

Friday, February 2nd, 2024

To Whom It May Concern,



Earlier this week, Alberta Premier Danielle Smith announced that the province will be barring Albertan youth from accessing gender-affirming medical care, forcibly outing trans students to their parents, imposing a parental veto on trans students' use of their chosen name until 16 years of age, explicitly allowing transphobic discrimination in sport, and imposing an opt-in for any discussion of sexual health or gender diversity at school. The proposed changes are summarized [in this article](#). Medically, the evidence-based, internationally recognized medical care that Smith proposes removing access to is necessary for gender-diverse people. Transphobia has known life-threatening consequences for affected youth, including higher risk of suicide and other important consequences for the mental health of a population already heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Canadian 2SLGBTQIA+ Medical Students' Association (CQMSA), a network of 2SLGBTQ+ and allied medical students dedicated to queer & trans health education and advocacy, condemns these policy changes as they prevent inclusive and equitable healthcare for 2SLGBTQ+ youth.

These changes will reduce trans and nonbinary people's bodily autonomy, will hinder access to an entire field of medical care for trans Albertans, and will undermine an already fragile relationship between the medical system and an entire group of highly marginalized patients. Smith's announcement represents another encroachment of the medical profession's authority and autonomy by politicians, seemingly motivated by a desire for votes amid a growing culture war around trans issues. Premier Smith announced the proposed policy changes and then stated in a subsequent press release that she does not wish to politicize the health of transgender people. To deem these policies apolitical is hypocritical as they will without doubt infringe on trans people's human rights. Her blatant disregard of the serious negative impacts these changes will have on trans people's lives and the real potential of increasing rates of distress and possibly suicide are deeply concerning. Further, these changes will not, as Smith claims, do anything to attract surgeons interested in practicing gender-affirming care to Alberta, and will only set the province back. Medical students and residents are highly sensitive to the political landscape when it comes to choosing our specializations and training locations, and we have heard only contempt for these policies from residents interested in gender-affirming care. The proposed policy changes will cause preventable harm to trans Albertan youth and will not increase the recruitment of healthcare professionals necessary to support trans Albertans.

Premier Smith has argued that gender-affirming care, including puberty blockers, involves "permanent and irreversible decisions regarding one's biological sex while still a youth" that "can severely limit that child's choices in the future." These statements about puberty blockers are factually incorrect, as these treatments are *fully reversible interventions* that pause puberty until cessation of treatment (WPATH Standards of Care, 8th version, 2022). They give youth time to decide whether to pursue gender-affirming hormone therapy or surgery later on. The pubertal development of secondary sex characteristics can be prevented if puberty blockers and, later,

hormone therapy are used. Preventing and delaying access to these treatments can allow the development of secondary sex characteristics that worsen gender dysphoria and complicate the gender-affirming changes a person seeks, incurring avoidable surgeries and potentially life-threatening consequences on mental and physical well-being.

Premier Smith has proposed a dangerous policy by placing limitations and rules on trans and nonbinary youths' use of a chosen name or pronouns at school. Socially transitioning through the use of clothing, names, and pronouns, as well as changing legal documents, are often the first line of gender-affirming care approaches for trans and nonbinary youth. Social transition is, in an ideal world, safe and fully reversible. Many households, however, are not safe spaces for youth to freely express their gender identity, and forcibly outing students to their parents or guardians could provoke or amplify stress, anxiety, or depression and potentially places these students in an unsafe housing environment. Adolescence is a time of identity exploration, and many youth do not have the privilege of doing so in their homes. Schools will now further contribute to and perpetuate discriminatory views which will prevent trans and nonbinary students from having access to a safe place to express their individuality, a crucial part of adolescence that other cisgender students will continue to experience.

The CQMSA condemns and strongly opposes these oppressive and life-threatening policy changes that, if realized in the form announced this week, will significantly harm the 2SLGBTQ+ communities of Alberta. We call on our allies to stand up for the trans youth of Alberta and other provinces where similar anti-trans movements are happening, to denounce in the strongest terms these attacks on the right of children to grow up happy, safe, and in good health.

Signed by the Steering Committee of the CQMSA in the name of our members, this 2nd day of February 2024.



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