
BRIEFING PAPER

Compatibility of the Existing Healthcare and Prevention Services with the Needs of Transgender People in North Macedonia

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Transgender people in North Macedonia are faced with inequalities when it comes to their access to healthcare, which infers a limited access to quality healthcare services pertaining to routine healthcare, as well as services related to medical gender confirmation.

The most common problem in the access to healthcare services that transgender people who have decided to undergo the process of medical gender confirmation encounter is the fact that the healthcare insurance does not fully cover the hormonal therapy expenses, and it does not cover other interventions, both surgical and non-surgical, at all. It has been documented that this contributes to an additional health risk owing to procurement and administering therapy without proper medical supervision, as well as an existential risk due to the financial burden incurred by the lack of healthcare services coverage. These risk factors make this marginalized and economically unstable community even more vulnerable.

This Briefing Paper is aimed at all key stakeholders, as well as decision and policy makers, and provides an overview of the existing healthcare and prevention services available for transgender people in North Macedonia, and additionally gives recommendations in terms of how to improve the general healthcare system for transgender people, by which they will become the central focal point and would be better suited to their individual needs.

1. EXPERIENCES AND VIEWPOINTS AMONGST TRANSGENDER PEOPLE REGARDING THE COMPATIBILITY OF HEALTHCARE SERVICES WITH THEIR NEEDS

One of the greatest difficulties indentified in receiving proper healthcare services adapted to the needs of transgender people include the physical distance of healthcare services related to medical gender confirmation and the lack of sensitized healthcare workers who would have sufficient knowledge for the needs of transgender people, and would in turn provide adapted services to transgender people.

Many transgender people decide to discuss matters related to their gender identity with a healthcare professional such as a psychologist or a psychiatrist; however, despite the current medical consensus that the attempts to change one's gender identity (conversion therapy) are ineffective, harmful and highly offensive, it has been confirmed that healthcare professionals have attempted to do just that.

Transgender people who have made the decision to align their gender expression with their gender identity by means of interventions for medical gender confirmation are frequently victims of violence or stigma and discrimination. Some transgender people are pressured by those in their immediate surroundings to keep their gender identity concealed and keep living in alignment with the sex assigned at birth due to the fear of losing housing or employment, as well as social exclusion by their friends and family or public condemnation.

Transgender women are particularly affected and recognized as a population under increased risk of the HIV infection, in which the prevalence worldwide amounts to 20%. Certain factors do appear to increase the risk of HIV, the likes of which include social exclusion and stigma, lack of access to proper healthcare for transgender people, hindrances in the access to education, employment and housing, and high degree of intimacy violence.

2. PERCEPTIONS OF CIVIL ORGANIZATIONS THAT WORK WITH TRANSGENDER PEOPLE IN NORTH MACEDONIA

The general perception in civil organizations is that transgender people do not seek healthcare service at the moment when they need them most; instead, they do so only when their health condition seriously deteriorates, and this is so owing to the fear of their identity being revealed and exposed. The specialist healthcare services related to the healthcare of transgender people are described by the civil organizations as services with hindered access due to the long waiting lists or even services which are not available at all for this community. The lack of clinical patients pathways, the lack of healthcare workers who are specialized and sensitized to work with transgender people, as well as the insufficient involvement of General Practitioners in the holistic healthcare process for transgender people are recognized as

an additional barrier, which is confirmed by transgender people's experiences.

The incompatibility of gender with the personal documentation is viewed within the civil sector as a source of stigma and discrimination by the healthcare workers, which are most commonly expressed in the form of mockery, sarcasm or inappropriate questions unrelated to the transgender person's health, which additionally deters transgender people from the healthcare system. Therefore, the civil sector prioritizes the legal recognition of gender in parallel with the processes of promoting the access to healthcare services, which would significantly reduce the barriers in the access to healthcare for transgender people.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SECURING A COMPREHENSIVE AND CONTINUAL ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE FOR TRANSGENDER PEOPLE

<p>To create a multidisciplinary team of healthcare workers (psychologist, General Practitioner, endocrinologist, gynecologist/urologist) that would provide services and care for transgender people and to establish a formal system of coordination and communication within this team.</p>	<p>To develop, adopt and establish clinical pathways, instructions, protocols, rulebooks and/or procedures for healthcare services provision for transgender people in accordance with the international standards and recommendations.</p>
<p>To create a healthcare services package related to medical gender confirmation, covered by the healthcare insurance.</p>	<p>To sensitize healthcare workers, including General Practitioners who work with transgender people, in alignment with the specific needs of the transgender community.</p>
<p>To develop capacities within the civil sector even further in terms of working with transgender people and to establish healthcare support teams for transgender people.</p>	<p>To recognize and include transgender people as a key population in the National Program for Protection of Population Against HIV, and inclusion of community members in the HIV testing and counseling services.</p>

Urgently implementing the processes for legal recognition of gender, simultaneously with the processes to improve the healthcare for transgender people, as well as creating systemic visibility of transgender people in the Republic of North Macedonia.



THE FIRST SEX WORKERS
COLLECTIVE IN THE BALKANS

TransFormA