

Updates from the Gender affirming (genital) surgery service

June 2020 update

The Gender Affirming (Genital) Surgery Service

In Budget 2019, \$2.99 million of additional funding was allocated over four years to supplement the allocation from the High Cost Treatment Pool (HCTP) for Gender Affirming Surgery (GAS). This funding is expected to enable the delivery of up to 14 surgeries per year.

The Ministry of Health (the Ministry) is establishing the Gender Affirming (Genital) Surgery Service (the Service) to help more transgendered people access publicly-funded gender affirming genital surgery in New Zealand.

The Service will be provided through an agreement between the Ministry of Health and R Yang Plastic Surgery Ltd and is limited to people over 18 years of age. The Ministry will function as the coordinator of the Service until a more appropriate provider is able to take over.

The scope of the Service is gender affirming genital surgery for transgendered people. Other surgical procedures, such as mastectomy or orchidectomy remain the responsibility of DHBs. Gender affirming surgery for people over 18 years who have been medically confirmed with intersex conditions is also the responsibility of DHBs.

Referrals for these procedures should be sent to your local DHB in accordance with any locally agreed pathways.

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

Existing patients waiting

Many patients on the waiting list have been waiting for several years. The longest waiting patients (any referred prior to 2016) have been contacted and asked to complete a health questionnaire. This has assessed the following:

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

These factors help us to validate the number of people on the waiting list and give us a more accurate figure of patients ready for surgery. We will conduct another validation of the next longest waiting patients very shortly.

If you are a patient on the waitlist prior to 2016 who we haven't been able to make contact with, or a transgender healthcare provider and you have patients that should have been contacted that have not been, please let us know at gender.surgery@health.govt.nz.

New referrals to the Service

Referrals for surgery still need to be made by a DHB specialist, apart from Capital & Coast DHB which has agreed to allow general practitioners from their region to make referrals on their behalf.

Patients referred to the Service and accepted will be placed on the waiting list for a surgical assessment. Currently patients are listed and assessed in order of referral date (ie. length of time waiting).

To be considered for an assessment, however, a patient must be medically fit to have an anaesthetic and complex surgery. **It is very important that patients maintain a healthy weight, with a Body Mass Index (BMI) of less than 30, while they are on the wait list for an assessment.**

Please note that any referral sent directly to R Yang Plastic Surgery Limited will not be eligible for the publicly-funded Service. Only referrals that are forwarded by the Ministry to R Yang Plastic Surgery Limited 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, patients will be contacted every twelve months to maintain communication. Patients will be asked to complete a review form to update their contact details and health status. Patients 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 for patients** because if we cannot make contact, they may be removed from the waiting list.

Prioritising new referrals

The Ministry will forward any referrals received to Dr Yang for prioritisation. Any referral sent directly to Dr Yang will not be eligible under the new Gender Affirming (Genital) Surgery Service.

Patients will continue to be listed and assessed based on referral date. However, the Ministry intends to work with transgender healthcare specialists to agree referral pathways and prioritisation criteria. This might consider whether there are some patients who should receive treatment more urgently.

The waiting list

Between 2010 and 2017 on average 11 patients a year were referred for gender affirming genital surgery. Twelve people received their first High Cost Treatment Pool funded treatment during this seven year period.

This year, 21 patients have or will have a first specialist surgical assessment. More will be referred for an assessment later this year.

At the end of May 2020, there are 211 people on the waiting list. This number is expected to change as we continue to contact the longest waiting patients and new referrals are added to the waitlist.