

## News Release

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### ***Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Vermont Supports Gender Affirming Care***

**Berlin, Vermont** —At Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Vermont we take a whole-person approach to health, and fundamentally believe that people should have a sense of well-being in both their body and their mind. We oppose the actions taken in Texas, Florida and ten other states that criminalize parents for seeking health care for their children, silence teachers in their classrooms, restrict transgender and gender non-conforming kids' access to sports, counseling and mental health resources, and marginalize an entire population simply for being who they are—we reject hate in all forms. We invite Vermonters on Transgender Visibility Day to consider ways to speak out against the alienation of difference.

“When someone looks in the mirror at their body, they might not like what they see because they think their ankles are too thick, their belly hangs over their jeans, their lips are too thin,” says Colleen Sanford a Registered Nurse who worked for seven years as a dedicated case manager for gender-affirming care services at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Vermont. “For some people who look in the mirror, they see body parts that shouldn't be there—which is distressing, discouraging and confusing. They may feel that they don't belong, which can lead to a deep psychological disconnect.”

A 2020 retrospective review of transgender and gender non-conforming adolescents showed alarming rates of psychiatric comorbidities.<sup>1</sup> 78.5% of the teens in the review had high rates of depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation and self-harm.

“The data is clear, and the health impact is troubling. We have a collective responsibility to care for our children, and to ensure that they have access to every resource available to promote mental and physical wellness,” said Dr. Josh Plavin, Vice President and Chief Medical Officer at Blue Cross and a practicing physician of Pediatric Internal Medicine.

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Vermont has been watching as state legislatures and governors across the country deliberately and systematically discriminate against transgender youth and their families. From [actions taken by Texas' Governor](#) attacking the parents of trans youth, to Florida's “[Don't Say Gay](#)” bill, to [legislation in Idaho](#) that would make it a felony with a maximum sentence of a life in prison for parents and doctors to give transgender youth hormones or puberty blockers—or leave the state to seek care for their children, to a [law signed in Idaho](#) with copycat legislation in several other states that prevents transgender children from participating in sports that reflect their gender—across the country this amounts to profound discrimination designed to alienate children and their families, while putting politics before the health and welfare of our nation's youth.

In Vermont there are fantastic resources to help families navigate gender affirming care and mental wellness, including free gender-affirming case management services for our members at Blue Cross

and Blue Shield of Vermont, and benefits that cover the entire spectrum of gender-affirming care. Our community partners offer a significant range of programming and resources for transgender youth and their families, including:

- [Outright Vermont](#) offers a vast array of social and support programming and community building for transgender and non-binary youth through their teens. Recurring weekly programs include Friday Night Groups and drop-in space (in-person and online). Monthly recurring programs, Trans Parent, and a Gender Creative Kids group reach parents, caregivers, and younger kids respectively. One-off annual programs like Camp Outright, Leadership Day, and the Queer and Allied Youth Summit focus on bringing larger communities of youth together to connect, develop skills, and just have fun with their peers and adult role models who get it, live it, and similarly want to see a more just Vermont for all.
- The [Brattleboro Retreat](#) has an inpatient mental health program in a LGBTQ+-affirming setting.
- The [Pride Center of Vermont's](#) Trans Program offers several support and social groups for those who hold a trans identity, and for friends and family of trans adults. The Pride Center recently hosted a fantastic inclusion training for Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Vermont employees that offered tangible information in an accessible, positive way. The training gave a space for employees to ask questions in a positive learning environment and is highly recommended for any Vermont employer who seeks to promote a more inclusive world.

“We reject the political alienation and marginalization of our children,” said Dr. Plavin. “I am calling on medical providers across the country to join me in speaking out.”

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Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Vermont is Vermont’s only local, not-for-profit health plan. For over 30 years, the company has been enhancing the health and well-being of the Vermonters we serve by offering innovative plans to individuals, older Vermonters, and businesses. Our employees are dedicated to developing new ways to support high-quality care, programs, and events that promote wellness. Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Vermont is an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association. For more information, visit [www.bluecrossvt.org](http://www.bluecrossvt.org).

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<sup>i</sup> Figueredo VM, et al. SUN-062. The Endocrine Society Annual Meeting; 2020.