

North Carolina Psychological Association
Information on Health Care for Transgender Minors
April 2023

Decisions about whether to seek gender-affirming care, and what specific services to utilize, must be made between a provider, patient, and the patient’s parents or guardians. Such decisions are relative to the youth’s individual clinical situation. Gender-affirming care typically include steps toward social transition, and may include treatments to temporarily postpone puberty, and in some instances, hormone replacement therapy (Coleman et al., 2022). Rather than allow flexibility to account for the varying needs of individuals, certain bills of the North Carolina General Assembly adopt a “one size fits all” approach by categorically criminalizing the recommendation or provision of appropriate gender-affirming care.

In this session of the General Assembly, there are multiple bills that would, if enacted, restrict, or ban outright medical, surgical, and mental health care for transgender minors (usually called “gender-affirming care”). Various bills would impose different restrictions on other health care professionals (not just psychologists) and could modify existing expectations of confidentiality between youth and various professionals at school and in the health care setting. Some would even allow “conversion therapy” (SAMSHA, 2015) by prohibiting “any penalty, or take any adverse action against any individual who gives or receives counsel, advice, guidance, or any other speech or communication, whether described as therapy or provided for a fee, consistent with conscience or religious belief.” (HB 786 Youth Health Protection Act.)

Science on Gender, Sex and Gender-Affirming Care

1. The terms "gender" and "sex" do not mean the same thing, and to imply so or regard one term as lesser, is to misrepresent decades of research in multiple fields. **Gender or gender identity “refers to a person’s basic sense of being male, female, or of indeterminate sex”;** *every person has a gender identity* (American Psychological Association, 2009).
2. The World Professional Association for Transgender Health has found gender transitions and related care to be accepted, ethical medical practice and effective treatment when properly indicated and performed as provided by their Standards of Care (Coleman et al., 2022).
3. Supportive evidence-based interventions—including but not limited to mental health counseling, social transition support, and gender-affirming hormone therapy—greatly improve mental health outcomes for transgender youth (APA 2015).
4. Statements from the American Psychological Association, American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, American Medical Association, American Academy of Family Physicians, American Academy of Pediatrics, and the Endocrine Society all support both non-discrimination and comprehensive care for transgender minors.
5. Foregoing gender-affirming care can have tragic consequences. Transgender youth experience disproportionate levels of violence and bullying. Transgender youth are also more likely to feel less safe at school than cisgender youth, that is youth whose gender identity is consistent with their assigned sex at birth (Day et al., 2018). **Access to gender-affirming care has a positive correlation with the mental health of transgender youth, and lowers their risk of suicide** (Bauer et al., 2015).

Adverse Effects of Preventing Gender-Affirming Care

1. As a result of stigma, rejection, and oppressive laws, transgender and gender non-conforming (TGNC) people experience enormous amounts of psychological turmoil.
 - a. **98% of trans women report traumatic experiences, 91% report multiple events, and 72% of victims of hate crimes in the US are trans women.**
 - b. **LGBTQ youth who are rejected by their families are 9 times more likely to attempt suicide than those who are accepted by their families** (Ryan et al.,

- 2009); whereas, suicide attempts decrease by 40% for LGBTQ youth who report having at least one accepting adult in their lives (The Trevor Project, 2019).
- c. Transgender young people experience extraordinary rates of bullying, harassment, and violence. For example, the GLSEN 2019 National School Climate Survey found that **91.8% of LGBTQ+ students had heard negative remarks about gender expression and 87.4% heard negative remarks specifically about transgender people** (Kosciw et al., 2020).
 - d. According to GLSEN’s data, **about a quarter of LGBTQ+ high school students have been physically harassed due to their gender identity or expression and about 9% were physically assaulted** due to their gender identity or expression.
 1. According to the Trevor Project’s National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health 2020, **transgender and non-binary youth who have their pronouns respected by others and/or have access to affirming services and resources attempted suicide at approximately half the rate of those who did not have the same support or access to affirming resources.**

The Harm of Gender Identity Change Efforts

1. All major national mental health organizations have expressed concerns about therapies promoted to modify gender identity and gender expression.
2. **To date, no scientifically adequate research shows that therapy aimed at changing gender identity or gender expression (sometimes called reparative or conversion therapy) is safe or effective.**
3. The American Psychological Association adopted a resolution opposing efforts to change people’s gender identity, citing scientific research showing that such actions may be harmful. The [Resolution on Gender Identity Change Efforts \(PDF, 105KB\)](#) emphasizes that “individuals who have experienced pressure or coercion to conform to their sex assigned at birth or therapy that was biased toward conformity to one’s assigned sex at birth have reported harm resulting from these experiences, such as emotional distress, loss of relationships, and low self-worth” (APA, 2021).
4. Gender identity change efforts can have a negative impact on young people. In one study of a large online sample of young people in the LGBTQ community, those who experienced such change efforts were significantly more likely to report having attempted suicide, and having done so more than once, than those who did not have such experience (APA, 2021).
5. **A requirement that any expression of gender non-conformity, or to essentially “out” youth by public employees, such as teachers, administrators, and counselors, is unrealistic and dangerous.** There are significant risks to the physical and mental health of transgender and non-binary youth when their gender identity is shared to others without their consent (Fish et al., 2020; Kosciw et al., 2020).

The North Carolina Psychological Association (NCPA), the primary professional association for psychologists in NC, advocates for psychology as a science, a profession, and a means of promoting human welfare. NCPA is comprised of over 1,000 members and represents diverse opinions about various social issues and works from a common foundation of research that describes the complexity and diversity of people. NCPA also works from a set of ethical principles that include Beneficence and Nonmaleficence, Integrity, Justice and Respect for People’s Rights and Dignity (APA, 2017).

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