

**Care with Pride: Ensuring Appropriate LGBTQ+ And Gender-Affirming Care in Los Angeles County**

More than 1.4 million adults and 150,000 youths identify as transgender in the United States, meaning those individuals' gender identity is different from cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth. Transgender (trans) people face unique and unfair stressors, including the stress some trans people experience when their gender identity is not affirmed. Trans people also experience higher rates of discrimination, harassment, and violence than cisgender people and, as a result, poorer mental health outcomes. In fact, according to a national survey of trans people, a staggering 39% of respondents experienced serious psychological distress in the month prior to completing the survey, compared to only 5% of the general U.S. population.

In particular, within healthcare settings, trans patients, both adults and youth, often face insurmountable hurdles in accessing medically necessary healthcare services. The same survey found that 33% of those who saw a healthcare provider had at least one negative experience related to being transgender, such as verbal

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harassment or refusal of treatment due to their gender identity. Additionally, nearly one-quarter (23%) of respondents reported that they did not seek the health care they needed in the year prior to completing the survey due to fear of being mistreated as a transgender person, and 33% did not go to a health care provider when needed because they could not afford it.

More disturbingly, trans people of color face even more hurdles and deeper patterns of discrimination when compared to their white counterparts. The effects of racism are then compounded, resulting in trans people of color having even higher rates of unemployment, homelessness, suicide, and discrimination which often turns violence. All of these factors are intertwined with the efforts by some states to further marginalize trans adults and youth in healthcare settings by outlawing healthcare professionals from providing gender-affirming care to their trans patients.

Fortunately, within the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services (DHS), a clinic exists providing the essential healthcare services for transgender individuals. Additionally, there are other clinics and community-based organizations (CBOs) that specifically focused on supporting local trans and gender nonconforming individuals. Through a partnership between The Alexis Arquette Family Foundation and the Violence Intervention Program (VIP) at the LAC+USC Medical Center, the Alexis Project is one example of a successful LGBTQ+ clinic where queer and trans youth and adult patients can find a safe and welcoming environment and access health services tailored to best meet their unique needs. At these clinics, there are specialized medical and mental health staff attuned to the needs of LGBTQ+ youth and providing a high-quality standard of care without any prejudice.

These clinics and CBOs can provide appropriate health services, including primary care, child and adult care, pelvic exams, cancer screenings, vaccinations, and critically for trans individuals, gender-affirming hormone therapy and pubertal suppression therapy services. Furthermore, reproductive health services are also available, including pregnancy testing, contraception, STD and HIV testing and treatment, and STD counseling with providers competent in tailoring counseling to LGBTQ+ needs. The Alexis Project also offers a wide array of mental health programs to serve LGBTQ+ teens, transitional age youth, and young adults, including assessment for gender-affirming services, mental health needs, individual and group therapy, and crisis intervention.

To improve and guarantee access to quality medical and mental health care for all LGBTQ+ patients in Los Angeles County systems, successful programs that have developed the experience and expertise in providing culturally-appropriate care should be expanded. Facilities across relevant County departments should expand their capacity to provide this care, and establish a referral process to connect patients with specialized resources available to them at clinics like the Alexis Project and other experienced providers.

According to the American Medical Association, expanding access to gender-affirming care is an important means of improving health outcomes for trans people. Receipt of gender-affirming care has been linked to dramatic reductions in the rate of suicide attempts, decreased rates of depression and anxiety, decreased substance use, improved HIV medication adherence, reduced use of harmful self-prescribed hormones, construction-grade silicone injections and other interventions that have potential to

cause adverse events, and positive health effects from gender-affirming care can extend to children and adolescents.

**I, THEREFORE, MOVE** that the Board of Supervisors instruct the Department of Health Services, in collaboration with the Department of Mental Health, the Department of Children and Family Services, and relevant community-based organizations, to:

1. Establish connections to the Alexis Project and other service providers to create regional clinics across the County to provide gender-affirming and culturally appropriate healthcare for LGBTQ+ individuals. These regional clinics shall further engage with other trusted community-based organizations to establish community engagement and support.
2. Assess the current protocols with regard to gender-affirming care at County-run health clinics and develop a standardized referral process to link transgender individuals seeking gender-affirming care to the Alexis Project and other service providers.
3. Partner with the Alexis Project and other providers to establish a toolkit and informational materials for all foster youth who identify as LGBTQ+, with a focus on transgender youth.
4. Partner with the Alexis Project and other providers to identify mental health resources and support for LGBTQ+ patients of all ages, with a focus on transgender people.
5. Report back within 60 days with a plan to implement these directives to expand LGBTQ+ care, specifically gender-affirming services, at County-run health clinics. The plan should include existing Departmental revenues to expand programs to

provide gender-affirming care and resources, similar to the services at the Alexis Project.

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