



February 4, 2024

The Section of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry of the Alberta Medical Association would like to add our voice to the chorus of concern arising from Premier Smith's recent announcement of new policies banning or significantly curtailing access to gender-affirming care and support in healthcare and education. We stand with our colleagues, who have already issued statements, but even more importantly, we stand with our patients.

As specialists in pediatric mental health who have the privilege of working with transgender/gender-diverse youth, we have the opportunity to experience first-hand their strength, courage and resilience. We also bear witness to the suffering and pain that arises from gender dysphoria and from questioning one's identity without access to appropriate support to help them through their journey. We are fortunate to live in an era where there is clear scientific evidence supporting safe and effective treatments for youth that alleviate their suffering and save lives. It is essential that all youth have access to these interventions in a timely, safe and appropriate manner.

We hold our responsibility to the health of Albertans sacred, which includes a duty to bring healing and hope as well as to do no harm. In a safe, secure and trusting environment, psychiatrists work to support youth in their exploration of their gender identity as one component of finding and embracing their authentic selves. This may involve no interventions at all aside from support. It may involve advice on socially transitioning, such as dressing in clothes that support one's gender identity or changing one's pronouns. It may involve being part of a broader team offering puberty-blocking agents to temporarily slow development to give youth time to explore and consider. One's journey may also eventually include hormone therapy, at the appropriate time as determined by the youth, their family and a team of medical professionals. In Alberta, youth under 18 years of age do not have access to gender-affirming surgeries but they may later choose to pursue these as adults.

Before any decisions are made and along each step of an individual's journey, the child and family/guardian accompanying them are offered extensive discussions with multiple medical professionals around the potential risks and benefits of interventions. Care is taken to ensure that those making the decision have the capacity to understand and consent to treatment. This process is done carefully and thoughtfully without pressure or persuasion.

Furthermore, we wish to reinforce the importance of ensuring safe and inclusive spaces for all Albertans - in extra-curricular activities and at school. We support age-appropriate, accurate, and comprehensive education that fosters the healthy development of children. This must include an understanding of sex, gender, relationships and reproductive health as they progressively develop and move toward adulthood.

We strongly urge the Premier to reconsider the proposed policies and offer her the opportunity to collaborate with experienced professionals, including Child and Adolescent Psychiatrists, to find a better way. One in which all Albertans feel accepted, loved and have access to the care they need to become their best selves.