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Gender Confirming Surgery Funding Positive; Barriers Remain

HALIFAX — Today the government released a list of gender confirming surgeries which will now be covered by MSI. The Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project (NSRAP) applauds these changes, but significant concerns remain.

“Surgery is an important part of a successful transition for many transgender people. These are medically necessary procedures and have been proven to improve health, well-being and quality of life,” said Kate Shewan, vice-chair of NSRAP.

Many people travel out of province for surgery, seeking specific physicians and techniques. NSRAP is particularly concerned by the decision to cover mastectomies performed in Nova Scotia rather than chest masculinization procedures offered in other provinces. The group is asking for clarification around the specific mastectomy techniques being used in Nova Scotia and whether these will meet the chest masculinization needs of transmen.

“We do want surgeons in Nova Scotia to perform these procedures whenever possible, but we need to ensure they are sensitive to the unique needs of the transgender community and are using techniques that will produce optimal outcomes for these individuals,” Shewan said.

“There are some shortcomings in today’s changes, but we are pleased that Nova Scotia is catching up with the rest of the country by providing coverage for some medically necessary and life-changing surgical procedures related to gender transition.”

Prior to today’s announcement, some Nova Scotians have paid for their surgeries out of pocket, but this is an option few can afford.

“Surgery places a huge financial burden on those who need it, so removing barriers to access is significant.”

There are additional barriers facing transgender people, including access to counseling and assessments, knowledgeable primary healthcare providers, and delays in access to hormone therapy and surgeries.

“In addition to gender confirming surgeries, it is important that we address the barriers that exist throughout the healthcare system,” Shewan said.

“NSRAP will continue to advocate for improvements on the steps taken today, particularly around chest masculinization, as well as for more comprehensive healthcare for the transgender community.”

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The Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project is a provincial advocacy organization for LGBTQ Nova Scotians. For more information, visit <http://www.nsrp.ca>.

On January 31, 2014, NSRAP hosted a community forum to address the development and implementation of policies for the coverage of sex reassignment surgery (SRS). The report from this forum is now available online at <http://www.nsrp.ca/trans-health>.

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