

Hospital and Provincial Health Services Division

PHSA Supplemental Note – Trans Care BC

Gender Affirming Care – Overarching Care Landscape

Current Issues: Gender-affirming care in BC is individualized and occurs through varied pathways-building up care pathways and hubs is an ongoing effort.

Care Pathway

- In BC, care for trans and gender diverse people is individualized and generally follows guidance in the WPATH Standard of Care V8 (2022).
- Transition-related medical interventions: Depending on the client’s needs and goals, the patient may begin with assessment for hormone therapy, and then may progress to surgery and post-operative care.
- Hormone care options are available in a range of care settings. GPs and NPs trained in hormone assessment, initiation and maintenance, as well as endocrinologists, provide this care in BC. Multi-disciplinary care is best for wraparound support yet is not fulsomely available.
- Funded gender-affirming surgeries in BC include, chest and breast surgeries (upper surgeries), gonadectomy surgeries and genital reconstruction surgeries (lower surgeries).
- Criteria and funding for out-of-province/out-of-country gender-affirming surgeries, is overseen by Medical Services Plan (MSP).
- The Gender Surgery Program is operated by Vancouver Coastal Health and funded by Trans Care BC, PHSA.
- On February 15, 2023, Trans Care BC aligned gender-affirming surgical care processes with the new WPATH Standard of Care V8 (2022) reducing barriers for patients seeking gender-affirming surgery. Key changes include:
 - Only one surgical assessment, instead of two, is now advised for all gender-affirming genital surgeries.
 - A former ‘congruent living’ requirement was removed.
 - The length of recommended hormone therapy prior to genital surgeries for adults, if indicated, was reduced from one year to six months.
- Since the inception of Trans Care BC, the volume of upper body surgeries (chest and breast) has increased. Wait times have been reduced over time.
 - In the last couple of years there has been a plateauing of demand. There are approximately 650 referrals into the central waitlist for chest and breast surgeries annually.
- Trans Care BC Health Navigators provide information about care pathways and steps in gender-affirming care processes for clients, loved ones and care providers. In 2022-2023, TCBC health navigators had over 6,000 interactions with community members, family members, loved ones and care providers to help people find care as close to home as possible. This is an 18% increase from 5,184 interactions in 2021-2022.

Hospital and Provincial Health Services Division

- Trans Care BC's voice feminization program, Changing Keys, was established in 2004. This intensive speech and voice training program is the only publicly funded program of its kind in B.C. that supports trans women with feminizing their speech.
 - In 2022-2023, 56 clients completed the program through virtual one-on-one sessions and virtual group sessions.
 - By Feb 2024, 46 clients have completed the program through virtual one-on-one sessions and virtual group sessions during the 2023-2024 fiscal year.
 - Trans Care continues to review this resource to try to reduce wait time and expand access to those with voice goals that aren't suited to the Changing Keys modality.

Issues Management Actions/Initiatives Undertaken and Timeline:

- An ongoing challenge has been supporting equitable access to care for those who are feminizing (trans women). Because estrogen therapy often does not net adequate feminization, trans women tend to require more surgery. Facial feminization and feminizing hair removal is not funded in BC but is commonly required. This is an out-of-pocket expense for many. These procedures were scoped and costed by TCBC (2016-17) via business case to MOH but not approved.
- Timely access to gender-affirming mental health and counselling support is a known gap in care. TCBC's small community grants funds some of this support but more is needed.
- Further progress has been made on development of care pathways with a goal of bringing care closer to home, including:
 - Funding and supporting a network of community-based psychosocial, mental health and peer support providers and groups.
 - Enhancing the health navigator team; building and maintaining an inventory of gender-affirming care options.
 - Creating new clinical tools, educational resources and training new care providers.
 - Conducting a surgical client experience survey to monitor chest and breast surgery experience. Applying learnings to improve experience over time.
 - Continuing to streamline and improve access to genital surgeries, bringing this care closer to home.

Partners Engaged: Trans Care BC's work is all partnership based. Key partners related to the overarching care landscape are varied and include: Regional health authorities, First Nations Health Authority, Foundry BC, Divisions of Family Practice, fee-for-service care providers, BC Children's Hospital, BCCDC, and many community-based non-profit providers.

Financial Implications: Trans Care BC's current budget from MOH is \$6.8M with \$2.4M of this budget being for the VCH Gender Surgery Program

Hospital and Provincial Health Services Division

PHSA Supplemental Note – Trans Care BC

Gender Affirming Care – Upper Surgery

Current Issues: This note describes the Trans Care BC centralised upper surgery waitlist, related surgical volumes and quality improvement efforts underway.

Central Waitlist Background and Current state

- As of January 1, 2018, the central waitlist for publicly funded gender-affirming upper surgeries moved from a Vancouver Coastal Health surgeon's office to Trans Care BC (under PHSA).
- Trans Care BC has streamlined the surgical referral process. The pooled waitlist approach allows patients to select the first available surgeon (if a client does not have a preference for a specific surgeon) and has improved communication with patients, referring providers and surgeons.
- 12 surgeons receive referrals from the Trans Care BC pooled waitlist and perform gender-affirming upper surgeries in Abbotsford, Burnaby, Campbell River, New Westminster, Port Moody, Prince George, Quesnel, Smithers, Surrey, Squamish, Vancouver, North Vancouver, and Victoria.
- Trans Care BC works collaboratively with the surgeons and health care leaders associated with the pooled waitlist to review and make improvements to it.
- Currently the volume of upper surgeries and wait times are disparate depending on the region, surgeons' capacity, and practice patterns. This is under review by Trans BC, in partnership with the surgeons, with an aim to improve consistency and availability of upper surgeries regionally so that care can be accessed closer to home for those outside the Lower Mainland
- There was steady increase in demand for upper surgeries the first few years that Trans Care BC operated the waitlist. In the last couple of years there has been a plateauing of demand. There are approximately 650 referrals into the central waitlist for chest and breast surgeries annually.
- In 2022-2023, there were 660 gender-affirming chest and breast surgeries completed by 15 surgeons in all 5 health authorities.
- Percentage of chest and breast surgeries completed within 26-week target:

Fiscal Year	% of chest surgeries completed within 26-week target and total # of surgeries	% of breast construction surgeries completed within 26-week target and total # of surgeries
2018 – 2019	72% (200 surgeries)	67% (24 surgeries)
2019 – 2020	68% (389 surgeries)	70% (40 surgeries)
2020 – 2021	79% (597 surgeries)	62% (39 surgeries)
2021 – 2022	91% (578 surgeries)	87% (69 surgeries)
2022 – 2023	95% (582 surgeries)	83% (78 surgeries)
2023 – 2024 (to end of P10)	93% (502 surgeries)	85% (33 surgeries)

3 Last Revised: February 22nd, 2024

Hospital and Provincial Health Services Division

Issues Management Actions/Initiatives Undertaken and Timeline:

- Work is underway with MSP and surgeons to review the criteria for breast surgeries to improve access. [s. 13](#)
- The structure and function of the upper surgery centralised waitlist is under review [s. 13](#)
- One surgeon operating in Fraser Health, Dr. Dan McKee, has significantly shorter wait times and does more of these procedures than any other surgeon working from the pooled waitlist. [s. 13](#)

Partners Engaged:

Regional health authority surgical directors, MSP and Tariff Committee, Surgeons participating in the upper surgery waitlist, Patients (via patient experience survey), surgical assessors, Primary care providers (source of referrals).

Financial Implications: These procedures are funded through MSP. Volumes have increased over time; this will have had an impact on billings. The waitlist coordination is funded through the core budget of Trans Care BC.

Hospital and Provincial Health Services Division

PHSA Supplemental Note – Trans Care BC

Gender Affirming Care – Lower Surgery

Current Issues: This note describes the launch and function of the Gender Surgery Program at VCH.

Background:

- Historically patients have travelled to Montreal, Quebec or to the USA for gender-affirming genital reconstruction surgeries. These procedures are now offered in Vancouver via the VCH Gender Surgery Program BC, reducing the need for out-of-province surgical care.
- The program is funded through Trans Care BC and launched in fall 2019, with the support of Trans Care BC and the Ministry of Health, Vancouver Coastal Health. This made B.C. the first in Canada to offer all gender-affirming genital surgeries in the public system of care.
- A data and reporting clean-up is happening with MOH/PHSA and VCH to better track these procedures. To-date, the VCH Gender Surgery Program has fully implemented the program which offers vaginoplasty, metaoidioplasty and phalloplasty surgeries. Current program statistics:¹
 - In 2022-2023, 118 cases were completed.
 - In 2023-2024 FY 103 cases have been completed to date as of the end of P10.
- As a part of the rollout of this new program, the Ministry of Health funded medically necessary, pre-surgical hair removal which is a prerequisite for some gender-affirming genital surgeries. Trans Care BC is responsible for funding and contracting these hair removal providers. In 2023/2024 there are currently 17 sites offering hair removal for gender-affirming surgeries, with a total of 26 providers.

Issues Management Actions/Initiatives Undertaken and Timeline:

- Wait times for consult for this new program and patient engagement has been a concern. The VCH Gender Surgery program continues to work on improving access and capacity.
 - The program recently implemented a Waitlist Coordinator role to assist with communication with patients and access to information about the program.
- The VCH GSP needs to increase volumes to keep up with current demand ^{s. 13}

Partners Engaged: VCH surgical directors and operational leadership, Patients (via client experience survey), Surgeons, surgical assessors, Primary care providers (source of referrals), Hair removal providers

Financial Implications: Further investment is needed to scale up program – current confirmed budget for the VCH GSP is 2.4 million with 300,000 at TCBC for medically necessary, pre-surgical hair removal services. This year is projected to be a full spend of this budget for the first time since program began.

¹ There are known reporting discrepancies between Vancouver Coastal Health and Surgical Patient Registry (SPR) data. A collaborative effort is underway between Ministry of Health, VCH and Trans Care BC to address this issue by standardizing reporting.

Hospital and Provincial Health Services Division

PHSA Supplemental Note – Trans Care BC

Gender Affirming Care – Care for Children and Youth

Current Issues: This note describes population-specific issues regarding the care of trans, Two-Spirit and non-binary (TTNB) children and youth.

Background:

- Trans, Two-Spirit and non-binary (TTNB) children, youth and their families/supportive adults are a population that TCBC has focused on due to the unique care needs and historical and current gaps in service.
- Over time, an increasing number of young people have presented for care with a range of care needs, from basic to more complex.
- TTNB children, youth and their families often require more psychosocial support services such as counselling and peer support. For children, youth and families, most counselling remains private pay; however, some free or low-cost options exist through services such as Foundry, Child and Youth Mental Health and some community services. Gender-affirming competency differs from site-to-site.
- Youth in the care of the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) and engaged in MCFD services are of particular concern for our PHSA trans health programs as these individuals often face additional barriers to wellness and care.
- Ideally, the care needs of TTNB children are met in a place-based way with stepped care pathways in place.
- Only some TTNB youth require specialized services, but for many, basic place-based resources skilled at engaging this population still don't exist.
- There are many strengths to be built on around B.C., and Trans Care BC is well positioned to continue supporting system improvements; however, this is a growing population and many existing services are under-resourced.
- For most youth, there is no medical intervention needed, just social support.
- For some, timely access to puberty blockers at the time of puberty onset is critical.
 - Currently, it is a challenge to access blockers around BC.
- Assessment and timely access to care for blockers, hormone therapy and other future medical interventions for trans youth requires more resource and is difficult to access for many youth and families.

Trans Care BC work:

Trans Care BC has continuously worked on improvements to care for TTNB children, youth and their families/caregivers. Some key aspects of the work are:

- **Health Navigation:** For children, youth and families seeking mental health supports, the Trans Care BC Health Navigation team can provide information about public and private mental health resources in their area. This team offers support to bridge parents, caregivers and youth to gender-affirming resources. Additionally, this team maintains a real-time inventory of available care access points.
- **Advisory work:** Trans Care BC continuously seeks feedback on key aspects of program-work related to children, youth, and their families/caregivers. The program hosts a Clinical Advisory Group and has a growing list of community and parent/caregiver advisors with lived experience who inform program work and development.

Hospital and Provincial Health Services Division

- **Support groups:** Stemming from consultation with community, Trans Care BC created a funded network of community-based, peer-driven support groups, some in partnership with mental health providers. Of the 35 funded groups:
 - 23 support youth
 - 10 support children
 - 18 support families/caregivers (some support all 3 cohorts)
- **Online education:** Creation of online and virtual courses and educational opportunities:²
 - Indigenous Gender Diversity: Creating Culturally Relevant and Gender-affirming services E-learning module (3 hours);
 - Supporting Gender Creative Children and their Families E-learning module (90 min);
 - Live and advanced practice trainings on clinical practice with trans, gender diverse and Two-Spirit youth;
 - Piloted Project ECHO in May 2023: This CME accredited, successful pilot will be adapted and offered routinely in order to build more capacity for community care; a youth focus will be integrated into future offerings;
 - In June 2023, Trans Care BC and BCCH piloted a new, CME-accredited, advanced practice and live training for pediatricians and adolescent medicine providers to teach gender-affirming care of pubescent youth and puberty blockers;
 - Weekly Clinical Mentorship Call for providers who are supporting TTNB people with rotating mentors including child and youth experts, autism care experts;
 - Developed a revised live training in 2022 for mental health and counselling providers focused on supporting youth and families. This was offered to MCFD and other teams online three times in 2022-2023.

Issues Management Actions/Initiatives Undertaken and Timeline:

- Trans Care BC is currently working on activities within a new strategic action plan that aims to close key gaps in gender-affirming care via active partnerships. Most aspects of the strategic action plan will positively impact children, youth and families.
- The Right to Thrive report released by the Child and Youth Representative BC notes significant challenges for TTNB youth engaged in MCFD services. Cross Ministry work is underway to define principles and an action plan to remedy concerns.

Partners Engaged: Foundry BC, Regional health authorities and First Nations Health Authority, BC Children's Hospital, CYMH Community services, Community based peer support groups for TTNB youth, TCBC Health Navigation team, community advisors, non-profit community partners and agencies.

Financial Implications: There is work to do to quantify resource needs for this population. Because young people cross so many Ministries, cross-Ministry collaboration is required to continue to improve access to care and support.

² Please see information relating to educational offerings in the final section of this document.

Hospital and Provincial Health Services Division

PHSA Supplemental Note – Trans Care BC

Gender Affirming Care – Partnerships, Networks and Education

Current Issues: This note overviews key partnerships, networks and educational activities.

Background:

Educational Resource Development

- Since 2016, Trans Care BC has developed in-person, live and asynchronous E-Learning trainings and educational resources through needs assessment, review, engagement with partners, and input from subject matter experts from a range of backgrounds.
 - As of P10 2024, more than 50,000 registrants completed TCBC’s Introduction to Gender Diversity course.
 - TCBC continues to offer the well-attended, weekly, noon-hour, virtual Clinical Mentorship Call with numerous new mentors added to the rotation from a broad range of disciplines and practice settings.
 - On March 31, 2022, a new Indigenous Gender Diversity course was launched with more than 3,300 registrants signing up to complete the course, to-date.
- In late-March 2022, Trans Care BC and BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) worked in partnership to share a first-of-its-kind Hormone Injection Supplies Toolkit resource.

Health Canada Funding

- In April 2022, Trans Care BC was awarded \$3.2M from the Sexual and Reproductive Health Fund (federal government) to develop an enhanced suite of educational tools and resources for care providers, patients and their supporters.
 - This funding was enhanced, through an amendment, with an additional \$1.8M in March 2022 to add additional content and communication resources to amplify aspects of the project that will be highest impact.
 - In collaboration with many organizational partners, a learning and communications campaign focussed on clarifying care and support needs for trans, Two-Spirit and non-binary (TTNB) and parents/caregivers, will be launched in Spring 2024. Tools and resources to teach care providers and parents/caregivers about how to be alert to mis and disinformation presently circulating about gender-affirming care will be a part of the campaign.
 - The enhanced suite of educational tools and resources include:
 - A new Learning Management System (LMS) has been developed alongside a suite of new asynchronous E-learning modules and tools. The new Learning Management System ‘soft-launched’ as of February 2023.
 - a live evidence-based clinical educational program (Project ECHO); the successful 2023 ECHO pilot has been expanded with over 130 learners currently enrolled (as of P10) in two streams of education over a twelve-month period.
 - a new program website created through extensive user experience research with

8 Last Revised: February 22nd, 2024

