

SUPPORTING ADOLESCENT ACCESS TO GENDER-AFFIRMING CARE

The Michigan Organization on Adolescent Sexual Health (MOASH) urges community leaders, decision-makers, and legislators to advocate for comprehensive access to gender-affirming care for transgender (trans) youth. Gender-affirming care includes any social intervention, medical treatment, and/or legal intervention trans and gender nonconforming (GNC) youth seek in accordance with their gender identities. MOASH believes decisions about gender affirming care should be made amongst youth, their providers, and caregivers — and should be afforded in a timely and accessible manner to support their physical, emotional, and mental health. This document provides guidance on how to increase youth access to gender-affirming care in your own community, learning and work environments, and across Michigan.

Respect trans youths' personal decisions and journeys regarding gender-affirming care.

- > **Access to gender-affirming care is crucial and most often lifesaving for trans youth, especially when given at an earlier age and stage of puberty. Suicidality decreases with gender affirming hormone therapy. One study of transgender youth demonstrated that the average rate of suicidality was a quarter what it was before treatment, after about one year of treatment.**¹
- > **Rates of suicidal ideation and suicidal behavior are lower when people consistently use trans youths' chosen names and pronouns. Whether at home, school, work, or with friends, the more contexts that a chosen name is used the stronger the protective³ effects. Suicidal ideation decreased by 29% and suicidal behavior decreased by 56% with each additional context.**

1 Sorbara, J. C., Chiniara, L. N., Thompson, S., & Palmert, M. R. (2020). Mental health and timing of gender-affirming care. *Pediatrics*, 146(4).

2 Allen, L. R., Watson, L. B., Egan, A. M., & Moser, C. N. (2019). Well-being and suicidality among transgender youth after gender-affirming hormones. *Clinical Practice in Pediatric Psychology*, 7(3), 302-311.

3 Russell S.T., Pollitt A.M., Li G., & Grossman A.H. (2018). Chosen name use is linked to reduced depressive symptoms, suicidal ideation, and suicidal behavior among transgender youth. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 63(4), 503-505.

Recognize the many barriers that trans youth face to obtaining gender-affirming care.

- > Within Michigan, trans youth face a number of barriers to gender-affirming care, including a lack of healthcare providers trained in gender-affirming care, a lack of sufficient insurance coverage, a lack of information on healthcare options and locations, and a lack of parental or caregiver consent. Youth may also fear stigma, discrimination, and harm for seeking care.
- > Trans youth who wish to change their names might be required to appear before a judge, publish their name change in a local paper, and obtain consent from a parent or guardian if they are a minor; this is dependent on circumstance and a supportive judge. This forces trans people to publicly out themselves, which may put them at risk for transphobic violence.

Refer to trans' youth by their correct name and pronouns.

- > Respect and listen when trans youth tell you their names and pronouns, and use these identifiers correctly. Do not refer to a trans youth by their “former” name (also known as a “deadname”) or by the wrong pronouns.
- > Learn and practice [how to respond](#) if you accidentally refer to a trans youth by the wrong name or pronouns. As soon as you realize or someone corrects you, quickly correct yourself and move forward; do not over-apologize or create a situation where they must comfort you for your mistake.

Advocate for more gender-affirming spaces within schools, workplaces, and society.

- > Learn about existing organizational, local, and statewide non-discrimination policies; if these policies are non-existent or lacking, advocate for comprehensive and protective non-discrimination policies. When trans and nonbinary youth have at least one gender affirming space, they are significantly less likely to experience depression, anxiety, and attempt suicide.

⁴ Mich. Comp. Laws § 711.1(1).

Advocate to legislators and decision-makers for more gender-affirming legal interventions.

- > Some of these legal interventions include, but are not limited to: removing parental consent and public notice requirements to changing name and gender markers; increasing governmental support and resources for trans youth; and requiring health insurance providers to cover gender-affirming medical care (e.g. hormone therapies, surgeries, laser hair removal) without copays, deductibles, and lifetime financial limits on coverage.

MOASH remains committed to supporting each trans youth in however they wish to affirm their own gender identities, raising awareness on what their rights are and what services they may access, and advocating for more supportive policies and practices. We urge you to do the same.

This is not legal advice. Please consult with a supportive lawyer and/or judge.