

BRIEFINGS ON TRANS HEALTHCARE

THE CASS REVIEW'S USE AND EVALUATION OF RESEARCH

2024



THE CASS REVIEW'S USE AND EVALUATION OF RESEARCH

The Cass Review's use and evaluation of research has been widely criticised by experts around the world.¹⁻³ Professional bodies internationally have condemned the Review, and the British Medical Association intends to evaluate the Review based on concerns about its methodology and recommendations.⁴ As part of the Review process, several systematic literature reviews were commissioned.⁵ These reviews then underpinned the Cass Review's entire engagement with, and use of, the evidence base on gender-affirming healthcare for young people. These literature reviews have been critiqued for many of the same reasons as the broader Cass Review's engagement with the evidence base; of particular concern is that their conclusions do not always align with the research they evaluate.³ For example, these reviews, and subsequently the Cass Review itself, claim there is no clear effect of hormone therapy reducing suicidality, despite the literature they deemed "high-quality" showing a reduction in suicidality after young people have received gender-affirming hormones.³

Critiques of the Cass Review's engagement with the evidence base include:

- It does not follow established standards for evaluating evidence and evidence quality.^{1,2}
- The discussion of evidence quality is scientifically unsound.¹
- It fixated on evidence quality to the exclusion of other factors that are rigorously considered when creating clinical guidelines.¹
- It fails to recognise the nuances of evidence quality measures.¹
- It inappropriately fixates on evidence which is technically classified as "high-quality" according to the GRADE system.¹
- It puts higher standards on the evidence for gender-affirming healthcare compared to the evidence base for other areas of paediatric and adult medicine.^{1,6}
- The conclusions it makes about the research do not follow from the results of the research.³
- Non-affirmative approaches (such as "gender-exploratory" therapy) are endorsed, even though there is no evidence of their supposed benefits.

- On the other hand, affirming healthcare is not endorsed despite the consistent favourable findings of real-world observational studies. The Cass Review text implies that a standard of evidence such as randomised controlled trials would be required (for example, Cass Review page 177), although randomised controlled trials of puberty suppression or gender-affirming hormone treatments are impossible, as they are neither feasible nor ethical.²

The Cass Review does not provide a trustworthy summary or evaluation of the research on gender-affirming healthcare for young people, and its claims about the evidence underpinning gender-affirming healthcare must be approached with caution in light of these widespread critiques.

Intended use of information

While we make every effort to make sure the information in this resource is accurate and informative, the information does not take the place of professional medical advice.

Do not use our information as a substitute for the advice of a health professional.

If you are an individual seeking medical or health information for yourself or for someone else, you should obtain advice relevant to your particular circumstances from a health professional.

More information and support

For clinicians, please contact AusPATH for resources and support. www.auspath.org.au

For families and young people, please contact Transcend Australia for resources and support. www.transcend.org.au

This resource and associated evidence briefs and fact sheets can be downloaded from www.transcend.org.au/resources/evidence

REFERENCES

1. McNamara M, Baker K, Connelly K, et al. *An Evidence-Based Critique of “The Cass Review” on Gender-Affirming Care for Adolescent Gender Dysphoria.*; 2024.
2. Horton C. The Cass Review: Cis-supremacy in the UK’s approach to healthcare for trans children. *Int J Transgend Health*. Published online March 14, 2024;1-25. doi:10.1080/26895269.2024.2328249
3. Grijseels DM. Biological and psychosocial evidence in the Cass Review: a critical commentary. *Int J Transgend Health*. Published online 2024. doi:10.1080/26895269.2024.2362304
4. British Medical Association. BMA to undertake an evaluation of the Cass Review on gender identity services for children and young people. July 31, 2024. Accessed August 31, 2024. <https://www.bma.org.uk/bma-media-centre/bma-to-undertake-an-evaluation-of-the-cass-review-on-gender-identity-services-for-children-and-young-people>
5. Cass H. *Independent Review of Gender Identity Services for Children and Young People: Final Report.*; 2024.
6. Howick J, Koletsi D, Ioannidis JPA, et al. Most healthcare interventions tested in Cochrane Reviews are not effective according to high quality evidence: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *J Clin Epidemiol*. 2022;148:160-169. doi:10.1016/j.jclinepi.2022.04.017