

4. Healthcare For Trans Men- Governance

Judgement, prejudice, misunderstandings- what trans men face when they access healthcare
Despite legal milestones like the NALSA judgment and the Transgender Persons Act (2019), trans men and gender-diverse persons in India continue to face systemic healthcare exclusion, unethical medical practices, and a lack of specific protocols. Addressing these disparities requires integrating rights-based frameworks into medical education and creating community-centric, affirmative healthcare infrastructure.

Healthcare Challenges and Rights of Transgender Men and Gender-Diverse Persons

1. Context and Overview

Despite progressive legal recognition and various welfare initiatives, transgender men and gender-diverse persons assigned female at birth (AFAB) continue to face systemic discrimination. The healthcare sector in India remains largely inaccessible or hostile, characterized by inadequate access to inclusive and dignified care.

2. Key Issues Faced in Healthcare Access

Structural and Institutional Barriers

Persistent Discrimination- Patients frequently encounter misgendering, judgmental attitudes, and outright denial of care within public healthcare institutions.

Administrative Gatekeeping- Access to healthcare is often rigidly linked to gender recognition certificates mandated under the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019. This creates a bureaucratic hurdle where medical care is conditional on legal documentation.

Binary Gender Bias- A rigid binary understanding of gender (male/female) among medical professionals often leads to the exclusion of transmasculine and non-binary identities who do not fit traditional categories.

Knowledge and Research Gaps

Lack of Representation in Research- There is limited Indian research specifically regarding gender-affirming care for trans men and AFAB individuals.

Curriculum Bias- Medical curricula and clinical practices are largely shaped by the experiences of trans women, resulting in unequal attention and a lack of expertise regarding the specific health needs of trans men.

Absence of Protocols- There is a critical absence of ICMR-backed (Indian Council of Medical Research), India-specific ethical and affirmative medical protocols for diverse Gender Identities and Sex Characteristics (GIESC).

Unethical Medical Practices

Refusal of Procedures- Essential medically indicated procedures, such as hysterectomy, are often refused due to deep-seated patriarchal and reproductive biases held by medical practitioners.

Violation of Bodily Autonomy- There are disturbing reports of unnecessary invasive examinations that violate both bodily autonomy and established medical ethics.

Challenges in Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT)

Inadequate Counselling- Patients often receive insufficient counseling regarding the dosage, risks, and potential long-term side effects of testosterone therapy.

Lack of Standardization- There are no standardized dosing guidelines tailored to body weight or specific health conditions.

Self-Medication Crisis- Due to the administrative hurdles in public insurance schemes and the scarcity of trans-affirming endocrinologists, there is a high incidence of self-medication, which poses severe health risks.

3. Implications of Exclusion

Dimension	Implications
Ethical	Reflects weak integration of empathy and ethics in public service. Denial of dignified care violates Article 21 (Right to Life and Dignity). Highlights the

	gap between formal equality (laws) and substantive equality (actual outcomes).
Health	Increases reliance on unsafe hormone use and self-medication. Leads to poor mental health outcomes, including severe anxiety, depression, and distress.
Economic	Results in a loss of productive workforce participation due to chronic poor health and exclusion.

4. Government Initiatives and Interventions

Legislative Framework

Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019– Aims to prohibit discrimination in education, employment, and healthcare. Recognizes the right to self-perceived gender identity.

Institutional Support

National Council for Transgender Persons– Constituted under the 2019 Act to advise the Central Government. Focuses on the formulation and evaluation of policies, legislation, and projects for community welfare.

National Portal for Transgender Persons (2020)– Launched by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. Enables applicants to obtain a certificate of identity and identity card digitally, removing the need for physical interface and reducing harassment.

Healthcare Infrastructure

Mitr Clinic / Sabrang Clinic– Originally established as Mitr Clinic in Hyderabad, Telangana, it was India's first transgender-led healthcare center.

Staffing– Entirely managed by members of the trans community.

Status– Faced closure in January 2025 due to funding cuts but was reopened as Sabrang Clinic with support from Tata Trusts.

Services– General health, HRT consultation, and treatment for HIV/STIs.

5. Judicial Measures- The NALSA Judgment (2014)

The Supreme Court ruling in National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) v. Union of India (2014) was a watershed moment with the following implications–

Legal Recognition– Directed Centre and State Governments to grant legal recognition of gender identity as male, female, or third-gender.

Reservation Benefits– Recognized third-gender persons as a "socially and educationally backward class of citizens," entitling them to reservations in public employment and educational institutions.

6. Way Ahead- Strategic Recommendations

Policy and Institutional Reforms– Develop ICMR-led, India-specific, evidence-based protocols for gender-affirming care.

Capacity Building– Introduce mandatory gender-affirmative training in medical education curricula and in-service training programs for doctors and nurses. Adopt protocols aligned with the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH), adapted to suit Indian socio-economic realities.

Community-Centric Approach– actively include community health workers with lived experience in the delivery of public healthcare to bridge the trust gap.

Regulation and Safety– Establish and enforce standardized guidelines for HRT dosage, monitoring, and long-term follow-up to prevent self-medication harms.

7. Concluding Remarks

The challenges faced by trans men and gender-diverse persons are not merely medical but reflect deeper systemic issues including knowledge deficits, patriarchal norms, and the weak implementation of rights-based laws. Addressing these gaps is essential for advancing constitutional morality, social justice, and ethical governance in India.

Source– <https://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/health/judgement-prejudice-misunderstandings-what-trans-men-face-when-they-access-healthcare/article70361315.ece>