

To: the Honourable Tyler Shandro - Minister of Health Date: _____

Legislature Office

423 Legislature Building
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Edmonton, AB
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I am a member of an Affirming community of faith, which has declared itself to be fully inclusive of people of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions. It has come to our community's attention that in mid-September, 2019 there was a change in policy regarding referrals for gender affirming top surgery. Prior to this change a referral for this surgery required the signature of a health care professional, or mental health care professional. Now the requirement is for a psychiatrist to sign a referral for top surgery.

It is already difficult to access psychiatrists who are supportive of trans and non-binary persons and have trans affirming education. Therefore, to require a psychiatrist to sign for this surgery has created an unnecessary and life threatening road block.

As a person of faith and member of an Affirming Faith Community, I am particularly concerned about the overall safety of trans/ gender diverse persons:

Research shows that **timely access to trans affirming care saves lives**. 40% of trans and gender diverse individuals report having attempted suicide as a result of the discrimination, stigma, and systematic barriers against this community (G. Bauer et al, 2013). 90% of these reported attempts happen when a trans/gender diverse individual has identified that they need access to medical care and is waiting for medical care to be received. Once the trans/gender diverse individual has access to medical care, the risk drops to 2%. I believe it is important for individuals of all identities to access medical care in a timely manner, and for their identities to be supported throughout the process.

This policy change and added step adds a supremely harmful stigma to a perfectly normal and necessary medical procedure for those who seek it, thereby putting trans and gender diverse people at a greater risk.

I ask the Alberta Ministry of Health, the Alberta College of Physicians and Surgeons and Alberta Health Services to reverse this policy and return to the former policy of having one health care or mental health care professional sign referrals for gender-affirming top surgery. I also advocate for wholistic and sustainable funding for trans health care in Alberta, trans healthcare has a disproportionate amount of gate-keeping that requires far too much time and energy from the individual seeking care.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Name of Affirming Congregation: _____

Please note that copies of this letter have been sent by email to:

- Hon. Leela Aheer - Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women (culturetourism.minister@gov.ab.ca)
- MLA David Shepard - Critic, Health (edmonton.CityCentre@assembly.ab.ca)
- MLA Janis Irwin - Critic, LGBTQ2+ Issues (edmonton.HighlandsNorwood@assembly.ab.ca)
- Donna Manuel - Executive Director, Health Insurance Programs Branch (donna.manuel@gov.ab.ca)
- Dr. Neil Hagen - Medical Advisor, Alberta Health (neil.a.hagen@gov.ab.ca)
- Dr. Verna Yiu - AHS, President & CEO (verna.yiu@ahs.ca)
- Dr. Ted Braun - AHS, Vice President & SOGIE provincial advisory committee lead (ted.braun@ahs.ca)
- SOGIE PAC - Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity & Expression Provincial Advisory Committee (sogie.pac@ahs.ca)
- College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta (publicinquiries@cpsa.ab.ca)