

14th October 2020

[REDACTED]

Email [REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED]

Official Information Act Request for – Gender Affirming Health Services

I write in response to your Official Information Act request received by us 19th September 2020 you requested the following information:

Could you please advise whether the following gender-affirming healthcare services are funded by this DHB for transgender patients, and whether the services are currently available:

- Hormone therapy
- Mastectomy
- Hysterectomy
- Orchidectomy
- Facial hair removal
- Breast augmentation
- Voice training

Could you please provide information about the process of accessing those services that are available?

- Specifically, is an assessment by a mental health professional required in order to access gender-affirming healthcare services? If so, which services?

- In the case of hormone therapy, can primary health providers prescribe hormones, or does this have to be initially approved by an endocrinologist?

- Is any period of real life experience required to access surgery?

Could you please advise what the process is if transgender patients require one of the above services, but the DHB does not offer this service? Does the DHB currently fund patients to travel to other areas to access this healthcare?

Counties Manukau Health Response:

Counties Manukau Health's (CM Health) Kidz First Centre for Youth Health welcomes gender diverse and transgender young people to our service. We provide support for young people and whaanau/families around gender exploration and transition related healthcare across the whole Auckland Region.

1. Could you please advise whether the following gender-affirming healthcare services are funded by this DHB for transgender patients, and whether the services are currently available:

- Hormone therapy
- Mastectomy
- Hysterectomy
- Orchiectomy
- Facial hair removal
- Breast augmentation
- Voice training

2. Could you please provide information about the process of accessing those services that are available?

Specialist services for medical support for youth across Auckland are provided via the Centre for Youth Health service, which is part of CM Health. Specialist services for adults are provided by the Regional Auckland Sexual Health Service (ARSHS), which is part of Auckland District Health Board (ADHB). Both of these services are accepting new patients.

These services work with service users to establish health goals and individualised health plans that may include accessing other Specialist health procedures, services and teams. Clinicians within these services, support primary care health teams to provide on-going supportive services, and link service users to other community networks and NGO providers who have particular expertise in this area.

The services listed as provided below in table 1 are only provided if service criteria are met and the need is established clinically.

Service	Provided
Hormone Replacement Therapy	Yes
Mastectomy	Yes
Hysterectomy	Yes
Orchiectomy	Yes
Facial Hair Removal	No - not available in the public system in CM Health
Breast Augmentation	Yes
Voice Training	Yes

Table 1 Sourced: Centre for Youth Health 20.09.2020

Publicly available information on the Hauora Tāhine service and CM Health's Centre for Youth Health service can be accessed via the HealthPoint website at the following links, and may answer many of your questions:

- <https://www.healthpoint.co.nz/public/sexual-health/hauora-tahine-pathways-to-transgender-healthcare/>
- <https://www.healthpoint.co.nz/public/paediatrics/kidz-first-centre-for-youth-health/>

Please refer to the health services links (above) for information on the available services, including current information on provision of the procedures you have listed, and availability of a range of other supportive services and resources. This includes hormone therapy, nursing, medical, psychology and counselling services.

As part of general elective services, a small number of elective surgical procedures are provided, primarily for upper body plastic surgery. CM Health does not allocate specific funding for surgical interventions for gender assignment procedures, and referred cases are assessed and managed in line with our standard elective surgery prioritisation criteria.

As per the Hauora Tāhine services Healthpoint link, *at this time surgical services have a limited capacity for chest reconstruction, with lower gender reassignment being managed by the Ministry of Health's High Cost Treatment Pool.*

More information can be found at the following link:

- <https://www.health.govt.nz/your-health/healthy-living/transgender-new-zealanders/health-care-transgender-new-zealanders>

3. Specifically, is an assessment by a mental health professional required in order to access gender-affirming healthcare services? If so, which services?

At CM Health, the Centre for Youth Health has access to psychology and mental health clinicians available as part of the service we offer. Service users may be seen by these services before commencing hormone therapy and before referral to surgical services.

For adults seen by Regional Auckland Sexual Health service, there is counselling available as part of this service also.

When people being seen for gender health care are found to have co-existing poor mental health or mental illness, referral is made to a mental health professional, either in primary care or specialist mental health services.

4. In the case of hormone therapy, can primary health providers prescribe hormones, or does this have to be initially approved by an endocrinologist?

We note that the prescribing of some hormonal medications is restricted in New Zealand and requires a Medical Specialist authorisation. Some can be started in primary care, although we have no visibility of how commonly this is happening.

Within Counties Manukau Centre for Youth Health, the process of starting hormonal therapy includes a multi-disciplinary assessment process, including assessing readiness hormones from a medical and psychosocial perspective. General Practitioners may provide maintenance treatment, including some prescribing with specialist oversight and review.

5. Is any period of real life experience required to access surgery?

For all surgery, excluding genital gender-affirming surgery, real-life experience is not required.

The journey towards gender affirming surgery is complex. Further information is available on Hauora Tahine Healthpoint webpage:

- <https://www.healthpoint.co.nz/public/sexual-health/hauora-tahine-pathways-to-transgender-healthcare/>

Gender affirming surgery is a complex area of health service delivery, both technically and in capacity terms. For upper body procedures, gender affirming surgery services can only be provided when capacity and funding allows. Our surgical and plastics teams strive to provide services within the limits of a capacity and funding constrained public hospital environment.

Access to and funding for genital surgery is managed directly by the Ministry of Health through a national contract with a private provider. Further information can be found on the MoH website:

- <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/preventative-health-wellness/delivering-health-services-transgender-people>

We also note the information on the 'Transgender New Zealanders' page on the Ministry of Health website as the most current detail on services availability in New Zealand:

- <https://www.health.govt.nz/your-health/healthy-living/transgender-new-zealanders/health-care-transgender-new-zealanders>

6. Could you please advise what the process is if transgender patients require one of the above services, but the DHB does not offer this service? Does the DHB currently fund patients to travel to other areas to access this healthcare?

Services provided for Counties Manukau are provided within the Auckland region; with access to available services for the transgender community as noted on the Hauora Tahine Pathways to Gender Affirming Healthcare Healthpoint webpage:

- <https://www.healthpoint.co.nz/public/sexual-health/hauora-tahine-pathways-to-transgender-healthcare/>

CM Health contributes to the funding of these services. If patients meet the criteria for the National Travel Assistance (NTA) policy to access services, this will be provided.

For context Counties Manukau Health (CM Health) employs over 7,500 staff and provides health and support services to people living in the Counties Manukau region (approx. 569,400 people). We see over 118,000 people in our Emergency Department each year, and over 2,000 visitors come through Middlemore Hospital daily.

Our services are delivered via hospital, outpatient, ambulatory and community-based models of care. We provide regional and supra-regional specialist services i.e. for orthopaedics, plastics, burns and spinal services. There are also several specialist services provided including tertiary surgical services, medical services, mental health and addiction services.

I trust that this information is helpful. You are entitled to seek a review of the response by the Ombudsman under section 28(3) of the Official Information Act. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or Freephone 0800 802 602.

Please note that this response or an edited version of this may be published on the Counties Manukau Health website. If you consider there are good reasons why this response should not be made publicly available, we will be happy to consider this.

Yours sincerely



Dr Peter Watson
Acting Chief Executive Officer
Counties Manukau Health