

Health Consumers Queensland (HCQ) is the peak organisation representing the interests of health consumers and carers in the state. HCQ is a not-for-profit organisation and a registered health promotion charity, and we believe in improving health outcomes for people in Queensland.

Our priority focus is on consumer engagement that influences and leads health improvements and delivers better outcomes. We achieve this through listening to and amplifying the voices of diverse Queenslanders.

Since its inception, HCQ has led a partnership approach to issues of access, safety, quality and engagement regarding the health and wellbeing of Queensland's health consumers, their carers and loved ones.

Child and adolescent gender services

It is the position of HCQ that gender-affirming care is healthcare, and that all children, adolescents and their families have a right to access services including Paediatric and Children's Gender Services free from political or social stigma and without delay.

Children's Gender Services (CGS) are health services tailored specifically for the needs of children and adolescents with diverse gender identities. Alongside their families, these services provide highly specialised and expert assessment, support and treatment to young people who continue to face unique challenges in accessing supportive care services focused on their experiences and particular health needs.

Definitions

There are several terms that may be referenced in this position statement, or across published literature all of which draw on key definitions, namely:

- *Gender incongruence* (International Classification of Diseases Eleventh Revision (ICD-11) (WHO, 2022).
- *Gender dysphoria* (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition, Text Revision) (DSM-5-TR) (American Psychiatric Association, 2022).
- The term 'treatment' for the purposes of this position statement refers to the broad management of a health need and does not infer a fixed modality (i.e. medication(s) or surgery).

HCQ recognises that language is a critical component to any discussion or position on the diversity of gender identities, dysphoria or gender incongruence as it relates to the experiences of children and adolescents.

Whilst all attempts have been made to use language that is consistent with contemporary definitions, HCQ recognises that children and young people, including their families, may use or prefer language that best recognises their experiences. HCQ respects these preferences, importantly consumer-led preferences, and any language used in this position statement is not an indication of a particular position of HCQ.

Background

Children's Gender Services have been available to children, adolescents and their families within Queensland Health since 2014. The highly specialised nature of this service has since seen a considerable uptake of referrals and protracted wait lists, with the latter a key concern for health consumers and providers.

Recent publications have observed that these delays are a significant contributor to the high levels of distress experienced by young people

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and their families when seeking out these much-needed services (Queensland Health, 2024; Hill et al., 2021).

In recent years there have been key findings across several publications that have attempted to assuage public discourse on matters related to the experiences of children and adolescents.

Evidence

HCQ recognises that there are obvious challenges across the medical and scientific evidence when attempting to analyse the impact of medical treatment(s) for this cohort of the healthcare community.

It is not the position of HCQ to present an opinion on the scientific evidence except to recognise that:

- The lived experiences of consumers indicates that delaying or withholding gender-affirming treatment creates unnecessary distress and may exacerbate mental ill-health (Hill, et al., 2021).
- The needs of children and adolescents experiencing gender-related distress or dysphoria can be complex and highly personal, and health services need to recognise these complexities when making decisions about service delivery for this vulnerable group within our communities.
- Supportive and informative public messaging from Governments, Ministers, clinicians and others in the public domain can have a significant impact on de-stigmatising gender experiences which are real and personal to each individual child or

adolescent.

- The lack of follow-up data within CGS' presents an opportunity to assess barriers to obtaining this data across all service providers in Queensland, recognising that fragmented systems continue to limit the sector's capacity to appraise outcomes fulsomely and in the best interest of evidence-based health care now and into the future (Queensland Health, 2022; Cass, 2024).

HCQ takes the view that:

Any attempts to re-evaluate services where consumers have already provided feedback based on their lived experience should consider the wishes of health consumers and their families in the first instance, to minimise any risk of being re-traumatised by subsequent reviews.

HCQ has always maintained a supportive presence in gender-affirming healthcare policy particularly for consumers navigating this area of health and social care and in recognising their lived experiences.

HCQ will continue to be an advocate for children, adolescents, adults and their families as they navigate this complex area of health care within Queensland and support their wellbeing as valued members of their local communities.

References

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3. Queensland Health. (2024). *Queensland Children's Gender Service External Clinical Service Evaluation*. Office of the Health Service Executive, CHQ, South Brisbane.
4. Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists. (2023). *The role of psychiatrists in working with trans and gender diverse people*. Melbourne. Available at: <https://www.ranzcp.org/clinical-guidelines-publications/clinical-guidelines-publications-library/role-of-psychiatrists-working-with-trans-gender-diverse-people>
5. Telfer, M., Tollit, M., Pace, C., Pang, K. (2020). *Australian Standards of Care and Treatment Guidelines for Trans and Gender Diverse Children and Adolescents, Version 1.3*. Melbourne, Royal Children's Hospital. Available at: [australian-standards-of-care-and-treatment-guidelines-for-trans-and-gender-diverse-children-and-adolescents.pdf](#)

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