

27 February 2024

# Submission: Review of Queensland Children's Gender Service

AMA Queensland thanks Children's Health Queensland for the opportunity to provide input to the service evaluation of the Queensland Children's Gender Service (QCGS).

The AMA Queensland Council established the LGBTQIASB+ Working Group to provide advice on emerging health issues in the LGBTQIASB+ community. Members of the Working Group have extensive experience in providing health care to LGBTQIASB+ people and collectively have significant clinical and personal experience in this important field.

Set out below is feedback provided by the Working Group, including broad input to the service evaluation, impacts on staff and patients of the QCGS and key operational issues for consideration. Members of the Working Group have also confirmed they are willing to meet with the reviewers and Queensland Health to discuss any aspect of this submission.

## QCGS service evaluation scope

AMA Queensland is aware of and remains concerned about the impact of recent events at the QCGS and associated media reporting on the wellbeing of staff and current and prospective patients of the service and the broader LGBTQIASB+ community.

Whilst AMA Queensland acknowledges the Queensland Government has determined that the service evaluation 'will examine the QCGS's current model of service delivery against the *Australian Standards of Care and Treatment Guidelines for trans and gender diverse children and adolescents (Version 1.3)*' and 'consider international practice relevant to Queensland services' it respectfully urges the reviewers to consider additional issues set out below or refer them to the Government for subsequent review.

## QCGS staff and patient wellbeing

As stated above, AMA Queensland is aware of and remains concerned about the impact of recent events at the QCGS and associated media reporting on the wellbeing of staff and current and prospective patients of the service and the broader LGBTQIASB+ community. The Working Group recommends the QCGS and Queensland Health implement the following measures to mitigate this impact and to limit similar circumstances eventuating in future.

- The provision of tailored, specific and accessible supports for staff, patients and families at the QCGS during both the current review and any similar future reviews, including during the review process and upon delivery of associated reports. At a minimum, these supports must include:
  - dedicated mental health crisis numbers and contacts; and
  - clear communication to all QCGS staff, patients and families regarding:
    - when and how findings from the review will be delivered;

- whether the evaluation report will be made public;
  - who/which agency will be responsible for implementing any recommendations from the review, particularly identified needs of the service (including within specified time frames); and
  - availability of funding to address specific needs of the service as identified by the review.
- Development of clearly documented Queensland Health processes and policies for reporting and managing transphobia, homophobia and discrimination by all Hospital and Health Services (HHSs) and Queensland Health staff. This must include:
    - the establishment of sensitive and appropriate processes for all staff and patients, particularly those who are also members of the LGBTQIASB+ community, to report workplace incidents of transphobia, homophobia, discrimination, vicarious trauma and associated burnout;
    - the provision of tailored, specific and accessible supports and advocacy for the above staff and patients; and
    - appropriate disciplinary or other action, including supervision, where incidents of transphobia, homophobia or discrimination are established.
  - Development of clearly documented Queensland Health policies regarding QCGS staff attendance or participation in and commentary on events, forums or media regarding matters affecting the LGBTQIASB+ community.
  - Mandatory training for all Queensland Health staff regarding:
    - sexual and gender diversity;
    - the provision of inclusive health care that complies with the principles of the *Human Rights Act 2019* (Qld); and
    - relevant Queensland Health policies and procedures if staff or patients wish to report alleged instances of staff transphobia, homophobia and discrimination.
  - The inclusion of appropriate statements in the service evaluation report acknowledging:
    - the dedication of staff, particularly LGBTQIASB+ staff, working at the QCGS and across Queensland Health; and
    - the stresses and trauma of recent events and associated media reporting caused to QCGS staff, patients and families.
  - Development of a strategic plan to prevent vicarious trauma and burn out for staff working at the QCGS and other Queensland Health services providing health care to the LGBTQIASB+ community.

### QCGS operational issues

AMA Queensland members have reported the following operational issues are impacting both staff and patients at the QCGS and submits them for the review's and/or Government's consideration and investigation.

- Staffing – challenges in staff recruitment and retention the QCGS are reportedly growing. An examination of current remuneration for specialists in nursing and mental health is urgently needed.
- Patient age – investigation of current protocols and practices is needed, including appropriate recommendations regarding the age at which:
  - the QCGS should no longer care for a patient;
  - referrals from general practitioners (or other health practitioners) should be rejected;
  - patients on the wait list should be transferred to the adult wait list; and
  - planning for transfer of care and actual transfer of care to the adult service should occur.
- Referrals – assessment of the number of referrals the QCGS receives and whether there are or should be specific Clinical Prioritisation Criteria and Health Pathways for referring GPs/other health practitioners.
- Wait times – investigation of:
  - the number of young people who 'age out' of the QCGS before receiving treatment; and
  - how wait times in the QCGS have changed, including for First Nations, young people living in out-of-home care.
- Discharge and discharge planning – review of current discharge processes including whether:
  - communication with patients' treating GPs can be prioritised; and
  - QCGS staff are given adequate administration time for drafting GP letters upon commencement of medications and discharge.
- Transfer of care – determination of whether there are (or should be) formal processes for:
  - transferral of care to the adult gender service, including regarding patient age; and
  - transferral of wait-listed patients to the adult gender service, including the age at which patients on the QCGS wait list are and should be transferred.

### General comments

AMA Queensland acknowledges the current review is limited to evaluation of the QCGS but takes this opportunity to highlight the fact that significant barriers to accessing these services for certain patients. Young people living in regional, rural and remote areas, First Nations people and members of culturally and linguistically diverse communities must have the same opportunity as metropolitan patients to access culturally safe LGBTQIASB+ health services without disadvantage due to where they live.