Queensland Health

Terms of Reference: Independent review of the evidence base and advice regarding policy options for the use of puberty suppression (Stage 1) and gender affirming (Stage 2) hormones for children and adolescents with gender dysphoria in Queensland's public hospital system.

Purpose

To conduct an independent review of, and provide policy advice about, the current evidence base and ethical considerations for the use of puberty suppression (Stage 1) and gender affirming (Stage 2) hormones for children and adolescents (that is, people under 18 years old) with gender dysphoria in Queensland's public hospital system (the Review). The advice will be based on the available literature and evidence base, and consider the short, medium and longer-term impacts of these treatments.

Reviewer/s

The Review will be led by an independent external consultant, Professor Ruth Vine, and the Terms of Reference for the Review have been settled in consultation with the independent external consultant (referred to as the 'Reviewer/s').

Scope of the Review

The Review will focus on the relevant literature and evidence base for the use of Stage 1 and Stage 2 hormones for children and adolescents under the age of 18 years who present with gender dysphoria or who are gender questioning in Queensland's public hospital system.

The Review will consider:

- the quality and outcomes of available medical and clinical evidence for the use of Stage 1 and Stage 2 hormones for children and adolescents with gender dysphoria;
- the use of Stage 1 and Stage 2 hormones for children and adolescents with gender dysphoria, including but not limited to:
    - the strength of the evidence base for using Stage 1 and Stage 2 hormones to treat gender dysphoria;
    - the ethical considerations and safeguards applied when prescribing and administering Stage 1 and Stage 2 hormones;
    - the legal and ethical considerations and social impacts on clinical practice and decision-making and informed consent;

    - the psychological, psycho-social and biological management including for Stage 1 and Stage 2 hormones, and whether these are considered to be reversible or irreversible; and
    - the short, medium and longer-term effects of Stage 1 and Stage 2 hormones as children and adolescents under the age of 18.
- models of governance to appropriately monitor access and oversight if the use of Stage 1 and Stage 2 hormones are endorsed for children and adolescents with gender dysphoria; and
- mechanisms for ongoing clinical audit, long term follow-up, data reporting and research if the use of Stage 1 and Stage 2 hormones are endorsed for children and adolescents with gender dysphoria.

The Review is not designed or intended to:

- result in recommendations regarding the use of Stage 1 or Stage 2 hormones for children and adolescents with gender dysphoria;
- require or compel anyone to participate in the Review;
- provide clinical assessment or care;
- judge participants or anyone mentioned by a participant, or to reach a conclusion about the efficacy of treatment for a particular individual; or
- in any way attempt to resolve differences of views.

The Review may consider relevant published and grey literature and findings and recommendations from national and international reviews, including identifying what findings and advice is relevant to the Queensland public hospital system. This includes but is not limited to:

- the *Independent review of gender identity services for children and young people* by Dr Hilary Cass (*the CASS Review*)[1];
- the *Evidence Check for effective interventions for children and young people with gender dysphoria* – update by the SAX Institute for the New South Wales Ministry of Health[2];

[1] Cass, H. (2024, April). The Cass Review – Independent review of gender identity services for children and young people: Final Report. https://cass.independent-review.uk/home/publications/final-report/ [accessed 21 January 2025]

[2] Bragge P, Cong-Lem, N, Delafosse V, Goldberg E, Temple-Smith M, Sanci L. (Sax Institute). (2024, February). Evidence Check – Evidence for effective interventions for children and young people with gender dysphoria for NSW Ministry of Health. https://www.saxinstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Evidence-for-effective-interventions-for-children-and-young-people-with-gender-dysphoria-update.pdf [accessed 21 January 2025]

- the *Safety measures for the use of puberty blockers in young people with gender-related health needs* by the New Zealand Ministry for Health[3].

The Review will provide advice about the matters outlined in the Scope (above) that may inform policy and implementation decisions by the Queensland Government, in a written report to be provided to the Director-General, Queensland Health.

The Reviewer/s may request Queensland Health staff to participate in informing the Review. However, participation by staff is not legislatively mandated.

The Review will conduct interviews with a sample of stakeholders. The sample of stakeholders will be determined by a panel of experts and the interviews may be conducted in-person or virtually. The Reviewer will also invite written submissions from stakeholders in response to a set of questions, with the questions being determined by a panel of experts. Where it is relevant to the Terms of Reference the Reviewer/s may consider any other matters that arise throughout the course of the Review.

The Review will enable participation in the submission process, from individuals and relevant organisations, including clinicians and professionals, young people and their families.

At a minimum, it is expected that the Reviewer/s will receive input from:

- Director-General, Queensland Health;
- Children's Health Queensland Hospital and Health Service;
- other Queensland Hospital and Health Services;
- clinicians in private practice;
- professional colleges and relevant representative groups; and
- persons (including under 18 years) who have, or are currently, receiving paediatric gender health services and their families/carers.

Environment, Confidentiality and Process

The Reviewer/s must listen to participants in an appropriately trauma-informed, non-critical, non-judgmental, receptive, and constructive manner.

[3] New Zealand Minister for Health. (2024, November). Safety measures for the use of puberty blockers in young people with gender- related health needs evidence brief Impact of Puberty Blockers in Gender-Dysphoric Adolescents: An evidence brief | Ministry of Health NZ [accessed 21 January 2025]

The Reviewer/s will advise participants that their participation will be treated confidentially and is not intended to be used in any other process outside of the Review, without their consent, unless required or permitted by law.

The report must de-identify personal details.

The Review is not designed or intended to:

- require or compel anyone to participate in the Review;
- determine liability nor the truth of any participants' experiences or stories;
- provide clinical assessment or care; or
- judge participants or anyone mentioned by a participant.

Timeline for Review

A final written report is to be provided to the Director-General, Queensland Health by 30 November 2025.

The Reviewer/s is to notify the Director-General, Queensland Health about the progress of the Review at regular intervals, as will be agreed following their appointment.

Any request for an extension of the due date for the report is to be made in writing to the Director-General, Queensland Health at least five business days before the due date, with supporting reasons.

At least 10 business days prior to the submission of the report, the Reviewer/s will provide the Director-General with a verbal briefing and/or draft report including advice with respect to their preliminary findings. Updates may occur at other times during the Review as requested by the Director-General, Queensland Health.

Administration and Support

The Review will be informed and assisted by a panel of subject matter experts to provide advice on content in specific areas including the research questions for the Review and guide written submissions and the literature review. This may include experts in the following fields:

- child and adolescent psychiatrist;
- endocrinologist;
- social worker;
- legal and ethical expert;
- researcher and academic;
- administrative support.

Additional Reviewer/s may be appointed if necessary.

Queensland Health Contact

For any instructions or other assistance during the course of the Review, the Reviewer/s should contact the Office of the Director-General, Queensland Health.

Media

The Reviewer/s must not make any public statement in relation to the Review and if approached by a representative of the media, must refer the media representative to the Media Unit, Strategic Communications Branch, Queensland Health, on news@health.qld.gov.au and immediately contact the Queensland Health contact.