

Re: MM16.21 - Trans-Inclusive Benefits: Expanding Health Benefits for Toronto Employees to Include Gender-Affirming Care

As a City of Toronto Agency, and as Canada's largest 2SLGBTQ+ organization, The 519 Community Centre strives to make a real difference in people's lives, while working to promote community well-being, equity and justice for 2SLGBTQ+ communities. The 519 is pleased to share our experience supporting trans, non-binary, and 2 Spirit (2STNB) staff and the importance of expanding health benefits to City of Toronto employees to include gender-affirming care, an issue we have been advocating for on behalf of our employees for a number of years.

Importance of Gender Affirming Care

Gender affirming healthcare is lifesaving healthcare and can address the holistic well-being and health needs of individuals across the gender spectrum. It encompasses a range of medical, psychological, and social interventions aimed at affirming an individual's gender identity. Access to gender affirming care is crucial for promoting mental health, reducing the risk of self-harm, and fostering a sense of belonging and self-acceptance among 2STNB staff. Providing comprehensive gender affirming care reflects a commitment to upholding human rights, equality, and dignity for all individuals, regardless of their gender identity.

A 2021 study found that nonaccess to gender affirming surgery leads to a 73% increase in suicide attempts compared to trans individuals who can access care¹. A 2021 literature review found that "gender-affirmation surgery decreases rates of gender dysphoria, depression, and suicidality, and significantly improves quality-of-life measures"². According to the 2019 Trans Pulse Canada study³, 45% of trans and non-binary people had an unmet health care need in the past year, compared to 4% of the general population. This speaks to the continued barriers that trans and non-binary people face in accessing not just gender-affirming care, but a broad range of medically necessary supports.

While great strides have been made in increasing access to medically necessary care for 2SNTB communities, a number of affirming procedures continue to not be covered by OHIP.

Importance of Providing Gender Affirming Care to City Employees.

2STNB employees at The 519 and across the Toronto Public Service often face difficulties when accessing necessary gender-affirming healthcare. With 38% of The 519's employees identifying as

¹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7869522/>

² <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33741180/>

³ <https://www.cmajopen.ca/content/9/4/E1213>

2STNB, increasing access to gender affirming care is crucial to our – and the City’s – ability to recruit, retain, and provide safe and affirming workplaces for 2STNB staff.

In December 2020, Green Shield Canada announced it was including gender affirming benefits as a standard benefit in all group plans. This benefit would provide up to \$5,000 per claim, up to a lifetime maximum of \$10,000, for core surgeries and services not covered by provincial coverage that assist in the physical alignment of a claimant’s gender. City of Toronto Staff cannot currently access these benefits.

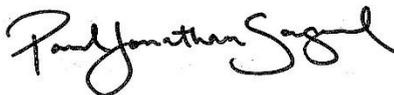
For years, The 519 and the AOCC have been advocating for the inclusion of gender affirming benefits for City employees via ongoing conversations with Pension, Payroll & Employee Benefits staff. In 2021, we were told that the City was reviewing its benefit agreements, but any changes would need to be part of the 2025 CUPE 2998 Collective Agreement negotiations. We have raised the option of using a negotiated Minutes of Settlement between The City and CUPE 2998 to include trans-affirming care, using the precedent of agreements reached during the COVID-19 pandemic to increase Mental Health Supports. We have also explored the possibility of contracting with Green Shield directly to provide these needed benefits to our employees.

As part of the Benefits Review Program and Negotiated Request for Proposals for the Provision of Administrative and Underwriting Services Process, we continued to advocate for the inclusion of gender-affirming care. We are pleased to hear that gender affirming care has been included within the renewed benefits package and appreciate Councillors Moise and Ainslie’s continued leadership on this matter.

Including gender affirming benefits to City employees is essential to ensuring that city staff are able to be their authentic selves at work, and that they are treated with the dignity and respect that are core to Toronto’s public service values. Providing these benefits to City staff will build on Toronto’s proud history of leading the broader public sector in providing equitable and affirming benefits and policies that support 2SLGBTQ+ communities.

We strongly urge that the City moves as quickly as possible to provide gender affirming care benefits to union and non-union staff alike, and at a minimum commit to supporting the inclusion of gender affirming care through upcoming collective bargaining processes.

Sincerely,



Paul Jonathan Saguil
Chair of the Board of Management
The 519



Maura Lawless
Executive Director
The 519