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Equal Rights Washington
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Lambda Legal
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Lesbian Rights
National Center for
Transgender Equality
National Gay and Lesbian
Task Force Action Fund
Oasis Youth Center
Pierce County
AIDS Foundation
Pride Foundation
QLaw Foundation
Rainbow Center
Seattle Counseling Service
Seattle University
School of Law,
Ronald A. Peterson Law Clinic
The Northwest Network
Transgender Law Center

PRESS RELEASE

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Public Employees Benefits Board Implements Transgender Inclusive Healthcare *Provides Parity in Healthcare Coverage for Transgender Individuals*

Olympia, WA—Earlier today, the Public Employees Benefits Board (PEBB) voted unanimously to support transgender inclusive healthcare for public employees in Washington.

Beginning on January 1st, 2015, hormones, mental health, and other non-surgical healthcare services will be provided for the treatment of gender dysphoria (a well-recognized medical condition in which the sex a person is assigned at birth does not match the gender they know themselves to be). Beginning on July 1st, 2015, coverage will include benefits for surgical services for the treatment of gender dysphoria.

“We applaud the PEBB for their leadership on this critical issue,” said Marsha Botzer, member of the Coalition for Inclusive Healthcare and founder and Board Co-Chair of Ingersoll Gender Center. “This victory ensures that transgender public employees throughout the state will have access to life-saving and medically necessary healthcare.”

This decision comes on the heels of a recent announcement by the Office of the Insurance Commissioner that makes it clear that insurance companies cannot discriminate against transgender individuals. The Federal government and the state of Maryland have also recently implemented transgender inclusive healthcare coverage for their employees.

Currently, nearly all insurance plans in Washington categorically exclude coverage for transition-related medical treatment, even when that same treatment (such as mental healthcare, cancer screenings, or hormone therapy) is covered for non-transgender people.

“We look forward to working with PEBB to implement and enforce this decision in a timely and uniform way,” said Danielle Askini, the Advocacy Director of Gender Justice League. “Removing these outdated exclusions brings parity to healthcare coverage—guaranteeing that transgender individuals will not be denied healthcare coverage simply because of who they are.”

Forty-five percent of transgender Washingtonians have attempted suicide at some point in their life according to the National Transgender Discrimination Survey. With access to gender transition related care, medical research has shown that the suicide attempt rate drops down to roughly 3 to 5%—only slightly higher than the general public.

“Providing the full range of services to transgender individuals is literally a matter of life and death,” said Seth Kirby, Board President of Pride Foundation. “PEBB’s decision

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sends a clear message to transgender individuals that they matter, and paves the way for other employers to follow suit.”

Removing transgender exclusions in healthcare is also cost-effective. A 2013 [study](#) of Fortune 500 employers who offer transgender inclusive health coverage to their workers found that providing such coverage had a negligible impact on costs. The City of Seattle, the Washington Education Association, Microsoft, Amazon, Boeing, and a growing number of large employers that self-insure already provide transgender inclusive health coverage to their employees.

“I am transgender and have been a subscriber to Washington State health insurance benefits for over 25 years,” said Kathryn Mahan, an employee at Pierce Conservation District. “Throughout this time, I have felt that I was being unfairly excluded from benefits because of my gender identity—the same benefits that were being offered to other state employees. This has led to much anguish and hopelessness. Today’s action by the PEBB is a critical step towards offering transgender employees parity in healthcare coverage. For that, I thank you.”

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The Coalition for Inclusive Healthcare is a broad is a broad group of organizations and individuals that support inclusive healthcare for transgender people in Washington.

Support for Transgender Inclusive Healthcare

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--Kathryn Mahan, an employee at Pierce Conservation District

“I know from personal experience the pain and challenges that these exclusions cause for transgender people and their families. PEBB’s decision will have a positive influence on the lives of transgender public employees throughout the state—finally ensuring that we have access to the medically necessary care that we need.”

-- Laura Harrington--employee at the University of Washington

“This care is life saving and medically necessary. After 30 years of practice, refusing transgender people medical care because of who they are goes against everything I believe in as a physician.”

-- Dr. Roberta Dalley, MD, GLMA Board Member, University of Washington Physician

“In 2006 the Washington State legislature banned discrimination in insurance based on a person’s gender identity. It’s time to make that promise a lived reality for all transgender people in Washington.”

-- Laurie Jinkins, Washington State Representative, 27th District