

AusPATH Statement in response to New Zealand Government's decision to restrict access to puberty blockers

AusPATH stands with PATHA, our colleagues in Aotearoa New Zealand, and the trans young people, families, and professionals affected by the recent New Zealand Government's decision to restrict access to puberty blockers.

As Australia's peak body for gender affirming healthcare professionals, we are deeply concerned that this decision disregards clinical expertise, research evidence, and the lived experience of the communities most affected. When governments depart from evidence-based practice and sideline the advice of healthcare professionals, the consequences are predictable: poorer health outcomes, reduced help-seeking, and a loss of trust in health systems. Decisions of this kind place unnecessary strain on families who are left carrying the full burden of supporting a distressed young person without access to appropriate, timely care.

Puberty blockers are a well-established medical intervention used internationally for a range of paediatric conditions. In Australia, they are commonly prescribed (and PBS-subsidised) for many indications. Removing access to puberty blockers does not stop trans young people seeking the care they require. Instead, it forces families into more difficult decisions, often requiring them to move directly to other gender affirming hormones without the time-buying, stabilising role puberty blockers provide. Families who delay or find themselves unable to access care are frequently left to manage escalating distress, often over the high-risk developmental period around puberty. This carries well-documented risks of anxiety, depression and suicidality, and increases the chance of inter-family conflict and family breakdown.

International experience demonstrates that restrictive approaches increase pressure on emergency departments, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Units, and crisis services. They also drive families toward online prescribing routes, importing common pharmaceuticals that would otherwise be safely managed within a well-regulated health system. These patterns are already visible in the United Kingdom following its own ban.

The UK Government has gone so far as to require clinicians within the NHS to report parents who support their children's affirmed gender, and in some cases, has applied laws that permit the arrest of parents if gender affirming medicines are found at home. This is not an approach any country should emulate.

Claims that the UK is leading a global shift are incorrect. The UK remains the only country with an indefinite ban. While some US states have imposed prohibitions, countries often cited as comparators (e.g., Finland, Sweden, and Norway) have *not* banned puberty blockers. Instead, they have reaffirmed multidisciplinary team-based care models consistent with those used in Australia. Within Australia, Queensland is the only jurisdiction that has restricted publicly available gender affirming hormones.

AusPATH also cautions that reducing access to medically indicated care increases the risk of preventable harm. Over the past five years, government bodies in both New South Wales and Queensland have conducted formal enquiries into state-based gender services. In each case, the reviews led to expansion of services, greater resourcing, and recognition of the risks created when gender affirming care is delayed or inaccessible. The recent events in Queensland and the path New Zealand is now undertaking by restricting access to puberty blockers creates avoidable and unacceptable risks for young people. It also risks replicating the failures witnessed elsewhere when governments override evidence-based clinical care.

AusPATH urges the New Zealand Government to reconsider this decision. We encourage all governments to follow the evidence, listen to healthcare professionals who specialise in this area, and centre the voices of trans people, their families, and those with lived experience.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'E Brook'.

Dr. Eloise Brook
CEO
AusPATH