

April 16th 2009

Honourable Ronald Liepert
Minister of Health and Wellness
Government of Alberta
324 Legislature Building
10800 – 97th Avenue
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6

Dear Minister Liepert:

I am writing to ask you to reconsider your government's recent decision to delist Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS) for transsexual persons from Alberta's health care formulary. This is a legitimate and necessary procedure for a small number of individuals which relieves significant human suffering and enables the majority to live fulfilled and productive lives.

Sherbourne Health Centre's experience with transgender and transsexual people comes from our work over the last seven years as a Toronto based health centre that serves lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people, amongst other populations. Sherbourne has rapidly become the largest primary health care program focused on LGBT people in Canada. For the past year we have also been providing province wide health promotion resources and training in this area through a new provincial program – Rainbow Health Ontario (www.RainbowHealthOntario.ca).

With respect to the transgender community, Sherbourne Health Centre now has more than 500 registered clinical clients and offers information and support to many others through groups, workshops and referrals to community resources. Our experience, which parallels that of other clinics as well as the current literature in this area, shows that the needs of transgender clients vary considerably: A certain number require a full range of body modifying procedures including hormone therapy and surgical procedures; others require hormonal treatment only; and still others require only psychological or social supports but not necessarily pharmaceutical or surgical interventions.

We have worked closely with the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-term Care for the past seven years to advocate for the needs of transgender communities and we were very pleased when Health Minister George Smitherman relisted SRS as an OHIP covered treatment in May 2008. Currently, we are working with representatives from the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, leaders in the Trans community and Ministry staff to identify ways to make health care services across the province more accessible and responsive to the needs of transgender people.

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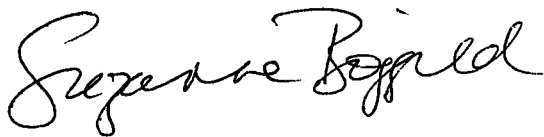
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From a human rights perspective, a health perspective and even an economic perspective, many Canadian provinces and western countries are recognizing the need to strengthen protections for transgender communities and to improve their publicly funded health services. We know of policy reports and health directives in both these areas from Vancouver Coastal Health Authority, the province of Manitoba, the British National Health system, as well as Australia and New Zealand. We would be happy to provide more detailed information on these sources if that would be helpful.

In summary, we urge the Alberta government to rescind its recent decision regarding SRS and to continue to provide equitable and necessary health care services to this small but very marginalized segment of our Canadian community.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Suzanne Boggild". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Suzanne Boggild MHSA CHE
Chief Executive Officer

