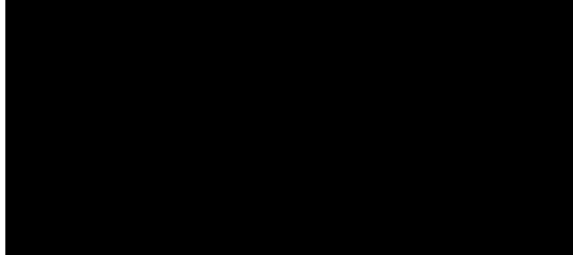


15 January 2020



**Re: Official Information Act request – Policy on gender affirming “Top Surgery”**

I refer to your Official Information Act request dated 9 December 2019 requesting the following information:

1. The DHB's policy on the provision of Gender Affirming "Top Surgery" to transgender patients in the DHB, or for the referral to any other DHBs for the provision of those services;
2. The DHB's policy on the provision of Top Surgery to transgender patients in, from, or referred by any other DHBs;
3. A copy of any agreement (current or expired in the past 12 months) between Auckland DHB and any other DHB for the provision of Top Surgery.
4. A record of any changes made to these policies or agreements in the past 12 months.
5. The minutes from any meeting in which the above changes were decided.

Our responses are listed below following each question. We have endeavoured to answer these as fully as possible using the information available to us.

1. **The DHB's policy on the provision of Gender Affirming "Top Surgery" to transgender patients in the DHB, or for the referral to any other DHBs for the provision of those services**

There is no formal policy relating to the provision of Gender Affirming “Top Surgery”. A range of gender affirming health services are provided although Auckland DHB does not allocate transgender-specific funding for surgical interventions for the transgender population. Rather, a small number of general surgical procedures including mastectomy, hysterectomy and orchidectomy have now been performed over the past three years as part of the general elective services for Auckland population. Referred cases are assessed and managed in line with our standard elective surgery prioritisation criteria. The secondary surgical services in all the Northern Region DHBs manage the referrals for their populations. A decision to refer a patient to a tertiary service is based on the clinical requirement and the secondary service will refer on to the tertiary service as clinically appropriate. All patients need to have also been referred by

Centre for Youth Health or Auckland Sexual Health Services as part of the pathway to other services. Auckland DHB follows the Northern Region Guidelines for gender-affirming healthcare for Gender Diverse and Transgender Children, young People and adults. The details can be found through the following link:

<https://www.healthpoint.co.nz/public/sexual-health/hauora-tahine-pathways-to-transgender-healthcare/>

**2. The DHB's policy on the provision of Top Surgery to transgender patients in, from, or referred by any other DHBs;**

As per the response to question 1, the Auckland DHB does not allocate transgender-specific funding for surgical interventions for the Auckland transgender population and as such does not accept referral for transgender patients from other DHBs. The secondary surgical services in all the Northern Region DHBs manage the referrals for their populations. A decision to refer a patient to a tertiary service is based on the clinical requirement and the secondary service will refer on to the tertiary service as clinically appropriate.

**3. A copy of any agreement (current or expired in the past 12 months) between Auckland DHB and any other DHB for the provision of Top Surgery.**

There is no written agreement with other DHB for the provision of "Top Surgery".

Auckland DHB established a new service arrangement for the provision of specialist and support services for gender affirming care, with the Centre for Youth Health (CfYH) at Counties Manukau DHB in January 2017 and with Auckland Regional Sexual Health Services for older transgender people. The pathway outlined in question 1 above is the route to further services, in association with other standard DHB practices.

**4. A record of any changes made to these policies or agreements in the past 12 months.**

Auckland DHB's approach to the provision of "Top Surgery" has not changed in the past 12 months. Referred cases are assessed and managed in line with our standard elective surgery prioritisation criteria. There has been some inter-DHB confusion regarding referral processes. We clarified this with a formal communication which is copied below.

*Concerns have been raised recently about access to gender-affirming surgical health services for transgender peoples, specifically for the Auckland and Waitematā DHB populations. We acknowledge that this has caused distress for our community and we are very sorry that this has occurred.*

*We would like to take this opportunity to explain the issue and outline a process for providing certainty to all concerned.*

*Firstly, please be assured that there is no cut in funding for access to surgery for transgender patients. Our commitment to this group's ongoing needs is undiminished.*

*There has been an issue with Counties Manukau DHB independently accepting patients on to their surgical list outside of existing referral processes.*

*The effect of this is that the patient's 'home' DHB has not had visibility of surgery until it is asked to meet the costs of the treatment.*

*The Auckland and Waitematā DHB Funder has rightly confirmed that this is not an agreed pathway for referrals and has asked that all referrals go through the local DHB surgical service, consistent with normal process.*

*The local DHB may then refer patients to an appropriate regional service due. This is not a withdrawal of funding but a clarification of the correct clinical pathway.*

*A regional working group will be set up before Christmas to establish formal written guidelines and pathways for access to surgical services for the population of the Northern Region. These guidelines may take a few months to finalise, following appropriate consultation with a range of stakeholders.*

*We would like to apologise most sincerely once again for the distress that has been caused as a result of the misunderstanding regarding the funding of these services. We will ensure that the surgical referral pathways are communicated widely to all stakeholders as soon as these are finalised.*

*In the meantime, we would be grateful if you could clarify to any stakeholders affected by this matter that there has been no withdrawal of funding for surgical services to the transgender community.*

**5. The minutes from any meeting in which the above changes were decided.**

As per the response to question 4, there has been no change to Auckland DHB's approach to the provision of "Top Surgery" in the past 12 months.

I trust this information meets your requirements.

You are entitled to seek a review of the response by the Ombudsman under section 28(3) of the Official Information Act. Information about how to make a complaint is available at [www.ombudsman.parliament.nz](http://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz) or freephone 0800 802 602.

Please note that this response, or an edited version of this response, may be published on the Auckland DHB website.

Yours faithfully



Ailsa Claire, OBE  
Chief Executive