



Wisconsin Chapter

American Academy of Pediatrics
DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN®



Wisconsin Medical Society



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UWHealth

October 4, 2023

Chair Moses and Members of the Assembly Committee on Health, Aging & Long-Term Care,

As hospitals, health systems and medical professional organizations serving patients throughout Wisconsin, we are trusted providers who deliver high quality health care to Wisconsinites from all corners of the state. Our patients and their families trust us with the most sensitive and complex medical conditions, including patients and their families seeking gender affirming health care services. **We are united in our opposition to AB 465** which would prohibit the delivery of certain gender affirming health care services to minors. We are supportive of constructive dialogue about how to best care for gender diverse youth, grounded in accepted clinical standards or care, respect and compassion. We oppose legislation that would eliminate patient and family access to aspects of gender affirming care and services. We also oppose the punitive nature of the bill that creates a process for licensing board review and calls for punishment of a health care provider by revoking such person's license to practice or prescribe medication if found to be in violation.

Why do we oppose this bill? Removing the ability for youth and their families to access this affirming care in Wisconsin will negatively impact these young people's well-being. We offer this care because our patients, their parents and guardians have come to us asking for this care. Across our health systems, this care delivery has some of the highest patient and family satisfaction rates. We stand with our patients and their families who seek individualized gender affirming health care services and our trusted providers and care teams who provide this care. We also support the clinical guidelines that inform this care.

We believe everyone, including LGBTQ+ kids and families, should be treated by their health care providers with respect, dignity and support. Based on our firsthand experience caring for patients, including working with their parents and caregivers, we know they do not come to the decision lightly to seek this care. We are committed to caring for transgender and gender diverse kids, teens and adults and supporting our clinics, programs and health care providers that provide such care.

Health care experts are best positioned, by education and experience, to determine with our patients and their families what care is most appropriate for them given each patient's unique needs. Wisconsin state government empowers the numerous health care professional regulatory boards to determine whether care provided in a particular case meets the standard of care, and to take appropriate disciplinary action if warranted. AB 465 undermines this system in two ways, first by eliminating an entire area of health care that may be in the

patient's best interests, and then preventing those regulatory boards from exercising their responsibilities to oversee their license-holders. Private health care decisions are best made among caregivers and their patients and should be free from government micromanagement.

Below, we provide a brief overview of clinical services, standards of care, individualized care plans and the consent process.

Clinical services and standards of care: The health care providers at gender affirming health clinics and programs include a variety of specialists in order to provide the care needed by patients and their families. Patients who participate in gender health programs have the opportunity to be seen by psychologists and other mental health therapists, endocrinologists, adolescent medicine specialists, advanced practice providers, speech pathologists and social workers. Treatment for patients seeking gender affirming care is provided in accordance with nationally and internationally recognized clinical guidelines, endorsed by major professional health organizations and established hospital practices. Every major U.S medical and mental health organization, including the [American Medical Association](#)¹, [American Academy of Pediatrics](#)², [American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry](#)³, [American Psychological Association](#)⁴ and the [American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists](#)⁵, support access to gender-affirming support and care for transgender young people and adults. Expert medical [standards of care](#)⁶ on the provision of gender-affirming healthcare and mental health services have been continuously maintained and updated. Research shows evidence that people who have access to the care they need see a positive impact on their mental and physical health including a 2022 peer-reviewed [study](#)⁷ that found receipt of gender-affirming care among young people aged 13 to 20 was associated with 60% lower odds of depression and 73% lower odds of suicidality over a 12-month follow-up.

Gender dysphoria, if left untreated, can result in severe distress, depression and suicide. Research from the Trevor Project concluded that, "LGBTQ young people are more likely to report mental health concerns, such as depression, anxiety, and suicidality, in comparison to their straight and cisgender peers (Johns et al., 2019; Johns et al., 2020). It is well-documented that receiving LGBTQ identity-related support and acceptance from others may help protect against the development of these mental health concerns, with prior research from The Trevor Project showing that sexual orientation and gender identity acceptance from an adult is related to lower rates of suicide attempts among LGBTQ young people (Green, Price-Feeney, & Dorison, 2021; Price & Green, 2023; The Trevor Project, 2019)."⁸

¹ American Medical Association: <https://www.ama-assn.org/press-center/press-releases/ama-reinforces-opposition-restrictions-transgender-medical-care>

² American Academy of Pediatrics: <https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/142/4/e20182162/37381/Ensuring-Comprehensive-Care-and-Support-for>

³ American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry: https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Latest_News/AACAP_Statement_Responding_to_Efforts_to_ban_Evidence-Based_Care_for_Transgender_and_Gender_Diverse.aspx

⁴ American Psychological Association: <https://www.apa.org/topics/lgbtq/division-54-statement-gender-affirmative-care.pdf>

⁵ American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists: <https://www.acog.org/-/media/project/acog/acogorg/files/advocacy/policy-priorities/trans-care-adolescents-issue-brief.pdf>

⁶ World Professional Association for Transgender Health: <https://www.wpath.org/publications/soc>

⁷ Journal of the American Medical Association: <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2789423>

⁸ The Trevor Project. (2023). Acceptance from adults is associated with lower rates of suicide attempts among LGBTQ young people: <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/research-briefs/acceptance-from-adults-is-associated-with-lower-rates-of-suicide-attempts-among-lgbtq-young-people-sep-2023/>

Individualized care plans: Gender affirming health care is deliberate, thoughtful and highly individualized and requires a diagnosis of gender dysphoria, a DSM-5 diagnosis that is defined by the American Psychiatric Association as “psychological distress that results from an incongruence between one’s sex assigned at birth and one’s gender identity.” An individual’s journey to seek the care that is right for such patient who is under the age of 18 requires parental or guardian consent before treatment can begin. It is a journey that requires informed and thoughtful deliberation at each step in the process. Individualized treatment plans are developed through collaborative discussions among patients, their families and medical professionals.

For patients who request care and support around gender development and identity, teams provide ongoing care to support the child and family’s well-being throughout their individual course of care. The most common care plans include ongoing psychological, emotional or social support. A pediatric health psychologist will meet with the family to gather health information related to their mental health and gender identity development. The psychologist may also discuss family, school and social life. Health care providers may ask to communicate with the patient’s existing therapist or help connect the patient with one.

For some patients, a plan of care could include a number of therapy sessions and consideration of family and community support with a patient’s choice to socially transition with changes to outward appearance like clothing and hairstyle. Some patients may choose, in consultation with their care team and consent of parents/guardians, to proceed with pausing puberty by taking a puberty delaying medication. Puberty delaying medications are used for a short period of time and are known to reduce the risk of suicide and depression in this population. The effects are largely reversible. One next step could be deciding not to proceed with any further medical intervention and allowing the return of the onset of puberty. Another step may include eventually proceeding to hormone therapies which help align the body with the patient’s gender identity. For a very small number of patients, proceeding with a surgical intervention to better match their gender identity may be their next step. Surgical interventions do not include any genital surgeries for minors. Every patient is unique so the care each patient receives is tailored to that individual.

Consent: For patients under 18, gender affirming care can only proceed with parent/guardian consent. During the process of obtaining consent, patients, parents or legal guardians are informed of the potential risks and benefits of the proposed treatment and reasonable alternative therapies so they can weigh them and decide with the patient whether to pursue treatment.

Lastly, what is happening in several European countries with respect to gender affirming care has been raised. No European country has banned access to gender affirming health care for minors. Like most of the European providers we also follow an individual centered and holistic approach to care whereby no patients are being prescribed puberty delaying drugs or hormone therapies as a first-line treatment.

Together, we urge you to oppose this legislation that would restrict access to gender affirming care that is safe, effective and medically necessary and to allow patients and families to continue making these important health care decisions for themselves.