

Monash Health Gender Clinic: A temporary pause in operations

27 March 2020

Monash Health is taking many urgent actions to prepare and respond to COVID-19. In line with federal government direction, this includes cancelling elective surgery and redeploying clinicians as appropriate. The redeployment of clinicians will impact some of our mental health services.

The Gender Clinic will initially be placing a three-month pause on:

- All mental health assessments
- Follow up appointments
- Laser treatments, effective immediately.

At this stage the Endocrinology clinic at Monash Medical Centre will continue to operate as usual. Please note that all Endocrinology appointments have been changed to teleconference or phone call. If you need to contact the Endocrinology team please call 03 8572 2514 or send an email to: genderdocs@monashhealth.org

The Gender Clinic recognises that psychological counselling and access to gender-affirming treatments is important to the health and wellbeing of many trans people, including those who are gender diverse and non-binary, and that the pause in clinic operations may cause distress to some clients.

To support clients who are in distress, we remain available, although with a reduced workforce. **Distressed clients are encouraged to call us on 03 9556 5216 during office hours** to speak to a clinician.

Gender Clinic operations will resume once conditions related to COVID-19 have stabilised. We don't yet know how long this will take, and recognise that this uncertainty may be very unsettling for people undergoing or awaiting assessment. Current clients will be contacted by their Gender Clinic clinician as soon as practicable, and people on the waitlist will be contacted by other staff.

During the pause, the Gender Clinic will not be accepting referrals and adding people to the existing wait-list. Clients on the current waitlist will maintain their position. As an alternative, clients may wish to explore private options and a list of private clinicians is available on our website.

A Victoria-wide Trans and Gender Diverse Community Health Service can currently provide fast appointments and dedicated support, including:

- Peer Navigation by a trans and gender diverse health worker,
- Telehealth and in person appointments with GPs, counsellors, psychologists, a psychiatrist, and endocrinologists trained in trans and gender diverse affirmative practice.
- Online facilitated group support
- Access to hormones

To access these services, visit <https://www.yourcommunityhealth.org.au/service-access/trans-and-gender-diverse-health/> or call 03 8458 6756.

These are uncertain times with frequent developments. We want to acknowledge the impact that events such as these have on a person's mental health and we strongly encourage you to have a look at the following links which have some very helpful advice on how to care for you mental health over the coming weeks and months.

- <https://www.psychology.org.au/getmedia/38073179-4701-48bd-afd9-988c560ee2f9/20APS-IS-COVID-19-P1.pdf>
- <https://headspace.org.au/young-people/how-to-cope-with-stress-related-to-covid-19/>
- <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/the-facts/looking-after-your-mental-health-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak>
- <https://www.acon.org.au/tgdcovid>

On behalf of the whole gender clinic team, thank you for your patience and understanding and please stay safe.

Cancellation of gender-affirming surgeries: Australian Professional Association for Trans Health statement 26 March 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic is, and will continue to stretch and challenge the Australian healthcare system. Urgent action is required if we are to curb the rising rates of infection for all people and particularly for those who are most at-risk of harm.

The Federal Government announced yesterday the cancellation of all elective (planned) surgeries in both public and private hospitals effective now.

This decision has been made in anticipation of increasing volumes of severely ill people who will need access to intensive care units (ICUs) and emergency departments (EDs) in our hospitals.

This means that only emergency surgery (i.e. treating trauma or acute illness) will be undertaken. This will allow for theatres to be re-purposed into ICU beds and to ensure anaesthetists are available to operate ventilators.

AusPATH recognises that gender affirming surgery is fundamental to the health and wellbeing of many trans people, including those who are gender diverse or non-binary, and that the cancellation of such surgeries will cause disappointment and distress to many.

While the term "elective" may sound like it's a choice - elective surgeries are not optional and AusPATH considers gender affirming surgical interventions to be not only medically necessary, but lifesaving.

Surgeries will resume once conditions related to COVID-19 have stabilised. We don't yet know how long this will take, and recognise that this uncertainty may be very unsettling for those awaiting surgery. Those affected will be contacted by their surgeon as soon as practicable.

We encourage anyone affected by this situation to seek peer and professional support. Mental healthcare, connecting with your doctor and being supported by your community are important and can make a big difference to wellbeing.

And please - wash your hands thoroughly and regularly, steer clear of people outside of your immediate household and stay connected online as much as you can. We are all in this together.