



20 June 2018

Gloria Fraser  
Via FYI.Org website

E-mail: [fyi-request-7889-74e4c5d7@requests.fyi.org.nz](mailto:fyi-request-7889-74e4c5d7@requests.fyi.org.nz)

Dear Ms Fraser,

### **Official Information Act (1982) Request**

I write in response to your Official Information Act request, dated 23 May 2018. You requested information on Gender-Affirming healthcare services in Counties Manukau:

For context, Counties Manukau District Health Board is committed to improving the health outcomes for all people in our community. We regard gender as a self-identified attribute, and only relevant if it affects clinical treatment. We acknowledge that our gender-diverse communities have both general health needs (e.g., chronic conditions, mental health and primary care needs), and have specific health needs that relate to gender identity and transition (e.g., hormonal, surgical). All health providers have a duty to deliver services that are respectful to our entire community.

Regarding specialist gender-affirming health services available for the Counties Manukau community, these are provided via the *Northern Region Transgender Health Services*, which is a collective name for a number of services that work together to provide gender-affirming healthcare for transgender and gender-diverse people in the Auckland and Northland region.

**1. Could you please advise whether the following gender-affirming healthcare services are funded by the Counties Manukau District Health Board for transgender patients, and whether the services are currently available:**

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

Publicly available information on the *Northern Region Transgender Health Services* (NRTHS) service, and which may answer many of your questions can be accessed on our HealthPoint website at the following link:

- <https://www.healthpoint.co.nz/public/sexual-health/northern-region-transgender-health-services/>
- <https://www.healthpoint.co.nz/public/paediatrics/kidz-first-centre-for-youth-health/>

Please refer to the NRTHS services link (above) for information on the available services including current information on the levels of 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.

A small number of surgical procedures have been completed as part of general elective services in the last three years, primarily for upper body plastic surgery. Counties Manukau does not allocate specific funding for surgical interventions for gender reassignment procedures, and referred cases are assessed and managed in line with our standard elective surgery prioritisation criteria.

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

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

Please refer to the NRTHS services link on Healthpoint (above) for information on processes to access services, including service referral expectations, information on consent and other services available.

Referrals to NRTHS can be made directly by a primary care team (e.g. GP, practice nurse), other health services (for example by Mental Health and Endocrinology), or by school-based health teams (e.g. School Counsellor or Nurse). The NRTHS also accepts self-referrals or referrals from family members.

The team works with service users to establish health goals and individualised health plans that may include accessing other Specialist health procedures, services and teams.

The NRTHS clinicians 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. When assessed as required, referral to a mental health professional will occur, either in primary care or specialist mental health services.

Referrals for surgery may be sent by primary care referrers or Specialists to the relevant clinical service. All referrals for elective surgery are assessed against standard elective processes and criteria.

**b. 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.

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

**c. 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.

Please refer to the 'Gender Reassignment Surgery' page on the Ministry of Health website, for the agreed current New Zealand clinical practice:

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

The journey towards gender reassignment surgery is complex. Suitability for gender reassignment surgery can be assessed using the internationally accepted World Professional Association for Transgender Health Standards of Care.

- <https://www.anzpath.org/about/standards-of-care>

These Standards are minimum requirements, and therefore it is also important to be mindful of other factors not related to gender identity that may preclude surgery (for example, a co-existing medical conditions or surgical risk).

Gender reassignment surgery is a complex area of health service delivery, both technically and in capacity terms. For upper body procedures, gender reassignment 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 Gender Reassignment procedures is managed by the Ministry of Health. Currently, a limited amount of funding is available nationally for treatment that is not available in New Zealand, and needs to be accessed overseas. Funding is accessed via the [Special high cost treatment pool](#).

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>

**3. Finally, could you please advise what the process is if transgender patients require one of the above services, but the Counties Manukau District Health Board does not offer this service?**

- a. Does the Counties Manukau District Health Board 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 is by a referral to the NRTHS as outlined above. Counties Manukau 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.

Please also refer to the Ministry of Health website for more information on these services:

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

I trust this information satisfactorily answers your query. If you are not satisfied with this response you are entitled to seek a review of the response by the Ombudsman under section 28(3) of the Official Information Act.

Please note that this response or an edited version of this may be published on the Counties Manukau DHB website.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'GJ', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Gloria Johnson  
**Chief Executive (Acting)**