

GENDER-AFFIRMING VOICE THERAPY

ACTION REQUESTED

Ensure access to gender-affirming voice therapy by speech-language pathologists (SLPs). SLPs provide gender-affirming voice therapy within their scope of practice and may be part of an interprofessional team. SLPs can help patients safely modify their voice and communication behaviors—including verbal and nonverbal communication, such as vocal pitch, intonation, voice quality, resonance, fluency, articulation, pragmatics, and vocalization (e.g., laughing)—through evidence-based interventions and patient-focused functional goals.

ISSUE: Laws and Policies May Limit Patient Access to SLP Gender-Affirming Voice Therapy

- According to the World Health Organization (WHO), gender-affirming health care can include any single intervention or combination of interventions—including social, psychological, behavioral, or medical (including hormonal treatment or surgery)—designed to support and affirm an individual's gender identity when it conflicts with the gender they were assigned at birth.
- SLPs may provide gender-affirming voice therapy regardless of health insurance coverage or other diagnoses. However, there may be significant variability in insurance coverage for services related to gender-affirming voice therapy.
- A medical diagnosis of “gender dysphoria” under the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition* (DSM-5; American Psychiatric Association, 2013) or the *International Classification of Diseases, 10th Revision, Clinical Modification* (ICD-10-CM) may facilitate access to health insurance coverage for gender affirmation services, including voice therapy.
- Gender-affirming voice therapy can help patients safely modify their voice and communication behaviors—including verbal and nonverbal communication, such as vocal pitch, intonation, voice quality, resonance, fluency, articulation, pragmatics, and vocalization (e.g., laughing)—through evidence-based interventions and patient-focused functional goals.
- Consistent with the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Bostock v. Clayton County*, the federal government currently interprets that Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act's prohibition against discrimination on the basis of sex includes sexual orientation and gender identity. The U.S. Department of Education and Department of Health and Human Services have issued notices of interpretation that this includes legal protections under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 and Section 1557 of the Affordable Care Act, respectively.
- Ongoing state legislative and regulatory efforts to restrict clinicians' ability to provide gender-affirming care could have a serious negative effect on the health of transgender and gender nonconforming individuals across the country.

ASHA CONTACTS

Legislation in the states: states@asha.org.

Federal laws, regulations, and guidance: reimbursement@asha.org.

SOLUTION: Ensure Access

- ASHA opposes legislative and regulatory policy efforts to (a) inhibit patient access to gender-affirming care and (b) restrict clinicians' ability to provide such care. ASHA is actively monitoring these policy efforts and working with our state associations to strategically engage as appropriate.
- ASHA is concerned by legislative and regulatory policies that raise questions regarding the ability of SLPs to provide care that respects all of their patients' needs or the ability of providers to feel safe in their workplaces, even when those policies do not specifically address gender-affirming care by SLPs.
- ASHA members should contact their state association and licensing board for questions specific to the state(s) where they practice.
- ASHA members seeking information on broader access to gender-affirming care policy efforts can find links to other organizations and legislative trackers at [Gender-Affirming Voice Therapy](#).