

Oklahoma Psychological Association's (OPA) Diversity Division Statement on
Supporting Gender-Affirming Care for Transgender Youth
Presented by the OPA Diversity Division

Oklahoma SB3XX blocks funding of gender-affirming care at Oklahoma Children's Hospital at OU Health. This bill also has impetus for future actions by the Oklahoma Legislature as Governor Stitt has recently expressed his support for ending gender-affirmative care across the state in 2023. We believe it is our duty as psychologists to put forward this statement as a division and organization as this falls in line with our mission statement by promoting human welfare of transgendered and gender diverse individuals. Ultimately, decisions on whether to seek gender-affirming care, and what specific services to utilize, must be made between a provider, patient, and the patient's parents or guardians (APA, 2022). These decisions are based on the unique clinical situation and with consideration of a cost/benefit analysis of treatment.

Supportive evidence-based interventions—including but not limited to mental health counseling, social transition support, and hormone therapies—greatly improve mental health outcomes for transgender youth (APA, 2015). Gender affirming care typically includes step-based care model toward social transition, treatments temporarily postponing puberty, and in some instances, hormone replacement therapy (Coleman et al., 2012). There are varying models of care and are distinctly based on treatment approach and the youth's development. Multiple studies have demonstrated gender-affirming care in reducing depressive and anxious symptoms and symptoms returning to developmentally normative levels (Olsen, 2016). Similarly, risk of suicide in the past year was lower among transgender individuals wanting and receiving gender-affirming care (Herman et. al, 2019). Professional organizations, including the American Medical Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, American Psychological Association (APA), Endocrine Society, and Pediatric Endocrine Society, actively oppose any legislative efforts to block transgender and gender diverse youth from gender-affirming medical and surgical care given availability of high-quality evidence-based care and its positive impact on psychosocial functioning.

Lawmakers have voiced concerns of “desistance”, or youth potentially regretting their transition decision in the future. However, a recent study published in *Pediatrics* revealed a desistance rate of only 5 percent, noting that studies showing a higher rate had flawed methodology or were inaccurately interpreted by lay persons (Olson, et al, 2022). In addition, frequently cited work used in arguments of desistance have included participants who never met criteria for gender dysphoria or who strongly identified as trans or gender nonconforming (Brooks, 2018; Steensma et al., 2013). Ultimately, withholding additional federal funding for health care clinics who provide gender-affirming care places transgender youth at risk of losing access to care, places a heavier burden on an already taxed mental health system, places providers at risk for possible legal and liability costs, and further burdens transgender youth and families at an already increased risk for mental health concerns.

The Oklahoma Psychological Association stands in solidarity with transgender youth and their families in Oklahoma. We support and stand with our LGBTQ+ colleagues, consumers, families, neighbors, and friends. We will continue to fight for your rights, utilizing our clinical and scientific knowledge to advocate for the right to appropriate healthcare for all persons in Oklahoma by utilizing policies that advance and protect the rights of Oklahomans, including the LGBTQ+ community.