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Know! The Facts About Gender-Affirming Care

In the past few weeks, you have likely seen something in the news about Ohio House Bill 68 (HB 68), a bill that would put limits on gender-affirming care for minors. Media coverage surrounding HB 68 has been intense and emotional. Young people are aware of the state and national conversations about banning access to gender-affirming care, perhaps even more so than adults because this legislation affects youth. No matter where you stand, the young people in your life may have questions or feel anxious about HB 68. Knowing the timeline, process, and context of HB 68 is helpful for both caring adults and youth as you follow the evolution of this bill. In this tip, we'll discuss HB 68, define important terminology, and explore what gender-affirming care means. The next Know! Tip will cover the mental health impacts of gender-affirming care.

What's happening in Ohio?

HB 68 passed the Ohio Legislature on December 13, 2023. Two weeks later, Gov. Mike DeWine temporarily stopped HB 68 from going into law with a governor's veto, stating, "Ohio would be saying that the State, that the government, knows what is best medically for a child rather than the two people who love that child the most, the parents." HB 68 would have established two different acts -- the SAFE Act and the Save Women's Sports Act.

The Saving Adolescents from Experimentation (SAFE) Act would prohibit a physician from performing or assisting any gender reassignment surgery, prescribing cross-sex hormones, or puberty-blocking prescriptions for gender transitions to minors. However, if a child is currently taking these medications in Ohio and it would be deemed medically harmful to stop, the child can continue the treatment. Mental health professionals will not be able to treat or diagnose a minor for any gender-related conditions without obtaining consent from one of the minor's guardians. Professionals would be required to screen for any abuse, trauma, or comorbidities during gender-related treatment. The SAFE Act would also prohibit Medicaid from covering any gender transition services for minors.

The Save Women's Sports Act would require K-12 schools that participate in athletic events administered by interscholastic athletic conferences or events to designate separate single-sex athletic teams based on the participants' sex. This policy also extends to any college or university members of the NCAA, NAIA, or NJCAA, including private and non-profit universities.

On January 5, 2024, Gov. DeWine signed an executive order that would prohibit any gender-transitioning surgeries for anyone under the age of 18. Since Gov. DeWine vetoed HB 68, it is eligible for a veto override within the Ohio Legislature. A veto override needs three-fifths approval from both the Ohio House of Representatives and the Ohio Senate. HB 68 passed each chamber with the necessary votes for a veto override. A veto override began in the Ohio House of Representatives and passed in the House on January 10, 2024.

Understanding Gender Terminology

Understanding the words and phrases that are commonly used in discussions of gender-affirming care is essential to understanding the impact and implications of HB 68. The following definitions come from the Mayo Clinic and the American Psychological Association.

Gender Identity: the internal sense of being male, female, neither, or some combination of both (1).

Gender Binary: the idea that all people can be classified as only one of two genders — female or male (1).

Gender Expression: how gender identity is shown to the outside world through the way a person looks or acts. Gender expression may include clothing, mannerisms, communication style, and interests, among other things (1).

Sex vs. Gender: Sex is assigned at birth, refers to one’s biological status as either male or female, and is associated primarily with physical attributes such as chromosomes, hormone prevalence, and external and internal anatomy. Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for boys and men or girls and women (2).

Transgender: an umbrella term for those who have a gender identity that differs from the sex assigned to them at birth, those whose gender expression doesn't follow society's norms for the sex assigned to them at birth, and those who identify and express their gender outside of the gender binary (1).

Non-binary: those whose gender identity is a combination of or goes beyond the gender binary of female and male (1).

Cisgender: those whose gender identity and gender expression align with their sex assigned at birth (1).

Gender transition: a complex process often involving one or more of the following social changes: adopting the appearance of the desired sex through changes in clothing and grooming, adopting a new name, changing sex designation on identity documents (if possible), using hormone therapy treatment, and/or undergoing medical procedures that modify their body to conform with their gender identity (2).

For more information about these terms, utilize the resources listed at the end of this tip.

What is gender-affirming care?

Gender-affirming care is a form of healthcare that can include a variety of medical, surgical, mental health, and non-medical interventions to support an individual's gender identity. Gender-affirming care is critical to the health and well-being of many transgender and non-binary adolescents. Receiving gender-affirming care helps transgender and non-binary people to live safe, healthy, and authentic lives (3,4,5).

Gender-affirming care encompasses a wide array of services. The United States Department of Health and Human Services offers a helpful chart explaining some of these services:

Affirming Care	What is it?	When is it used?	Reversible or not
Social Affirmation	Adopting gender-affirming hairstyles, clothing, name, gender pronouns, and restrooms and other facilities	At any age or stage	Reversible
Puberty Blockers	Using certain types of hormones to pause pubertal development	During puberty	Reversible
Hormone Therapy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Testosterone hormones for those who were assigned female at birth Estrogen hormones for those who were assigned male at birth 	Early adolescence onward	Partially reversible
Gender-Affirming Surgeries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Top” surgery -- to create male-typical chest shape or enhance breasts “Bottom” surgery -- surgery on genitals or reproductive organs Facial feminization or other procedures 	Typically used in adulthood or case-by-case in adolescence	Not reversible

It's important to know that gender-affirming interventions are provided with careful consideration of cognitive and physical development, parental consent, and established, evidence-based standards of care (4,6). Every major medical and mental health organization in the United States recognizes the medical necessity of care that supports patients' gender identities.

Resources

- [Learning About Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Expression | SAMHSA](#)
- [Children and gender identity: Supporting your child - Mayo Clinic](#)
- [Answers to your questions about transgender people, gender identity, and gender expression \(apa.org\)](#)

- [Transgender and Non-Binary People FAQ - Human Rights Campaign \(hrc.org\)](#)
- [Gender-Affirming Care and Young People \(HHS.gov\)](#)
- [Transgender and nonbinary youth mental health.pdf \(preventionactionalliance.org\)](#)

Numbered sources are hyperlinked at the start of this document

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