

Medical Care & Comprehensive Support for Gender Expansive Youth

Job Aid



What is the current national landscape for transgender and gender expansive youth?

- 1 Transgender and gender expansive youth are currently the target of extreme scrutiny from both popular media and state legislatures. While half of the states in the US have laws or regulations that proactively protect transgender and gender expansive youth and prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and/or gender identity, it is also true that half of the states in the US have considered a ban on medical care for transgender youth over the last three years, and about one-third of the US states currently ban students from participating in sports consistent with their gender identity. Additionally, only seven states (not including Massachusetts) explicitly require LGBTQ inclusion in state curricular standards. Three states have banned students from using school facilities (bathrooms, locker rooms, field trip accommodations, etc.) that are consistent with their gender identity. All of this has a huge impact on transgender and gender expansive kids' mental and physical health and their ability to learn.

How does being LGBTQ affect health outcomes?

- 2 LGBTQ youth are more likely to have adverse mental and/or physical health outcomes, including higher levels of depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation and attempts, and substance use due to social rejection, bullying, lack of support from family/friends, and/or increased stigma and discrimination. LGBTQ youth may have poor school attendance and performance, and may withdraw from peers, teachers, and family members. Make sure you have a baseline for each of your students, and watch for changes in typical behaviors.

How does supporting gender expansive youth differ from supporting gender binary youth?

- 3 Supporting gender expansive youth is no different than supporting gender binary youth. School nurses are trained to look holistically at each and every student – to see all parts and layers of them, including their culture, identity, history, family, context, and gender identity, and treat and support them in any and every way possible.

What are some good ways to start supporting gender expansive youth?

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 - Ask students their chosen name and pronouns and consistently use them to show respect for who they are
 - Believe them – having a supportive adult decreases rates of mental illness/suicide and increases well-being
 - Create a culture of respect and support district-wide to ensure all students feel heard, valued, and safe
 - Review policies and handbooks to be sure they are consistent with the law and are non-discriminatory
 - Provide equal access to all programs, remove barriers to participation, and limit gendered activities
 - Maintain strict confidentiality about a student's assigned birth sex, name changes, and sexual orientation
 - Ensure students' access to the restroom and locker room that correspond to their respective gender identity
 - Research gender issues, and provide education and training for staff and families

How can I create a safe space in my clinic?

- 5 Safe spaces are co-constructed. The student will decide if they feel safe. Strive to create a place of humility that is free of judgement and staffed by people who are prepared and trained to have honest conversations about gender and sexuality. Don't assume pronouns, gender, or sexuality in your clinic. Use gender-neutral language, and always use correct names and pronouns. Help youth with social transitions and connection, and provide resources to external programs and services.

What is the three-step affirming model of healthcare?

6 Listening, responding with compassion, and paying attention

What if I make a mistake or incorrect assumption about gender?

7 Do – acknowledge, apologize, move on, be mindful. Don't – deny it, over apologize, dwell on it, repeat it.

Can a minor access gender-affirming medical care without parent/guardian consent?

8 The age of consent in Massachusetts is 18 for all purposes, including gender-affirming medical care. Children under age 18 require parent/guardian permission before receiving any medical treatment, except in very specific situations. Some condition-based exceptions exist (i.e., access to family planning services, HIV/STI services, substance use disorders, mental health services), however, gender-affirming medical care typically doesn't fall under those conditions. For children in state custody, DCF must give consent before a minor can receive gender-affirming medical care. Social workers can give consent for a youth in state custody to receive puberty blockers, but they must discuss hormone therapy with guardians.

What protections do providers have in Massachusetts?

9 Providing guideline concordant gender-affirming care to transgender and gender expansive youth is not illegal, and providers have explicit legal protections to providing this type of care in Massachusetts.

Under Chapter 127 of the Acts of 2022:

- Reproductive and gender-affirming healthcare is a right
- Patients, providers, and anyone providing aid accessing gender-affirming care cannot be criminalized
- Providers cannot have their licenses stripped or be fined for providing gender-affirming healthcare

Does insurance cover gender-affirming care in Massachusetts?

10 According to Insurance Nondiscrimination Bulletin 2014-03, with the current exception of self-insured plans, insurance claims technically can't be denied because they are for the treatment of gender dysphoria. Further, insurance companies can't deny care because of a conflicting gender marker (i.e., a transgender male cannot be denied a pap smear).

For minors, MassHealth covers puberty blockers, hormone therapy, gender-affirming speech therapy, and masculinizing top surgeries, but doesn't cover other gender-affirming surgeries (i.e., hysterectomies, vaginoplasties, etc.) or holistic gender-affirming care (i.e., long-term hair removal). MassHealth also covers home-based and community-based behavioral health services for members younger than 21.

What are some of the top issues for the transgender community in Massachusetts?

11 A community assessment of transgender people conducted by the Massachusetts Trans Political Coalition in 2019-2020 found that 72% of respondents had trouble with insurance coverage, 69% had difficulty locating knowledgeable providers, and 57% had issues accessing gender-affirming hormones and/or surgery.

For transgender minors, insurance barriers to coverage of gender-affirming care include: age criteria, prior authorization, non-matching documents, behavioral health letters, workforce/provider density issues, and wait lists for surgeons.

What is the Safe Schools Program for LGBTQ Students?

- 12** The Safe Schools Program for LGBTQ Students is a joint initiative between the MA Commission on LGBTQ Youth and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). They create policy at the state level, provide free training and technical assistance, and curricular resources to school districts across the state.

How do I start at gay straight alliance (GSA) or ally group at my school?

- 13**
1. Poll students
 2. Get an advisor
 3. Set meeting time/place
 4. Establish respectful rules
 5. Plan activities
 6. Use correct names and pronouns

What can I do to better advocate for LGBTQ youth?

- 14** When advocating for LGBTQ youth in a school setting:
- Talk to the student first to find out what kind of advocacy would be helpful to them specifically (i.e., administration, teachers, parents, fellow students)
 - Come prepared with evidence based resources – don't ask the student to educate you
 - Take advantage of district and state resources and programs
 - Remember that students' right to privacy is especially critical for transgender and gender expansive youth

When advocating broadly in the school setting:

- Add LGBTQ+ books to your library, and incorporate LGBTQ characters, people, examples into lesson plans
- De-gender health forms, and advocate for all school forms to allow for legal and preferred names
- Strive to integrate school records and information systems so they all reflect students' preferred names (EHR, class rosters, ID cards, lunchroom computer systems, etc.)
- Don't tolerate bullying by students or staff
- Train teachers, staff, and administrators to support LGBTQ students and families, and ask that they use and respect students' preferred names and pronouns
- Assign at least one bathroom as gender neutral in your school
- Clearly post your school's non-discrimination policy
- Help your school start a GSA if they don't have one already

When advocating at the state and national level:

- Get involved in ballot measures
- Support progressive candidates and organizations
- Remember to vote
- Seek out organizations involved in advocacy (Human Rights Campaign, GLAAD, National Center for Trans Equality, Transgender Law Center, Lambda Legal, Trans POC Coalition, GLSEN)

What are some LGBTQ-supportive youth programs and resources in Massachusetts?

- 15**
- Gender Spectrum
 - GLSEN
 - Trans Student Educational Resources
 - Human Rights Campaign (*Schools in Transition: A Guide for Supporting Transgender Students in K-12 Schools*)
 - PFLAG
 - AGLY Network
 - Out MetroWest
 - Suicide/support hotlines (i.e., Trevor Project and Trans Lifeline)
 - Planned Parenthood (provider lists)
 - New England Transgender Health Consortium (provider lists)
 - National LGBTQIA+ Health Education Center's Gender Affirming Pediatric Care Toolkit