

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 3, 2022:

Barriers to gender-affirming healthcare increase in NS, the province with the highest proportions of trans and gender diverse individuals

[Kjipuktuk (Halifax), NS] – The Halifax Sexual Health Centre (HSHC) was made aware of two new significant barriers to gender-affirming care (GAC) access on May 2, 2022.

We were informed by the office of Dr. Steven Morris, a plastic surgeon, that he was no longer going to be offering gender-affirming top surgery procedures (mastectomy, chest masculinization), effective immediately. Dr. Morris was the **only** provider of gender-affirming surgery within the province of Nova Scotia. Dr. Morris cited that his decision was undertaken after years of his lobbying for proper MSI billing codes, wherein his requests were routinely ignored.

We were also informed that two specialist providers of surgery readiness letters (a requirement of MSI to get gender-affirming surgery approved for public funding), were no longer accepting new referrals for GAC patients, citing capacity limitations.

Patients seeking GAC specialist letters will now need to be referred to alternative clinicians. The options for these clinicians are rapidly dwindling, and those who remain are experiencing increasing waits. Patients planning on accessing surgery in NS will now need to take on the considerable burden of accessing surgery in Montreal, QC. Not only does this impact surgery wait times, travel costs, and post-operative care plans, but will increase the engagement with bureaucracy and paperwork, for both providers and patients. MSI will need to be informed and approve a patient's surgery application be redirected to Montreal. Filing and managing these applications are currently an **uncompensated** task for providers.

This crisis in GAC is not new. HSHC and many other organizations have reached out to various levels of government regarding the ongoing struggle to provide and access GAC for years. The Nova Scotia Government and the Nova Scotia Health Authority (NSHA) have put all of their GAC eggs in one basket – a basket of **undercompensated and over-burdened** providers and community health clinics. These resources are starting to fracture. Patients are the ones who will suffer from the purposeful disregard for GAC in this province. **Gender-affirming care is lifesaving care, and the lives of some of the most vulnerable people in our province are at risk.**

The NS Government and the NSHA must recognise that Nova Scotia has the highest proportion of trans and gender-diverse individuals in Canada. They deserve comprehensive healthcare access that addresses their unique needs. HSHC alone has 850+ patients receiving GAC, with an additional ~60 patients on our waitlist for care. They comprise approx. 22.8% of all Nova Scotian individuals who self-identified as trans and/or non-binary in the

2021 Census. It should be noted that HSHC is **not** a service of the NSHA, but a non-profit community clinic.

Gender-affirming care requires comprehensive coordination and compensation. We need decisive action by the provincial government to properly fund all aspects of gender affirming care, including, but not limited to, surgeries. We also ask that MSI reassess their requirements for gender-affirming surgery approval, reducing the barriers and delays in accessing care.

To learn more about policy alternatives for gender-affirming care, visit: gacns.ca.



Abbey Ferguson
She/her
Executive Director
Halifax Sexual Health Centre



Dr. Hali Bauld MD, CCFP
She/her
Medical Director, Halifax Sexual Health Centre
Founder/Medical Director, Truro Sexual Health Centre

ABOUT HSHC

The mission of Halifax Sexual Health Centre is to improve and optimize the sexual health of all members of our community, by providing high quality and caring services, and empowering clients to make healthy choices.

MEDIA CONTACT

To arrange a media interview, direct requests and questions to:

Abbey Ferguson (she/her), Executive Director, Halifax Sexual Health Centre
902-455-9656 ext 2, ed@hshc.ca

Riley Neilson-Baker (they/them), Gender Affirming Care NS
genderaffirmingcarens@gmail.com