

Trans Health Information Ottawa (THIO) strongly opposes the National Gallery of Canada (NGC)'s decision to host Jordan B. Peterson for tomorrow's NGC event on the psychology of creativity. Peterson is known as an outspoken opponent of transgender rights. THIO believes it is a harmful and grave misstep for our national art institution to host, and thereby tacitly endorse, a public figure known for his intolerance and lack of respect for the lived experiences of others.

THIO is a grassroots project that seeks to remove barriers to healthcare for trans, Two Spirit and gender diverse people living in Ottawa and surrounding counties. Our communities have the same legal right as others to access publicly funded services, from drop-in clinics to hospitals. However, it is well known that our healthcare experiences and related health outcomes are worse than the general population. Both research evidence and community wisdom point to the same explanations for these health inequities:

- We don't feel welcome and therefore avoid interactions with healthcare providers;
- Our very existence and our routine healthcare needs are often denied by federally and provincially funded institutions.

Our job at THIO is to push these publicly funded institutions for accountability and to work toward creating culturally competent and culturally safe healthcare environments for all. **So if THIO is focused on health, why make a statement on art programming?** Art is a public good and is well known to play a positive role in both individual and community health. Access to and participation in art is associated with longevity, improved mental health, and a decreased sense of social isolation. To this end, trans, Two Spirit and gender diverse people deserve equitable access to publicly funded cultural institutions- as an end in itself and as a social determinant of health (i.e. culture, social environments). Unfortunately, as with healthcare settings, we are often made to feel unwelcome in art institutions especially when our existence is denied by these institutions and their special guests.

If the NGC aligns with Peterson, it risks alienating the most vulnerable communities in our society whose health and wellbeing could benefit from the NGC's outreach, training and education programs. Canada is also home to well respected professional artists who are trans, Two Spirit and gender diverse. To honour Peterson with an invitation to speak at the NGC communicates that our works, our dignity, and our human rights are less important than his status as a venerated NGC guest. While the NGC and its programs will still be formally available to people in our communities, the decision to include Peterson in tomorrow's event will impact our sense of belonging as a valued part of Canada's heritage and cultural life.



Similar to the health sector, mainstream arts spaces are known to have trouble reaching, engaging, welcoming and reflecting marginalized communities. This trouble connecting with key groups of Canadians is not about formal access to art galleries but about meaningful access to art and art spaces; the solution to this disconnect lies in programming and exhibition choices. Bringing Peterson to the NGC is a programming choice that is divisive and that excludes many of us from participation. While private galleries may not have an obligation to be broadly representative and inclusive, the NGC is a national institution with social and ethical responsibilities related to its corporate citizenship. The NGC states in its own corporate documents that it *“provides Canadians with a sense of identity and pride in Canada’s rich visual arts heritage by making art accessible, meaningful, and vital to diverse audiences of all ages.”* The NGC also notes that its exhibitions and programs are responsive to the changing face of Canada and to the needs of its culturally broad audience. It does so by highlighting a commitment to youth, Indigenous Canadians, people with disabilities, and other groups with lower rates of museum attendance.

When the NGC promotes a public figure and educator who has spread misinformation about minorities and who has discriminated against marginalized students at his own institution (University of Toronto), we believe it is in breach of its own values. Further, it demonstrates that the NGC has lapsed in its stewardship role with regard to accommodation, diversity and access. **In the interest of all Canadians and NGC visitors, we urge the NGC to remove Jordan B. Peterson from tomorrow’s event.**

Sincerely,

Rika Moorhouse, Community Organizer, THIO  
Serena Rivard, Community Organizer, THIO  
Beck Hood, Community Organizer, THIO  
Talia Johnson, Community Organizer, THIO

(cc) Yasir Naqvi, MPP  
(cc) City Councillor Catherine McKenney  
(cc) City Councillor Mathieu Fleury