

Medical Students concerned at federal government's lack of support for trans and gender diverse communities

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The Australian Medical Students' Association (AMSA) is extremely disappointed with recent comments made by members of the federal government regarding the trans and gender diverse community.

AMSA expresses deep concern over the stigmatising representations of the trans community in the political debate, a lack of gender-affirming care in political statements and the disregard for the mental health of trans and gender diverse communities.

"Gender affirming care is not a matter of personal belief or subjective concern – it is a matter of access to evidence-based, patient-centred healthcare," said Flynn Halliwell today, Chair of AMSA Queer.

"Not only is the 'concern' purported by our politicians regarding children's access to gender affirming surgery stigmatising, but it is also factually incorrect," continued Mr Halliwell.

In Australia, genital surgery is only available to adults over the age of 18 years old [1].

"Trans and gender diverse people are continually being framed as talking points for political attention, without consideration of subsequent effects on the mental health and wellbeing of these communities. Publicly debating the validity of gender-affirming healthcare is not the solution. It is part of the problem."

AMSA affirms Equality Australia's calls for all political parties and candidates to treat LGBTIQ+ people with dignity and respect, and to campaign in a way that does not undermine these communities' health and wellbeing [2].

Yet, such comments contribute to the mental health crisis currently faced by Australia's trans and gender diverse community.

"It is well-established that trans and gender diverse communities experience higher rates of mental ill-health and greater risk of suicide, largely driven by experiences of interpersonal, institutional and systematic stigma and discrimination," said Jasmine Davis, President of AMSA.

Research published this week revealed that during the pandemic 61% of the 1019 trans people surveyed experienced clinical depression, and 49% reported thoughts of self-harm or suicide [3].

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“Considering the Federal Government’s interest in mental health and suicide prevention, it is extremely disappointing to see these stigmatising representations of gender affirming care arise in public debate,” Mr Halliwell stated.

AMSA calls on the Federal Government to redirect focus onto improving access to evidence-based, patient-centred gender affirming healthcare, as well as funding of LGBTQIA+ mental health and suicide prevention services.

“The value of gender affirming healthcare in promoting positive mental health and wellbeing for many trans and gender diverse people is clear. Increasing the quality and accessibility of these services should be what we are focusing on,” Ms Davis said.

AMSA is the peak representative body for Australia’s 17,000 medical students. AMSA Queer is the representative body for Queer identifying medical students and works to improve health outcomes for all LGBTQIA+ individuals through education and advocacy.

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