

Position Statement on Access to Care for Transgender and Gender Variant Individuals

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"Policy documents are approved by the APA Assembly and Board of Trustees...These are...position statements that define APA official policy on specific subjects..." – *APA Operations Manual*.

Issue: Significant and long-standing medical and psychiatric literature exists that demonstrates clear benefits of medical and surgical interventions to assist gender variant individuals seeking transition. However, private and public insurers often do not offer, or may specifically exclude, coverage for medically necessary treatments for gender transition. Access to medical care (both medical and surgical) positively impacts the mental health of transgender and gender variant individuals.

The APA's vision statement includes the phrase: "Its vision is a society that has available, accessible quality psychiatric diagnosis and treatment," yet currently, transgender and gender variant individuals frequently lack available and accessible treatment. In addition, APA's values include the following points:

- best standards of clinical practice
- patient-focused treatment decisions
- scientifically established principles of treatment
- advocacy for patients

Transgender and gender variant individuals currently lack access to the best standards of clinical practice, frequently do not have the opportunity to pursue patient-focused treatment decisions, do not receive scientifically established treatment and could benefit significantly from APA's advocacy.

APA Position:

Therefore, the American Psychiatric Association:

1. **Recognizes that appropriately evaluated transgender and gender variant individuals can benefit greatly from medical and surgical gender transition treatments.**
2. **Advocates for removal of barriers to care and supports both public and private health insurance coverage for gender transition treatment.**
3. **Opposes categorical exclusions of coverage for such medically necessary treatment when prescribed by a physician.**

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Background to the Position Statement

Transgender and gender variant people are frequently denied medical, surgical and psychiatric care related to gender transition despite significant evidence that appropriately evaluated individuals benefit from such care. It is often asserted that the DSM (and ICD) diagnoses provide the only pathways to insurance reimbursement for transgender individuals seeking medical assistance. However, to date, the APA has issued no treatment guidelines for gender identity disorder (GID) in either children or adults. This omission is in contrast to an increasing proliferation of APA practice guidelines for other DSM diagnoses (1).

The absence of a formal APA opinion about treatment of a diagnosis of its own creation has contributed to an ongoing problem of many health care insurers and other third party payers claiming that hormonal treatment and sex reassignment surgery (SRS) are “experimental treatments,” “elective treatments,” or “not medically necessary,” and, therefore, not reimbursable or covered under most insurance plans. The lack of consistency in how a transgender condition is defined by some institutions further marginalizes these individuals based on their subjective, surgical and hormonal status (2). In addition, treatment is not always accessible to wards of governmental agencies, such as transgender and gender variant individuals in foster care and prison systems. In other words, the presence of the GID diagnosis in the DSM has not served its intended purpose of creating greater access to care--one of the major arguments for diagnostic retention (1).

Lack of access to care adversely impacts the mental health of transgender and gender variant people, and both hormonal and surgical treatment have been shown to be efficacious in these individuals (3-7). Practice guidelines have been developed based on peer-reviewed scientific studies and are published and available for clinicians to access (3, 8, 9). The American Medical Association and the American Psychological Association both have position statements stating the critical importance of access to care for transgender and gender variant individuals (10, 11).

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