

Trump's Order on Gender-Affirming Care Escalates Reversal of Trans Rights

Transgender people and their allies are concerned executive order will discourage prescriptions and medical procedures and complicate insurance coverage.

February 3, 2025 By Julie Appleby and KFF Health News

President Donald Trump ratcheted up his administration's reversal of transgender rights on Tuesday with [an executive order](#) that seeks to intervene in parents' medical decisions by prohibiting government-funded insurance coverage of puberty blockers or surgery for people under 19.

Trump's order, titled "Protecting Children From Chemical and Surgical Mutilation," is certain to face legal challenges and would require congressional or regulatory actions to be fully enacted. But transgender people and their advocates are concerned it will nonetheless discourage prescriptions and medical procedures they consider to be lifesaving in some cases, while complicating insurance coverage for gender-affirming care.

"It can't be understated how harmful this executive order is, even though it doesn't do anything on its own," said Andrew Ortiz, a senior policy attorney at the [Transgender Law Center](#). "It shows where the administration wants to go, where it wants the agencies to put their efforts and energies."

The order is one of several Trump has issued, less than two weeks since taking office, that target the trans community. He has directed his administration to recognize only the male and female sex — and to abandon the term "gender" altogether. He ordered the State Department [to issue passports](#) identifying Americans only by their genders assigned at birth. He has encouraged the Justice Department to [prosecute teachers and other school officials](#) who help trans children transition, including by using their preferred names. And he signed an order that's expected to lead to transgender people being banned from military service.

"We're terrified. We cry every day. Hurting my family and my kid is winning politics for Republicans right now," said the parent of a transgender child who lives in Missouri and asked not to be identified for fear of being targeted. "Every bone in my body is telling me I can't keep my child safe from my government anymore, I can't keep my family safe."

[About 300,000 American children ages 13 to 17 identify](#) as transgender, according to the Williams Institute at the UCLA School of Law, which researches sexual orientation and gender identity law and public policy. But the number who seek gender-affirming care is believed to be far fewer. An examination by Reuters and Komodo Health of about 330 million health insurance claims filed from 2017 to 2021 [found that fewer than 15,000 patients](#) ages 6 to 17 with a diagnosis of gender dysphoria had received gender-affirming hormone therapy and fewer than 5,000 had started puberty-blocking medications — though the annual number of such patients more than doubled over the five-year span.

Trump's order seeking to disrupt insurance coverage for young people, the Williams Institute [said in a brief](#), "will likely at least limit the availability of gender-affirming care or make it more difficult to access in the short term and could increase risk for both providers and recipients of the care."

Much of what the order calls for would require rule changes or other federal guidance, which can take weeks to months. Though it is mostly directed toward government health insurance programs, the order could have private-sector implications, too, and is likely to face litigation from states or advocacy organizations.

Specifically, the directive intends to limit insurance coverage for hormonal or surgical treatments that help young people transition.

It directs the secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services to "take all appropriate steps" to end insurance coverage of such treatments. It specifically names several government programs such as Tricare, which serves the military and its dependents; Medicare and Medicaid; federal and postal health benefit programs; and the Foreign Service Benefit Plan.

"The aim here is clearly targeted at federally funded plans, such as Medicare and Medicaid, but there's a lack of clarity as to whether it would impact other plans, such as exchange plans, where essential health benefits are required," said Lindsey Dawson, director of LGBTQ Health Policy at KFF, the health policy research, polling, and news organization that includes KFF Health News.

State Medicaid programs vary widely in their rules around transgender care, with a variety of limits or restrictions on what types of care can be covered for minors in just over half the states, [according to a map](#) provided by the Colorado-based Movement Advancement Project, a nonprofit think tank.

While little is likely to happen immediately from the order — one of more than 100 issued by the president since his inauguration last week — it could, nonetheless, have a chilling effect on medical professionals.

The order directs the Department of Justice to work with Congress to promote legislation that would allow children and parents a "private right of action" — the ability to file a lawsuit — against medical professionals who provide transgender care.

And the Justice Department was also directed to consider the application of existing laws to those

who provide or promote access to gender care.

In addition, one section of the order directs agencies to “take appropriate steps to ensure that institutions receiving Federal research or education grants end the chemical and surgical mutilation of children,” a move that could affect hospitals or medical schools.

Julian Polaris, [a partner at the consulting firm Manatt](#), said the order “displays the federal government’s willingness to use federal programs to restrict access to disfavored services even to providers and patients outside those federal programs.”

The move drew immediate criticism from groups supporting LGBTQ+ people’s rights.

“It is unconscionable that less than 24 hours after trying to take away Head Start programs and school meals for kids, President Trump issued an order demonizing transgender youth and spreading dangerous lies about gender-affirming care,” [Alexis McGill Johnson](#), president and CEO of Planned Parenthood Federation of America, wrote in a press release.

Because it defines “youths” as those under age 19, the order would apply the directives to medical treatments provided to 18-year-olds, who otherwise are considered adults in making legal choices, voting, or serving in the military.

“There’s also just a problem with not seeing young people as capable in making decisions around their health and their futures, and so blurring that line and trying to move it up and taking more control over more people is obviously concerning,” Ortiz said. “But having the line hard at 18 also doesn’t make it any better.”

Ortiz noted that the order contains misinformation about medical care for young people who are transitioning and targets a small subset of U.S. residents: transgender youths in families that can access and afford gender-affirming care.

“That should be concerning to everybody,” he said, “that they are pulling out populations to target, to say that, ‘We don’t think that you deserve access to best-practice medical care.’”

Trump’s order explained that the action was necessary because such medical treatment could cause young people to regret the move later, once they “grasp the horrifying tragedy that they will never be able to conceive children of their own or nurture their children through breastfeeding.”

KFF Health News Midwest correspondent Bram Sable-Smith contributed to this report.

[This story](#) was published by KFF Health News on January 31, 2025. It is republished with permission.