



EUPHA's response to the call for evidence by the European Commission related to

Mid-Term Review LGBTIQ Equality Strategy

On 14 September 2023, EUPHA responded to the call for evidence related to the mid-term review of the EU LGBTIQ Equality Strategy. The response and related evidence was provided by EUPHA Sexual and gender minority health section.

Transgender and gender-diverse (TGD) individuals are at a substantially heightened risk for a plethora of poor mental and behavioural health outcomes, including HIV acquisition, depression, anxiety, as well as self-injurious thoughts and behaviours (SITBs; e.g., non-suicidal self-injury, suicidal ideation, suicidal behaviour) compared to their cisgender peers (McNeil et al., 2017; Randall et al., 2023). Although most research studies demonstrating these gender identity-based disparities have been conducted in North America, several studies from across Europe have documented the presence of similar disparities in, e.g., Sweden (Bränström et al., 2022), Italy (Scandurra et al., 2021), and Switzerland (Nguyen et al., 2022).

Emerging evidence has started to demonstrate that gender-affirming care for TGD individuals seeking such services may not only be associated with short-term alleviations in psychological distress, but also lead to long-term sustained improvements in psychosocial health (Chen et al. 2023; Green et al., 2022; Bränström & Pachankis, 2020; Becker-Hebly et al., 2021). Results reported by Chen and colleagues (2023) also highlight the importance of timely and careful access to gender-affirming hormone treatments in early-pubertal stages for later-life psychosocial wellbeing, suggesting that initiation of hormone treatments among TGD seeking gender-affirming care (i.e., puberty suppressors) during early puberty may help avoid traumatic pubertal changes incongruous with gender identity. These findings underline the importance of timely access to gender-affirming care to TGD youth and young adults, and may be considered one of the fundamental tools to advance health equity in TGD populations and prevent gender identity-based disparities in SITBs and other health outcomes.

Yet, anti-gender movements across Europe have gained significant momentum in recent years. These movements challenge the validity and existence of gender, and in turn, gender identity as well (Rowlands, 2023). Anti-gender campaigners range from conservative political actors, religious leaders and institutions, to “gender critical” feminists, all united in one mission: to advocate for legislative and political action against the fundamental human rights of TGD people and ban access to gender-affirming care for TGD youth and young adults. These actors utilize misinformation, disinformation, and confusion to achieve their goals. This anti-gender advocacy has clear and devastating public health implications. TGD children are especially vulnerable, increasing their risk for poor physical and mental outcomes due to relentless attacks on their very identity, and delaying

or even barring access to the provision of trans-specific healthcare, including puberty suppressors, through policy regression.

Countering anti-trans narratives in Europe and protecting TGD childrens' health and human rights require concerted action and leadership across all levels of government, including the European Commission. To win against anti-gender campaigns in Europe, it is critical to guarantee access to gender-affirming care for TGD youth and young adults seeking such services. These protections are central to any goal that aims to achieve LGBTIQ equality. The Commission's LGBTIQ Equality Strategy will only be truly successful if it helps drive effective EU and national policies that protect TGD youth and young adults' access to gender-affirming care.

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