

Updates from the Gender affirming (genital) surgery service

August 2020 update

The Gender Affirming (Genital) Surgery Service

Gender Affirming (Genital) Surgery Service (the Service) has been established to help more transgender people access publicly-funded gender affirming genital surgery in New Zealand.

The Service has been funded with \$2.99 million approved in Budget 2019 over four years to supplement the allocation of funding from the High Cost Treatment Pool for gender affirming genital surgeries. This funding is expected to enable the delivery of up to 14 surgeries per year.

The Service is provided through a contractual agreement between the Ministry of Health and a provider of gender affirming genital surgery in New Zealand. The Service is limited to people over 18 years of age. The Ministry is currently the coordinator of the waiting list for a first specialist assessment with the Service.

The scope of the Service is gender affirming genital surgery for transgender people. Referrals for other gender affirming surgeries and referrals for people with an intersex variation should be sent to the person's local DHB in accordance with locally agreed pathways.

Information on the new service can be found at [Delivering health services to transgender people](#).

Validation of referrals for people already waiting

In late 2019 the Ministry wrote to a group of people on the waiting list whose referrals were received prior to 2016. In August 2020 we contacted a second group of people on the list who were referred between 2016 to mid-2018.

We asked these people to complete a health questionnaire and provide recent health status information. This has assessed the following:

1. whether the person is still contactable
2. whether the person still wishes to proceed with surgery
3. whether the person has any health problems or risk factors that would delay or prevent them having surgery.

We then sent the validated referrals to the Service for review and consideration for a first specialist assessment.

If you are a person on the waiting list who was referred prior to mid-2018 and we haven't been able to contact you, or a healthcare provider and you have transgender patients who should have been contacted but haven't been, please let us know at gender.surgery@health.govt.nz.

New referrals to the Service

Referrals to the waiting list need to be made by a DHB specialist unless a DHB has agreed to allow general practitioners to make referrals on their behalf.

People referred to the Service and accepted will be placed on the waiting list for a first specialist assessment.

To be considered for a first specialist assessment a person should be medically fit to have an anaesthetic and complex surgery. It is important that people on the waiting list maintain a healthy Body Mass Index (BMI) of less than 30, be non-smokers (including nicotine-based vapes) and ensure that any medical and/or mental health conditions are managed and stable.

Please note that any referral sent directly to the Ministry's contracted provider will not be eligible for the publicly-funded Service. Only referrals that are forwarded by the Ministry to the Service will be accepted.

Referral and health questionnaire forms can be found at [Delivering health services to transgender people](#).

Given the number of people on the waiting list, we will contact people every twelve months to maintain communication and update their contact details.

People on the waiting list are encouraged to email gender.surgery@health.govt.nz at any time if their contact details change. It is important that we have up-to-date contact information because if we cannot make contact, patients may be removed from the waiting list.

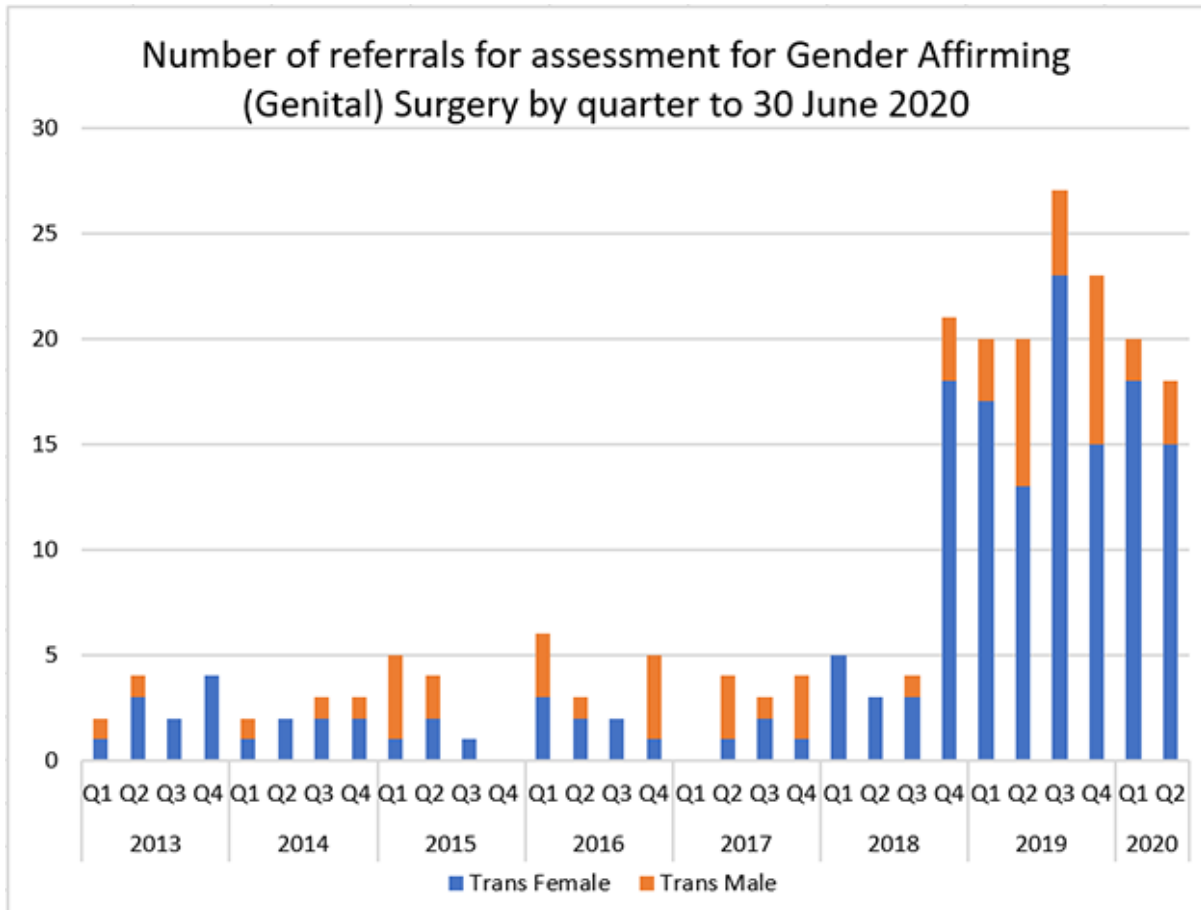
Prioritisation of referrals

We are currently validating referrals of the longest wait patients. However, we intend to seek the views of the transgender community later this year on other prioritisation criteria to understand if there could be reasons why some referrals should be prioritised for a first specialist assessment sooner than others.

The waiting list

Background

The chart below sets out the number of new referrals received by quarter between January 2013 and 30 June 2020. Overall 74 percent of the referrals are for trans women and 26 percent are for trans men. The number of people referred to the waitlist increased by over 100 percent between October 2018 and 30 June 2020.



Current status

As at 31 August 2020, there were 242 referrals for a first specialist assessment on the Active list for the Service. Of these, 25 people have or will be offered a first specialist assessment this year. More people could be offered an assessment later this year or early 2021.

The waiting list is a list for a first specialist assessment with the Service. It is not a waiting list for surgery. Whether surgery is the right option for a patient is a matter for the Service and the patient to discuss at the first specialist assessment.

The number of people on the waiting list is constantly changing as new referrals are received and the waiting list is updated following the validation of referrals. This is because some people cannot be contacted, advise they no longer require surgery or need to address health issues before they can be considered for a first specialist assessment or surgery.

Therefore, attributing a 'number' to a referral on the waitlist does not depict the specific order that a patient may be considered for a first specialist assessment or the length of time someone may be on the waiting list.

The Ministry sends validated referrals with updated health information to the Service. Following the Service's review of the validated referrals either:

- the Ministry will contact a patient if the Service requires additional health information before considering them for a first specialist assessment or

- the Service will contact the patient directly with the offer of an appointment for a first specialist assessment.

A patient offered a first specialist assessment who needs to travel a long distance for the appointment may be eligible for financial assistance under the National Travel Assistance (NTA) Scheme. The Service will assist patients register for NTA. Eligibility for NTA is decided by a patient's local DHB but only after the DHB has received a copy of the NTA registration form and appointment letter from the Ministry. Patients will be advised whether they are eligible for NTA well in advance of their appointment.

The preparation time for surgery can be lengthy as patients may require weight loss, readiness assessment and/or hair removal prior to proceeding to treatment. There is no reimbursement available to patients who pay for hair removal prior to their first specialist assessment. The Service will arrange for hair removal procedures and readiness assessments if these are required.