

Transgender Care Coordination

External Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

External FAQs: Removing “Gender Alterations” Exclusion from the VA Medical Benefits Package

1. What is VA’s policy regarding health care for transgender Veterans?

VA is committed to ensuring that we, as an integrated service and benefits delivery system, are welcoming to all Veterans, including those with minority gender identities and expressions. As part of this commitment, VA provides all medically necessary gender affirming care to transgender Veterans with the exception of gender affirming surgical interventions due to an exclusion in the VA medical benefits package.

2. Is VA planning to remove this exclusion from its benefits package?

Yes. VA wants all eligible Veterans to have access to clinically appropriate, inclusive health care services. In 2016, VA received a Petition for Rulemaking (PFR) to remove this “gender alterations” exclusion that prevented and continues to prevent VA from performing medically necessary gender-affirming surgeries. This petition argued that the exclusion was discriminatory. Revising the medical benefits package would enable a safe, coordinated continuum of care that is Veteran-centric.

3. What is VA doing to ensure transgender Veterans are not facing discrimination?

VA is currently reviewing its policies to ensure that transgender Veterans do not face discrimination based on their gender identity and expression. This review includes an evaluation of statutory and regulatory requirements to build out a continuum of care that provides all medically necessary services for our transgender and gender diverse Veterans.

4. What are the steps involved to permanently remove the exclusion?

VA would formally grant the PFR and initiate rulemaking to remove the exclusion. The entire rulemaking process, itself, can take two years and includes a period of public comment.

Rulemaking is the term used when a federal government agency creates, modifies, or removes rules published in the Code of Federal Regulations (also known as the CFR). Rulemaking to remove this exclusion is recommended to align VA with current Administration priorities, best medical practice, research, and professional health organizations. Revising the medical benefits package would enable a safe, coordinated continuum of care that is Veteran-centric.

5. What about transgender Veteran care during the rulemaking process?

During the rulemaking process, VA will continue to provide or pay for the services it currently offers, including corrective procedures after gender affirming surgeries a Veteran obtains outside VA, hormone therapy, and other gender affirming care.

VA will also have the opportunity to develop processes to meet the surgical and care coordination needs so that Veterans have clear and consistent access nationwide. Delivery of the care will likely happen in a combination of venues including both within VA and through academic partners and other community-based experts in transition-related surgical care.

6. What are the benefits of removing this exclusion?

Removing this exclusion would enable VA to provide transgender and gender diverse Veterans with coordinated, medically necessary, transition-related surgical procedures. Gender affirming procedures have been proven effective at mitigating serious health conditions, including suicidality, substance abuse, and dysphoria.