Written evidence from Mermaids

Mermaids welcomes this opportunity to respond to the Health and Social Care Select Committee inquiry into sexual health and the inequalities faced by young trans and gender non-confirming people. Mermaids is a charity that supports transgender and gender variant children, young people and their families. Our online support group for parents has over 1,200 members, and over 500 young people on our youth group and we generally advocate on behalf of transgender and gender variant children and young people nationwide.

Mermaids welcomes the governmental commitment to improving the lives of LGBT individuals in its recent LGBT Action Plan and this must include transgender and non-binary young people.

There is very limited evidence about trans people’s sexual health generally and specifically around young trans people. We have noted that trans respondents to the National LGBT Survey were more likely to report negative experiences with sexual health services than cis respondents. Mermaids suggests that negative experiences often cultivate from dealing with services that are not trans-aware and therefore incapable of being fully trans inclusive. Currently, the social climate and level of awareness around transgender issues and healthcare means that not every transgender young person can access sexual health services with the comfort of knowing they will be understood and respected which exposes them to risk of harm. This harm is posed by either the subconscious prejudicial treatment toward transgender people or because young people do not feel confident in accessing treatment. As well as this lack of trans awareness within services, the other main factor to inequalities trans young people currently face is likely to be because the allocation of funding and resources are currently not being used for our trans young people in a bespoke way necessary to improve their experience.

Recommendations

1. Anyone working within the sexual health service be it at a local or national level should undergo mandatory transgender awareness training to ensure they deal with every trans patient in a respectful way and so they understand particular issues that may arise specifically for that patient without the patient having to try and educate a healthcare professional within a consultation as this can be distressing and humiliating. Service providers should have to undergo refresher training every few years to ensure their practice is up to date.

2. Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) should ensure that all young people are given the knowledge, skills and values they need to protect their sexual health and have happy, healthy relationships and we recommend that there is a clear aspect to the curriculum that provides for trans-focused education in relation to sexual health. All trans and non-binary student must feel included and represented. School guidance should be strengthened to ensure this happens.
3. Funding of the public health system must be urgently addressed within November’s upcoming Spending Review. The Secretary of State for Health should commit to protect the public health budget to protect both prevention and clinical services.

4. The experiences of transgender and gender variant young people should be periodically reviewed and services made accountable where trans and non-binary people face inequalities.

5. The government commissions the necessary research around transgender youth in relation to sexual, reproductive health and HIV services. This should be done as a matter of urgency. The results should be used to improve the experience of transgender and gender variant young people.

6. A new standard contract should be developed for sexual health providers, which includes standards on inclusion with specific consideration for transgender and gender variant young people.

7. Healthcare services should be signposted to specialist trans support services to provide extra expertise where necessary.

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