

Your Journey through Gender-Affirming Care



For more information scan this QR code or go to myhealth.alberta.ca/gender-affirming-care-pathway

The information in this guide applies to those over 18 years of age. Gender-affirming care includes a variety of non-medical and medical options designed to support and honour your gender identity. Your healthcare team can help you create a care plan tailored to your needs to support you on your gender-affirming care journey. It will help you to know what to expect as you work with your care team on your gender-affirmation goals. You are the most important part of your healthcare team. If you have any questions along the way, please ask your team. Click on the page numbers in blue if you want more information about the step in your journey.

Before your appointment ([page 4](#))

- Write down how you feel, how your experience with gender has been for you, and any questions or concerns.
- Consider bringing a family member or friend to support you.



Visit your healthcare provider ([page 6](#))

- In order to better support your gender-affirmation, your healthcare provider needs to hear from you and understand who you are and what matters to you.
- Your health includes physical, emotional, spiritual, financial, and social elements. The more you can share your needs, goals, and concerns, the better your healthcare provider can support you.



Get your tests ([page 8](#))

- Some medical treatments rely on balancing hormone levels and supporting your body to respond well to treatment. Some treatments require monitoring bloodwork and making medication changes based on these results.
- In most cases, you will not need a physical exam except in cases where it is absolutely necessary for either a particular treatment or surgical referral.



Review your test results ([page 9](#))

- Find your test results on MyHealth Records or MyAHS Connect (myhealth.alberta.ca/myhealthrecords), or ask your healthcare provider to print them for you.
- Talk with your healthcare provider so you know what your test results mean.



Review your treatment & management options ([page 10](#))

- Your healthcare provider will help you better understand your options and give you important strategies to guide your journey of gender-affirmation.
- Non-medical options are an important part of your journey. These include community resources, support with name & documentation changes, options for gender-affirming gear and counselling.
- Medication (hormone therapy) may be used to increase certain hormone levels and reduce others that lead to changes in gender characteristics.
- Gender-affirming surgeries may also be options to pursue.
- Discuss with your healthcare provider what to expect from treatment and how each may impact you.



Start your treatment & watch your symptoms ([page 21](#))

- Take an active role in your treatment; write down any new symptoms.
- Changes in hormone levels can have side effects. To help manage these, check with your healthcare provider on what changes are to be expected and what potential symptoms would need medical attention.



Talk with your healthcare provider about a referral ([page 23](#))

- You may need a referral to different healthcare providers based on your specific needs, especially if gender-affirming surgeries are being pursued.
- Ask who you are being sent to and what they do.
- Ask how long it will take to be seen and what you should do if you don't hear back.



Keep taking care of yourself ([page 24](#))

- Keep taking care of your overall health, including health screening and looking at healthy lifestyle supports.



Important Tips:

Need a family doctor?
ahs.ca/findadoctor

Need a translator or interpreter? Let your healthcare provider know

Need health advice?
Call Health Link at 811

Need to find programs and resources in your community?
Call 211 or visit ab.211.ca

How to use this resource

The information provided in this resource is based on validated evidence from a variety of sources, including healthcare professionals in Alberta, peer-reviewed journals, current clinical guidelines, validated patient resources, and specialty care recommendations. It is intended as general health information and should not replace the clinical judgment or advice of a qualified healthcare provider. This resource does not address the unique needs of individual patients. Always consult with your healthcare team and follow their recommendations for your specific care.

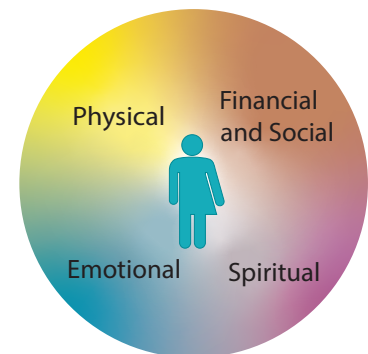
These pages are for you to use as needed. You can look through all of them at once or just the ones that help you now. Feel free to come back to the resource whenever you need it.

Whole-person health

The whole-person health approach will help you and your healthcare team better support your gender-affirming care. It is drawn from the teachings of the medicine wheel.

Whole-person health means thinking about all parts of your health and wellness: physical, financial and social, spiritual, and emotional. All of these parts are connected and influence each other. It's important to be aware of your personal needs in each part and to share that information with your healthcare team.

- **Physical:** your specific health conditions and how your body works
- **Financial and Social:** your ability to meet your housing, transportation, food, and health needs, feeling supported to manage your daily life, and having meaningful relationships
- **Emotional:** how you think, feel, and cope with life events
- **Spiritual:** your beliefs, sense of connection, and purpose



Whole-person health

Whole-person health also reminds us that we are all connected and work together: you, your support systems, and your healthcare providers. Your healthcare providers could be your doctor, nurse practitioner, or a team that comes together with you to plan and organize your care.

Your healthcare provider needs to understand who you are and what matters to you. This helps to build trust. But it can be hard to know what to share or what to say. Try starting by asking yourself:

“What are the things in my life that are important to me?”

“What are the things in my life that may be affecting my health and well-being?”



Bringing forward what matters to you is important. Here are some examples of things you may want to talk about with your healthcare provider:

Physical

“My body does not look the way I would like it to.”

“Because of chest binding, I experience shortness of breath and back pain.”

“Due to tucking, I am experiencing skin breakdown.”

“What aspects of the gender-affirming care we are discussing can be reversed? What aspects can’t be reversed?”

Financial and Social

“What types of gender-affirming hormones are covered by my Alberta Health Care?”

“What are the differences in cost between injectable, topical, and oral medications?”

“Can you give me some resources to connect me to other transgender and gender diverse individuals?”

“I might want to have biological children. What are my fertility options?”

Emotional

“I am feeling isolated and like there is nobody else out there like me.”

“I am feeling rejected from my family.”

“Ever since my friend died, I’ve been struggling with my feelings.”

Spiritual

“It’s important that I follow traditional healing practices.”

“I am afraid of what my religious group will say.”

What is gender-affirming care?

The information in this guide applies to those over 18 years of age. Sex and gender are often used interchangeably, but they refer to different things. For some people, their gender identity aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth, known as being cisgender. However, many people's gender identity does not align with their assigned sex. To describe this, individuals may use terms such as transgender, non-binary, or other identity labels that reflect their unique experience. Many go through a process of coming to know, embrace, and create more alignment between their gender identity and how they live or express themselves. This is called gender affirmation.

Gender-affirming care is an approach to supporting and affirming an individual's gender identity through non-medical and medical options.

Most of your medical gender-affirming care should be available and well-managed through your primary care provider (family physician). Gender-affirming care for each person should be individualized and based on what your goals are through a process of coming to know, understand and express your gender affirmation.

It's completely okay to recognize that you may need support beyond what your primary care provider can provide. Sometimes, additional help or a referral to other professionals or support networks can be beneficial for some.

Before your appointment

Everyone will have their own unique journey with gender-affirming care. How you move through your journey, the number of visits with your healthcare team, the steps you will take, and the order you take them in will depend on your individual needs and will be decided in partnership with your healthcare team.

Think of what your gender-affirming goals are and what is most important for you to get out of your appointment with your provider. Here are some topics to help you get started:

- What support am I looking for? For example, guidance and resources for updating my name, support groups in my area, counselling services that specialize in gender-affirming care.
- What gender-affirming care do I need? For example, starting hormone therapy, gender-affirming surgery.
- Consider writing down how you would describe your gender identity and what your goals are from treatment.

- If you have started any medication, consider using a journal to write down the changes that you notice, and whether they are positive or negative. You can share this information with your healthcare team.
 - Try to write down what change you noticed, when you noticed it, whether it was a positive or negative change, and then whether it happens more than once (recurrent) or whether it only happened once (one-time event).
 - If it was a negative change, did anything make it better or worse?
- Write down a list of your questions and concerns. When you're done, read your list and mark the most important things.
- Make a list of the prescription and non-prescription (over-the-counter) medicines you use, including any vitamins, herbs, and supplements.
- Consider asking someone you trust to go with you to appointments where you feel you would benefit from having their support. This can be to ask additional questions, take notes, or just to remember what was said at each session. They can also be there to help advocate for you if you feel this would help.

Depending on your individual gender-affirming care goals, your primary care provider may need to better understand your experience with gender. This is usually done through a conversation and helps them to understand the ways in which your gender identity might not align with the sex you were assigned at birth. This will help them support you in achieving your goals as much as possible within the Alberta healthcare system.



Helpful tools and resources

- [Support with speaking to your provider](#) (Trans Care BC)
- Common terms to help you and your provider feel on the same page with relevant language: [LGBTQIA+ Glossary of Terms](#)
- Use a symptom tracker: hqca.ca/symptom-tracker (Health Quality Council of Alberta)
- To get the most out of your visit, plan to write notes during the visit or see the Alberta Health Services **My Care Conversations app** (ahs.ca/careapp) website for more information about recording your conversation with your healthcare provider.



Visit your healthcare provider

Speaking with your healthcare provider and clinic staff:

Your healthcare provider should ask for your preferred name so that you are addressed properly, however, they also may request the name that is on your medical chart or legal documents if these have not been legally changed.

An example of how to respond could be:

"The name I go by is _____. There is a different name that I do not go by on my medical records which is _____."

Your right to privacy:

Information about the purpose of your visit or the names and pronouns you use may not be things that you want discussed out loud in a waiting room. To respect your privacy, you can ask for a private space to discuss your needs or ask to confirm certain pieces of information by writing them down on a piece of paper rather than speaking out loud in front of others.

Your healthcare provider will review your history. They may ask questions to better understand what you are experiencing, thinking or feeling in relation to your gender identity and for how long this has been the case. Often your healthcare provider will be trying to better understand your situation to gather information they need to support your gender-affirming goals. Physical exams are often not necessary for most gender-affirming primary care.

What should I share with my healthcare provider?

- Your experience with gender identity and how this may differ from your sex assigned at birth. Sharing how this makes you feel and how it impacts your daily life, your work and relationships can help your healthcare provider support you in steps that affirm your goals.
- Any strong desires to express yourself or be perceived as a gender different than the one you were assigned at birth. This might also include the external appearance of primary sex characteristics (how different parts of your body look).
- Talking about how you feel can be difficult, sometimes writing things down can help and trusting that your healthcare provider is wanting to help can make sharing this slightly easier.
- What types of things help you work better with your healthcare team, and what you expect and need from the relationship with your healthcare provider.



- Things in your life that can impact your ability to manage your health, like:
 - Problems with money, housing, and access to transportation
 - Not enough support or help
 - Childhood experiences
 - Alcohol or drug use

It's important to talk about these things with your healthcare provider because they all play a role in your health and well-being.

You are the most important part of your healthcare team.

If you don't understand what your healthcare team is telling you, let them know right away. Be open and honest. You might say:

"This is a lot for me. Could you please explain it slowly, using language that is easier to understand?"

"It sounded like you said that I should... Did I understand that correctly?"

"Can you show me a picture or model to help me understand?"

"Do you have a written resource where I can read more about it?"



Helpful tools and resources

- Making the most of your appointment:
myhealth.alberta.ca/health/pages/conditions.aspx?Hwid=hw226888
- Working with your healthcare team: hqca.ca/info



Each individual will require different tests, assessments and screening depending on their individual health needs and gender-affirmation goals.

- Non-medical options usually do not need require medical tests or assessments.
- Depending on your individual health, there may be other screening or assessments to help set you up for success with your treatment journey. This might include your healthcare team asking you questions about your mental health and well-being.

If medical options are a route you choose you may need tests to help with your care:

Bloodwork for hormone therapy

An important part of hormone therapy relies on managing hormone levels in your body.

- Your healthcare provider will need to check certain bloodwork before starting medication.
- They will also need to measure once treatment has begun to help guide when to change the medication dose.
- Bloodwork is also important to help your provider manage any other health conditions that might impact your gender-affirming treatment.

More than 1 in 4 adults have a fear of needles and this can often be a barrier to care. There are lots of great resources to help support, including steps you can take before, during and after to make the experience more comfortable. Talk to your healthcare provider if this applies to you.





Review your test results

It is important to know what your test results are and what they mean for you personally. Take time to discuss your results with your healthcare provider. Medical terms can be hard to understand. And even common words like “positive” or “negative” or “high” or “low” might mean something different for medical tests. Ask your healthcare provider for explanations and examples to make sure you fully understand.

You might ask:

“What does this mean for me?”

“Is there a current concern? If so, what is it?”



Helpful tools and resources

You may find some of your results and health information using secure online tools:

MyHealth Records

See your lab results, immunizations, and some other results with a MyHealth Records account. Sign up at myhealth.alberta.ca/myhealthrecords.

MyAHS Connect

See your health information, manage your Alberta Health Services appointments, and interact directly with some members of your healthcare team. Ask your healthcare provider how to access your MyAHS Connect account. Learn more at ahs.ca/myahsconnect.





Review your treatment & management options

Every individual will require their own specific treatment and care plan. Always discuss any concerns that you may have with specific recommendations from your healthcare team.

This guide will introduce some of the non-medical and medical options that you can talk about with your healthcare team:

Non-medical options:	Medical options:
• Name and document changes • Voice therapy or coaching • Hair removal • Binding, packing, tucking, and padding • Counselling • Community support • Health and well-being	• Fertility • Hormone therapy ◦ Estrogen-based therapy ◦ Testosterone-based therapy • Gender-affirming surgeries ◦ Breast construction ◦ Chest masculinization/ mastectomy ◦ Hysterectomy ◦ Orchiectomy ◦ Phalloplasty & metoidioplasty ◦ Vaginoplasty

Non-Medical Options

Like all gender-affirming care, non-medical options are unique and different for everyone. It should be your choice on how you feel most comfortable expressing your gender identity. It could involve:

Name and document changes:

You can choose to change your name and update your documents (like your ID or medical records). A resource that can help guide you in Alberta: skippingstone.ca/IDguide.

There are also the following clinics available in both Calgary and Edmonton that can offer support with name and document changes:

- Skipping Stone Foundation Calgary: Trans ID Clinics
 - Monthly Trans ID Clinics to assist with the navigation of the complex process of ID changes in Alberta, including assistance completing the required documentation. Free notarization services are offered by volunteer lawyers. skippingstone.ca/id-clinics
 - Cost: free
 - Program Length: 60 min appointment
 - Frequency: monthly
 - Access: by appointment only



- Student Legal Services Edmonton: Trans ID Clinics
 - The Trans ID Clinic can assist all Edmonton-area residents over the age of 18 seeking to change their names and gender markers, regardless of their income levels.
 - Cost: free
 - Access: online application sloedmonton.com/trans-id-project
 - By phone: (780) 492-8287

Voice therapy or coaching:

Voice therapy or coaching can help you adjust the way you speak to better align with your gender identity, making you feel more confident in your expression.

There are various affirming voice services for Albertans:

- Publicly these include the [Voice Clinic](#) in Edmonton and the [Calgary Voice Program](#). There are also virtual and in-person options through [Skipping Stone Foundation](#), [Trans Care BC](#), and various other private options, including [Trans Voice Teacher Directory](#). These programs can provide support, knowledge, and skills to find affirmation in your voice.

Hair removal:

There are different ways to remove facial or body hair, both temporary and permanent. Finding the best method for you might take some experimenting.

- Temporary hair removal (such as shaving, waxing, and threading).
- Long-term or permanent hair removal (such as electrolysis and laser treatments).
- Medically necessary hair removal (for certain procedures before surgery).
- For additional considerations, see [hair removal by Trans Care BC](#).

Binding, packing, tucking and padding:

Non-medical options like binding, packing, tucking, and padding are affordable and less invasive than surgery.

- **Binding:** involves using tight clothing, tape, or compression garments to create a flatter chest. People bind for reasons such as feeling more comfortable in their body, clothing and being perceived by others in a way more aligned with their gender.
- **Packing:** involves wearing a prosthetic penis or padding in your underwear or lower garments. People use a packer for reasons like feeling more comfortable in their body and clothing, being perceived by others in a way more aligned with their gender, using it during sex, or being able to stand while peeing.

- **Tucking:** involves positioning the penis and testicles to conceal them, helping some people feel more comfortable in their body, clothing, and being perceived by others in a way more aligned with their gender.
- **Padding:** involves using undergarments to create the appearance of larger breasts, hips, or buttocks, offering a comfortable, affordable, and painless alternative to surgical options.
- For more information on these non-medical options:
 - transcarebc.ca/explore-transition/binding-packing-tucking-padding
 - Available gender-affirming gear in Alberta: skippingstone.ca/resources-full#gear

Counselling:

Talking to a counsellor or therapist can provide emotional support, help with gender exploration, and address some of the challenges you may face in your journey. This can be helpful at all stages of your journey. Finding someone that you can connect with, who understands your needs is important.

- Searching gender-affirming providers can be done via the [Psychologists' Association of Alberta](#) or [Trans Wellness Initiative Providers](#), as well as the mental health section of [Trans Affirming Network](#).

Community support:

Connecting with others who understand your experience, whether in person or online, can provide a sense of belonging and reduce feelings of isolation.

- Community resources include practical support, guidance on '[coming out](#)', in-person and virtual support groups across Alberta, [Indigenous](#) and [Two-Spirit](#) resources, as well as support for parents, caregivers and family. There are links within the [Trans Affirming Network](#) for businesses across Alberta.
- Talk to your healthcare provider about programs and services near you, or visit [211 Alberta](#).

Health and well-being:

Taking care of your overall wellness, including mental and physical well-being, is important in your gender-affirming care journey, helping you feel good about yourself.

- **Affirmation & empowerment:**
 - Making decisions about your care that are true to your wishes may be challenging. It might feel like providers are quick to tell you the risks of options instead of the affirming reasons for doing it. This can lead to people making decisions that they either don't want to make or doing so out of fear. Feeling empowered and having more people in the healthcare system that understand gender affirmation is starting to change this.



- **Sex & intimacy:**
 - Finding accurate and inclusive information about sexual health can be difficult. There are also many ways to express sexuality that are individual for each person. Understanding arousal, potential changes with transition and feeling safe to explore your desires are just a few of the many aspects of sexual well-being.
- **Pregnancy:**
 - Many transgender people capable of becoming pregnant take testosterone to affirm their gender. Planning a pregnancy requires the person to stop taking testosterone as it is not safe to take during pregnancy. Stopping testosterone will lead to physical and emotional changes and during pregnancy, our bodies go through so much change to grow a baby. These combined changes can feel like a rollercoaster but knowing what to expect and putting supports in place can really help.

There are lots of resources available, see [Health & wellbeing by Trans Care BC](#) for more information on these wellness topics.

Medical Options

This section covers the medical gender-affirming options including hormone therapy and transition related surgeries.

Fertility:

- It is important to consider the impact that certain medical options, such as hormone therapy, may have on your fertility and your body's ability to have a genetically related child. Changes from hormone therapy on your fertility can be permanent so it is important to talk to your healthcare provider about this if having a genetically related child is something that you want to do at some point.
- Options may include banking your sperm or eggs prior to starting hormone therapy or postponing hormone therapy if pregnancy is something you are considering soon. What is important is knowing beforehand what any options may involve so that you make decisions that are right for you and your future care goals.

Hormone therapy:

- Hormone therapy can be used to re-balance your body's hormone levels in a way that feels more aligned or affirming of your gender. Hormone therapy can also promote the development of affirming body characteristics as well as reduce characteristics that are not affirming or causing dysphoria.

- Options for hormone therapy will depend on various factors that are unique to you. Many people choose to start this process by making an appointment with their primary care provider. In most cases, they should be able to support and get a plan in place to prescribe hormone therapy if you make that decision.
- Your primary healthcare provider will need to have a conversation with you to make sure hormone therapy is safe to start and that it fits with your gender-affirming care plan. The more they understand about your experience, the better they can support you and your care goals. Working together on this helps things go as smoothly as possible to get the results you want. Ultimately the decision to start hormone therapy is yours. Your healthcare provider's role is to encourage, guide, and assist you in making fully informed decisions.
- Before starting hormone therapy, it is important that you understand your treatment, consider asking the following:

"What effects might I expect from treatment?"

"How long will medication take to work on my body?"

"What ongoing monitoring or tests are needed?"

"Are there different ways to take hormones?"

"What are the risks associated with treatment?"

"Are there any expected side-effects of treatment?"



What is hormone therapy?

For adults, this can be broadly split into two routes depending on your situation.

1) Estrogen-based therapy

Estrogen-based therapy often combines estrogen and testosterone-blocking hormones. This is usually the preferred starting point for estrogen-based therapy.

- **Estrogen** is a hormone that is used to support the development of features such as breast development, rounder hips and thinner hair as well as reducing testosterone-related features such as facial hair. Often combined with a testosterone-blocking medication, which contributes to features such as softer skin, thinner body hair and reduced muscle mass, while reducing testosterone-related features.
- **Testosterone-blockers** reduce the body's production of the hormone which leads to less muscle mass and less facial hair growth.

Estrogen/androgen-blocker related changes may include	Expected onset	How long before you'll see the most change
*Breast growth	3-6 months	2-3 years
*Smaller genitals (testicles)	3-6 months	2-3 years
Decreased fertility	Variable	Variable
Fat redistribution & potentially weight gain or loss	3-6 months	2-5 years
Decreased muscle mass	3-6 months	1-2 years
Mood changes	Variable	Variable
Fewer erections	1-3 months	3-6 months
Changes to sex drive, sexual interests or sexual function	Variable	Variable
Skin changes including softening & decreased oiliness	1-6 months	Unknown
Decreased growth of body & facial hair	6-12 months	3 years
Decreased scalp hair loss (balding)	No regrowth, loss stops 1-3 months	1-2 years

*Change is permanent and will remain even if hormone therapy is stopped.

There are some increased health risks from taking estrogen-based therapy.

It is important that you understand the risks listed below and discuss with your healthcare team how to monitor for signs and symptoms.

These may include increased risk of:

- Blood clots
- Pulmonary embolism (blood clot in the lung)
- Stroke
- Heart attack
- Gallstones

2) Testosterone-based therapy

Testosterone is a hormone that is used to support the development of features such as facial hair growth, deepened voice and increased muscle mass. It also reduced the estrogen-related features.

Testosterone related changes may include	Expected onset	How long before you'll see the most change
*Deeper voice	3-12 months	Years
*Growth of body and facial hair	3-6 months	3-5 years
*Growth of the external genitals (clitoris)	3-6 months	1-2 years

*Scalp hair loss	>12 months	Variable
Decreased fertility	Variable	Variable
Fat redistribution & possible weight gain or loss	3-6 months	2-5 years
Increased muscle	6-12 months	2-5 years
Mood changes	Variable	Variable
Changes to sex drive, sexual interests or sexual function	Variable	Variable
Skin changes including increased oil & acne	1-6 months	1-2 years
Dryness of internal genitals (vagina)	3-6 months	1-2 years
Stopping of monthly bleeding (period)	2-6 months	n/a

*Change is permanent & will remain even if hormone therapy is stopped.

There are some increased health risks from taking testosterone-based therapy.

It is important that you understand the risks listed below and discuss with your healthcare team how to monitor for signs and symptoms.

These may include increased risk of:

- Increased red blood cells (polycythemia)
- Sleep apnea
- Scalp hair loss (balding)
- Changes to cholesterol which may increase risk for heart attack or stroke
- Liver inflammation

Gender-Affirming Surgeries:

Gender-affirming surgeries (also known as transition-related surgeries) is a term used to describe various types of surgeries that can change the look and function of your body to be more reflective or affirming of your gender.

Gender-affirming surgeries are sometimes referred to as ‘top surgeries’ relating to the chest area or ‘bottom surgeries’ relating to the genital area.

There are many considerations that may impact your decision to have surgery.

Cost:

- Some gender-affirming surgeries are covered by Alberta Health Care, which means the cost of the surgery itself will be paid for. There are also private options available (though not covered in this guide), which require you to pay for the surgery.
- Even if the surgery is covered by public health care, there may be other costs to consider. These can include:
 - Time off work for the surgery and recovery
 - Medical supplies you may need afterward

- Expenses for a support person
- Possibly travel and accommodation costs depending on where the surgery is done
- You can find more information about this at:
 - [Funding for Transition Surgeries](#)
 - [EI sickness benefits](#)

Setting realistic expectations:

- Although most people who decide to have gender-affirming surgery are happy with the outcome, it is important to set realistic expectations. It can be a long journey from deciding on surgery to being on the other side and happy with the results.
- Like any major surgery, there are limitations to consider and there is a recovery process that takes time. For example, some surgeries have different criteria to be able to have the operation, any major surgery will have some degree of scars, and each surgery will have different things you are not able to do for some time after the procedure.

It is important to discuss surgical expectations with your healthcare provider as well as with any surgeon you may be referred to see.

The following section helps to explain a little more about these types of surgeries and what you might need to know about each of them. Additional information on each specific surgery can be found at [Trans Care BC](#) and [MyHealth Alberta](#). For metoidioplasty, phalloplasty and vaginoplasty, the [Gender Reassignment Surgery program in Montreal](#) has additional information.

Breast construction (also called breast augmentation or top surgery) is surgery that creates, enlarges or shapes one's breasts.

- The goal of this surgery would be to have breasts and nipples with sensation, a larger cup size and minimal scarring. Breast implants generally last 10-15 years, often meaning that another surgery may need to happen later in life.
- These are typically done as day surgeries meaning that you do not usually stay in hospital and are performed by a plastic surgeon.
- For publicly funded breast construction surgery, the following needs to be completed:
 - You need to have been on hormone therapy for a year with no or minimal breast development
 - You need to have a body mass index (BMI) of 35 or under (criteria set by most surgeons based on safe surgical outcomes and reducing the complications associated with them)
 - You need to be not actively smoking (criteria set by most surgeons based on safe surgical outcomes and reducing the complications associated with them)
 - Your healthcare provider will need to measure your chest circumference

- Your healthcare provider needs to complete relevant paperwork
- You need an assessment by a psychiatrist or other physician with extensive training or clinical experience in assessing and managing the mental health needs of trans and gender diverse individuals

Chest masculinization/ mastectomy (removal of breast tissue) is a surgery that removes or reduces breast tissue and skin for a flatter chest. You may also choose to pursue chest masculinization surgery which includes a nipple graft.

- This may also require changing the size or position of the nipple.
- These are typically done as day surgeries meaning that you do not usually stay in hospital and are most commonly performed by a plastic surgeon.
- For publicly funded surgery chest masculinization/mastectomy, the following needs to be completed:
 - You need to have a body mass index (BMI) of 35 or under (criteria set by most surgeons based on safe surgical outcomes and reducing the complications associated with them)
 - You need to be not actively smoking (criteria set by most surgeons based on safe surgical outcomes and reducing the complications associated with them)
 - You need an assessment by a psychiatrist or other physician with extensive training or clinical experience in assessing and managing the mental health needs of the transgender population

Hysterectomy (removal of uterus) is a surgery to remove the uterus (usually including the cervix and fallopian tubes).

- After the surgery, the person can no longer get pregnant and menstruation (monthly period) stops. Having a hysterectomy will change the levels of hormones being produced in your body and as a result some level of ongoing hormone therapy will be recommended. This surgery is performed by gynecologists and is usually a performed as a day surgery meaning that most often, you do not stay overnight in hospital.
- A hysterectomy is a requirement for people wanting a phalloplasty or metoidioplasty.

Orchiectomy (removal of testicles) is a surgery to remove the testicles and can be done with or without removing the scrotal sac.

- After the surgery you may be able to lower your hormone therapy dose, however, some level of ongoing hormone therapy will be recommended. Some people stop their surgical journey after an orchiectomy and others continue on to a vaginoplasty. This is based on each person's gender-affirming goals.
- Orchiectomy surgeries are performed by urologists.

Phalloplasty & metoidioplasty (creation of penis) are two surgical options to create a penis.

- Each have their own benefits and risks so understanding these options will help you make an informed decision on what is right for you. Both surgical options require a lengthy recovery time (6-8 weeks for metoidioplasty and up to 4 months for phalloplasty).
- Both metoidioplasty and phalloplasty surgeries are performed by specialized plastic surgeons and so require additional considerations. The public healthcare system in our province refers exclusively to surgeons in Montreal.
- Criteria for these surgeries are set by healthcare providers in Montreal. These are:
 - At least one year lived on gender-affirming hormones
 - At least one year lived in preferred gender
 - At least six months after having a hysterectomy
 - A body mass index (BMI) of less than 40
 - You must undergo 2 independent assessments by psychiatrists or other physicians with extensive training or clinical experience in assessing and managing the mental health needs of the transgender population
- **Phalloplasty** is a surgical procedure to create a longer and thicker penis, with a glans (a head).
 - The intended benefits are to enable sexual sensation, the ability to get erections (with the assistance of an implant, if desired), the ability to have penetrative sexual intercourse (with an implant or external stiffening device) and the ability to pee standing up when urethral lengthening is performed.
 - A phalloplasty requires a graft site from your arm or your leg and the recovery from a phalloplasty is longer as the graft site also needs extra time and care to heal.
 - The phalloplasty process is usually over 2-4 surgeries, requiring hospitalization for approximately one week and 3-6 months of post-operative care and recovery at home. Scarring to the donor site and incision sites are worth noting.
- **Metoidioplasty** starts with a period of testosterone hormone therapy to enlarge the erectile tissue (clitoris).
 - This can be 2-3 years to get maximum growth, and the metoidioplasty is a surgical procedure that then creates a penis out of that tissue to a length of 2-4 cm.
 - The intended benefits of a metoidioplasty are preserving sexual sensation, allowing an erection without the assistance of implants, along with additional surgical options such as urethral lengthening which allows you to pee while standing.
 - The metoidioplasty process is usually over 1-2 surgeries, requiring 3-5 days of hospitalization and 6-8 weeks of recovery care.

Vaginoplasty (creation of vagina) is a surgery which creates a vulva and vagina with depth allowing for receptive sexual intercourse. Alternatively, a vulvoplasty is another surgery option that creates a vulva with little to no vaginal depth.

- Both surgeries remove the penis, testicles and scrotal sac. In a vaginoplasty, the tissue from the penis is usually inverted to create the inner walls of a vagina.
- The intended goal of a vaginoplasty is to create genitals with sexual sensation and a urethra for urination while sitting.
- After surgery, hormone therapy can be reduced based on a person's bloodwork levels. Recovery usually takes 6-8 weeks, including time off work. Vaginoplasty surgeries are performed in Montreal by plastic surgeons and so require additional consideration for such as travel, support while away from home etc.
- Criteria for vaginoplasty surgeries are set by healthcare providers in Montreal. These include:
 - At least one year lived on gender-affirming hormones
 - At least one year lived in preferred gender
 - A letter of support from a gender-specialized psychiatrist
 - A body mass index (BMI) of less than 40

Gender-affirming treatment options can feel daunting, given the number of options, the impact of each option and the benefits and risks of each option as it relates to your goals. There are some great resources to help offer you some background information going into appointments with your care provider.

Asking the following questions may help you make an informed decision about your different treatment options and decide which one(s) will work best for you:

"What are the advantages and disadvantages of each option?"

"Can I use any of these options together?"

"What are the short term and long term considerations?"

"Are there risks or side effects from them?"

"What results can I expect?"





Start your treatment & watch your symptoms

As you begin your treatment, remember that if something doesn't work the way you thought it would, talk with your healthcare provider to try and find the best solution.

If hormone therapy is used, this can have several side-effects. These include:

Managing potential side-effects of estrogen/testosterone blockers	
Persistent dizziness	Usually temporary and mild. If severe, talk to your healthcare provider about switching to another testosterone blocker.
Low libido	Talk to your healthcare provider about adjusting hormone levels or potentially adding another hormone (progesterone).
Difficulty having/ maintaining erections	Talk to your healthcare provider about adjusting hormone levels.

Managing potential side-effects of testosterone	
Acne	Most problematic in first year of hormone therapy. Talk to your healthcare provider about ways to treat the acne.
Scalp hair loss	Talk to your healthcare provider about medication to try and stop this.
Unexpected menstrual cycle (period)	Bleeding usually stops within 6 months of starting testosterone. Talk to your healthcare provider about your testosterone dosing, when you are taking it and if there your dosing routine can be adjusted to limit this from happening.
Internal vaginal dryness	This is a common side-effect for those on long-term testosterone. Talk to your healthcare provider about over-the-counter ways to treat this.

Watch closely for changes in your health and be sure to contact your healthcare provider right away if you experience any new symptoms.

Post-operative care

- Recovering from surgery can take time, and the process may be different for each person.
- It's important to follow your surgeon's aftercare instructions, including any restrictions for the weeks after your surgery.



- Talking with your healthcare providers about your recovery plan before surgery can be very helpful, as some parts of your recovery will need planning. This includes knowing the restrictions right after surgery and how you will get back to your regular routine over time.
- If you have any questions or concerns after surgery, contact your surgeon or healthcare provider.



Helpful tools and resources

If you can't reach your healthcare provider and need health advice or information, call Health Link anytime, day or night, by dialing **811**.



Talk with your healthcare provider about a referral

Most of your gender-affirming care can be managed by your primary care provider (like a family physician or nurse practitioner), including guidance on non-medical options and managing hormone therapy. You may need other appointments depending on your gender-affirming goals and other associated health concerns. The need for a referral to other healthcare providers will depend on the treatment and management options you and your healthcare team decide on. It may include seeing some of the following specialists:

Psychiatrist

- A psychiatrist is a medical doctor who specializes in helping people with mental health issues. They diagnose and treat conditions such as depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, and other mental health disorders. Psychiatrists use a mix of therapy and medication to improve their patients' mental health. While not everyone needs to see a psychiatrist, there are situations where their support is mandatory, such as when someone requires specific surgeries related to transitions.

Mental health providers (psychologists, counsellors, or social worker)

- Mental health providers explore how our thoughts, emotions, and behaviours work. They apply this knowledge to support individuals in gaining insight into their mental health, coping with challenges, and making positive changes in their behavior to improve well-being and quality of life.

Gynecologist

- A gynecologist is a medical doctor who specializes in diagnosing and treating issues with the female reproductive organs (the vulva, vagina, uterus, and ovaries). A gynecologist can help with any issues related to menstruation and fertility.

Urologist

- A urologist is a medical doctor who specializes in diagnosing and treating issues with the male reproductive and urinary systems (the penis, scrotum, prostate). A urologist can help with lower urinary tract symptoms (such as problems holding urine), impotence (erectile dysfunction) and issues caused from an enlarged prostate.

Endocrinologist

- A medical doctor who specializes in diagnosing and treating health conditions related to hormones and hormonal glands. An endocrinologist can help manage your period, extra hair growth, weight management, diabetes, and other hormonal conditions.

If transition-related surgery is part of your journey, then additional healthcare providers may be involved including different surgical specialties such as Plastic Surgeons or General Surgeons.



Helpful tools and resources

To learn about how to prepare for your specialist appointment, visit ahs.ca/qure.





Keep taking care of yourself

Taking care of yourself means focusing on all parts of your well-being: physical, emotional, spiritual, financial, and social. These aspects are all connected and can affect each other, so it's important to pay attention to your needs in each area.

Your healthcare team may continue to check in on different areas based on the treatment and management options you choose. This could include evaluating other health conditions, called co-morbidities, and making sure you're up to date with screenings.

Co-morbidities are additional health conditions that can exist alongside your gender-affirmation journey. These might include conditions such as anxiety, depression or diabetes. It's important to address these as part of your overall care plan.

Ongoing screening: While gender affirmation is an important focus in your healthcare, it's also essential to keep up with screenings and prevention for other health conditions. This may include checking for things like cardiovascular risk, chest/breast cancer, cervical cancer, sexual health, osteoporosis, and colon cancer.



Helpful tools and resources

Find resources and services in your community:

211 helps Albertans find the right resource or service for whatever issue they need help with, at the right time. 211 is available anytime, day or night, by phone, text, and online chat. It is confidential and available in over 170 languages over the phone. To contact 211:

- Call 211
- Text INFO to 211
- Visit ab.211.ca

Workshops, classes, and services from the **Alberta Healthy Living Program** can help you to improve your health and quality of life with a chronic condition: ahs.ca/ahlp

Chronic Disease Management support: ahs.ca/cdm

Health Information & Tools: myhealth.alberta.ca/Pages/HealthInfoToolsDefault.aspx



Resources

There's lots of information out there, and it can be confusing to know what information is accurate and true. Here are some great resources that may be helpful for you.

- [Resources | Skipping Stone](#)
- [Funding for Transition Surgeries | Alberta Health Services](#)
- [Hormone Therapy | Trans Care BC](#)
- [Surgery | Trans Care BC](#)
- [Trans Lifeline](#)
- [Trans Wellness Initiative: Providers](#)

Get help now:

- Emergency: Call 911
- Health Link: Call 811

Mental health, addiction, and crisis support:

- 811 or [Addiction Helpline](#): 1-866-332-2322
- 811 or [Mental Health Helpline](#): 1-877-303-2642
- Crisis Text Line: Text CONNECT to 741741
- Crisis Services Canada: Call 988, or visit talksuicide.ca
- Office of Mental Health Patient Advocates: alberta.ca/office-of-alberta-health-advocates.aspx

Helpful tip

If you can't print this resource at home, ask a family member, friend, or your healthcare provider to print it for you. You can also use a computer and printer at your local library.

Community and social supports:

- 211 Alberta: Call 211, or visit ab.211.ca
- Family Violence Info Line: 310-1818, or visit alberta.ca/family-violence-find-supports.aspx
- Income Support: 1-866-644-5135, or visit alberta.ca/income-support.aspx

Alberta Health Services programs:

- Home Care: ahs.ca/homecare
- Find a Dietitian: ahs.ca/nutrition
 - Health Link has dietitians to answer nutrition questions. Call Health Link at 811 and ask to talk to a dietitian or complete the self-referral form on ahs.ca/811.
- Spiritual Care Services: ahs.ca/spiritualcare

Primary care (family doctors):

- Find a doctor: ahs.ca/findadoctor
- Virtual care guide: ahs.ca/virtualhealth

Patient concerns and feedback:

- Office of Alberta Health Advocates: alberta.ca/office-of-alberta-health-advocates.aspx
 - Offers coaching to help you advocate for yourself in the health system, and support to learn how the health system works and how to navigate through it.
- Alberta Health Services Patient Relations: 1-855-550-2555, or visit ahs.ca/patientfeedback



Important phone numbers

Name or clinic name:

Phone number:

Name or clinic name:

Phone number:

Name or clinic name:

Phone number:

Notes

Use this space to take notes.

About this Pathway

The AHS Provincial Pathways Unit co- developed this patient pathway in partnership with patient and family advisors, primary and specialty care providers in Alberta. It is current as of January 2025.

Authors & Conflict of Interest Declaration

This pathway was reviewed and revised by a multi-disciplinary co-design team including psychiatrists, primary care providers and patient and family advisors from across Alberta.

Pathway Review Process

Patient pathways undergo scheduled review every two to three years, or earlier if there is a clinically significant change in knowledge or practice. The next scheduled review is December 2028. However, we welcome feedback at any time. Please send your [feedback here](#), or email us at albertapathways@primarycarealberta.ca.

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Disclaimer

This pathway represents evidence-based best practice but does not override the individual responsibility of healthcare professionals to make decisions appropriate to their patients using their own clinical judgment given their patients' specific clinical conditions, in consultation with patients/alternate decision makers. The pathway is not a substitute for clinical judgment or advice of a qualified healthcare professional. It is expected that all users will seek advice of other appropriately qualified and regulated healthcare providers with any issues transcending their specific knowledge, scope of regulated practice or professional competence.