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CPATH Statement on Access to Gender-Affirming Surgeries in Canada

The Canadian Professional Association for Transgender Health (CPATH) is Canada's national interdisciplinary professional association dedicated to advancing the health, rights, and well-being of trans and gender-diverse people. Our membership includes physicians, nurses, psychologists, social workers, speech-language pathologists, researchers, allied health professionals, and community-based leaders. Together, we represent the broadest national body of clinical, academic, and lived-experience expertise in transgender health care.

CPATH affirms that access to comprehensive gender-affirming health care, including gender-affirming surgeries, is an essential component of evidence-based, patient-centred, and ethically grounded care for transgender and gender-diverse people. This position aligns with the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) *Standards of Care, Version 8*, which reflect decades of clinical experience, peer-reviewed research, and international consensus on best practices in transgender health.¹

Gender-affirming surgeries are not cosmetic services. For many trans and gender-diverse people, surgical interventions are critical to reducing gender dysphoria, supporting safety and social functioning, and improving mental health and overall quality of life. These interventions may include, but are not limited to, chest and breast surgeries, genital surgeries, facial procedures, body contouring, voice-related interventions, and hair-related procedures. The medical necessity of any particular intervention varies between individuals and must be determined through individualized, collaborative clinical assessment that centres the patient's goals, anatomy, social context, and lived experience.

CPATH strongly supports health policies that recognize and respond to the diverse and individualized health care needs of transgender people. There is no single or linear pathway of gender transition, and no uniform set of interventions that is appropriate for all individuals. For some individuals, certain surgeries may be essential to safety, social functioning, mental health, and quality of life; for others, those same interventions may not be necessary. Effective coverage frameworks must therefore be sufficiently broad and flexible to accommodate this diversity and to recognize that medical necessity varies across individuals and gender journeys. Arbitrary exclusions of specific procedures or rigid sequencing requirements undermine patient-centred care and contribute to inequitable health outcomes.

Across Canada, access to gender-affirming surgeries remains highly variable, with documented differences in publicly funded coverage, eligibility criteria,



and approval processes between provinces and territories.²³ In many jurisdictions, coverage is limited to a narrow subset of procedures or constrained by rigid eligibility criteria that do not reflect current clinical standards, as documented in Canadian peer-reviewed policy and clinical literature.⁴ This patchwork of coverage places disproportionate burdens on trans and gender-diverse people, compounds existing health and social disparities, and creates barriers for clinicians attempting to provide evidence-based care. The result is inequitable access to medically necessary treatment, prolonged distress, and preventable harms. Partial or selective adoption of current clinical standards undermines both patient outcomes and health system equity.

CPATH recognizes Prince Edward Island and the Yukon as Canadian jurisdictions that demonstrate the feasibility of broad, inclusive public coverage for gender-affirming surgeries. Their approaches recognize gender-affirming surgical care as medically necessary, rely on individualized clinical determination of medical necessity, and avoid overly restrictive or prescriptive procedure lists. These models reflect contemporary standards of care and demonstrate that broad, inclusive coverage can be implemented within publicly funded health system frameworks.

CPATH also recognizes and supports provincial and territorial efforts to develop regional surgical expertise and establish centres of excellence that provide gender-affirming surgical care closer to home. Expanding local capacity is an important step toward improving access and continuity of care.

At the same time, consistent with the *WPATH Standards of Care, Version 8*, access to gender-affirming surgery must remain individualized and responsive to patient needs and goals. Many procedures involve multiple surgical techniques, each requiring distinct expertise and experience. No single centre can reasonably be expected to offer the full range of procedures or approaches required to meet the diverse needs of transgender people.

Accordingly, coverage frameworks should allow access to out-of-province, territorial, or international surgical options when clinically appropriate or when the desired expertise is not locally available. Maintaining flexibility in referral pathways helps prevent service bottlenecks, mitigate prolonged wait times, and support timely access to medically necessary care.

Ensuring equitable access to gender-affirming surgeries aligns with core Canadian values of dignity, equality, and fairness in health care. Barriers to access disproportionately affect already marginalized populations and limit full participation in education, employment, family life, and community. By contrast, timely access to comprehensive gender-affirming care is associated with meaningful improvements in mental health, reductions in suicidality and psychological distress, enhanced social participation, and improved overall well-being.⁵

From a policy perspective, broad and flexible coverage frameworks support coherent, defensible, and equitable decision-making. Policies grounded in individualized medical necessity reduce administrative burden, limit inconsistent adjudication, and minimize reliance on ad hoc exceptions or appeals. Such frameworks can evolve alongside clinical evidence and remain resilient under ethical, equity, and public-interest scrutiny.

CPATH encourages provincial and territorial governments, health authorities, and public insurers to pursue the broadest possible coverage of gender-affirming surgeries consistent with the WPATH



Standards of Care, Version 8, and principles of medical necessity. Improving coverage requires adoption of shared principles that prioritize breadth, flexibility, clinical expertise, and patient-centred determination of need within each jurisdiction's legislative and fiscal context.

Policies should be designed to:

- Recognize gender-affirming surgeries as medically necessary health care
- Support individualized determinations of medical necessity
- Avoid arbitrary exclusions of specific procedures
- Reduce administrative and structural barriers to care
- Promote equity across jurisdictions

CPATH remains committed to working collaboratively with governments, clinicians, insurers, community organizations, and trans and gender-diverse people to advance policies that promote health equity, respect autonomy and dignity, and ensure access to the comprehensive gender-affirming care individuals require to thrive.

References

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