



# Gender Positive Alliance

## Factsheet – Gender Affirming Care

Learn more about Gender Affirming Care (GAC) here:

<https://www.aamc.org/news/what-gender-affirming-care-your-questions-answered>

<https://opa.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/2022-03/gender-affirming-care-young-people-march-2022.pdf>

### Introduction

The World Health Organisation defines GAC as: “Gender-affirmative health care can include any single or combination of a number of social, psychological, behavioural or medical (including hormonal treatment or surgery) interventions designed to support and affirm an individual’s gender identity.”

This means any support given by professionals, organisations, society and the individual to help transgender people feel better able to live their lives in the gender they identify as.

This may include everything from allowing young people to socially transition and wear the uniform appropriate to their gender identity in schools, all the way to medical interventions such as hormones and surgeries. Gender Dysphoria is a lifelong condition, and the ways in which the condition is managed change throughout people’s lives, depending on their needs.

### The detail – subject

Gender Affirming Care (GAC) typically starts with reaching out to **online safe spaces**, such as reddit and tumblr to communicate with likeminded people. This may then branch to **social transition**, which means living in the world as the gender they identify as. For transfemmes this might mean growing their hair long and choosing more feminine clothing, and for transmascs often means shorter hair, chest binding and wearing more masculine clothing. People often **change their names** to better match their gender identity, and begin to inform organisations and others around them of their gender identity, name and correct title, eg Mx, Mr or Ms. They might also access **therapies for their mental health** due to their experience of being rejected and discriminated against.

**Medical treatment** might include using puberty blockers to prevent the onset of their body’s natural puberty, or for adults this will make their body more receptive to hormone therapies. **Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT)** allows the individual’s body to respond to the puberty that matches their gender identity. So, for example, someone assigned female at birth might take testosterone to help lower their voice, masculinise their facial features, and develop facial hair, and someone assigned male at birth may take oestrogen for the inverse effects. HRT changes muscular and (if before natal puberty) skeletal development to become more of that of their true gender.

**Top surgery** can be used to increase breast size, or remove breasts, and **bottom surgery** is used to replace the existing genitalia with the one more appropriate to the person’s gender identity. Some people may choose to have cosmetic surgeries to make facial features appear more fem/masc, or to shave the Adam’s Apple.

### Why does it matter?

Studies consistently show that the earlier a transgender person is supported with their gender identity, the **better long term outcomes** for their mental and physical health, and risk of suicide. Social transition can be scary, as it means coming out to the world about being transgender, and increasing the risk of bullying and violence. Earlier gender affirming care can also help the individual adapt sooner to living the life that meets their emotional and psychological needs, reducing gender dysphoria and improving how society treats them, and overwhelmingly improves confidence and happiness within the trans individual.

Some cisgender people fear the ‘permanence’ of hormone treatments and surgeries, while transgender people often see this positively as it allows them to align their bodies with who they know themselves to be inside. However, medical treatments are VERY DIFFICULT to access, and often very expensive as they are almost impossible to access on the NHS. Services such as Gender Identity Clinics and GenderGP are massively oversubscribed, but offer transgender people a way of managing their health and transition.