



Surgery & OHP FAQs

This FAQ was created by Brave Space, LLC after listening to the wonderful presenters from Basic Rights Oregon (BRO), OHSU Trans Health Program and Legacy Trans Health Program, and Oregon Health Authority (OHA) on 4/14/2020. Thank you Hayes Young, Jess Guerriero, Amy Penkin, Ellen Pinney, Nancy Haque, and David Ballantyne for conveying up-to-date information about the state of gender-affirming health in Oregon during COVID-19. To view the dialogue, click on this link:

Basic Rights Oregon Queer Town Hall: Trans-Affirming Healthcare

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eK57DJcmE5I>

Contact information for all of the presenters are at the end of this FAQ.

SURGERY FAQ

Will surgeons' offices reopen on 5/1, after Kate Brown's executive order to resume non-emergent procedures?

To hear more about Kate Brown's order, please visit [this link](#). The order says non-emergency procedures may resume starting 5/1/20, **as long as protective equipment is preserved**. Gender-affirming surgeries are included in the prioritized surgeries. All hospitals are taking a **slow, incremental approach** to this. That means that only a few of the scheduled surgeries will be conducted right away, so clients on waiting lists will still see significant delays in their surgeries. It is likely that less intensive procedures will be resumed first (ie, top surgeries, gonad surgeries). Don't expect a "return to normal" for quite some time.

Is my surgery cancelled, or postponed?

All surgeries that were scheduled to happen during the stay-at-home order should only be **postponed**, not cancelled. A postponement means that you are still in the same place on the surgeon's waitlist, but your surgery date has been put on pause until further notice. There could have been some cancellations for reasons unrelated to COVID closures or changes in insurance. If you're unsure, reach out to your surgeon's office to confirm.

Are they still offering consultations and post-op appointments?

Yes. Consultations that were scheduled, or are yet to be scheduled, will be held by video conference or phone. Post-op appointments can still be held to ensure your results heal well, or to treat any complications.

Will I be put at the end of their waitlist?

No. Patients will remain at the same place in line on the scheduling list. The surgeries scheduled for March will likely be scheduled first, and so forth. **If you had an insurance**



change during this time, you will not lose your place in line, but you need to let your Surgeon's office know about the new insurance.

Does anyone get prioritized when they start rescheduling?

The hospitals will take into account the length of stay in a hospital to recover, and use of supplies, when they start scheduling. Shorter day surgeries (ie chest surgeries, gonad surgeries) may be scheduled first because they do not require over-night stays in the hospital.

If you have extenuating circumstances, such as needing a surgery in between school semesters, have support people with restricted travel times, or other situations that require strategic scheduling, contact the Trans Health Program of your hospital system.

When will surgery offices go back to normal?

OHSU and Legacy Trans Health Programs are looking at this every day. Surgeries have been postponed for two very important reasons: your health and to make sure there are enough supplies in hospital systems. Every hospital system currently has at least one patient with COVID symptoms, which means the risk of exposure to other patients is very high. It also means that the use of supplies per patient—gloves, masks, gowns, beds, IVs, respirators, etc—is much higher to make sure they don't transfer the disease. **It is very important that patients seeking gender-affirming surgeries do not get sick while healing from surgery.**

Both programs have started daily evaluation of supplies, staff availability, quickness of hospital stays, the number of COVID patients at hospitals, and the danger of COVID exposure for other patients at hospitals, to determine when they will have the ability to resume surgeries. They are being very intentional because they don't want to offer you a surgery date, only to delay you again later because they made a mistake. Oregon's peak use of supplies/deaths is supposed to happen around 4/22. That's the FIRST time that hospitals may be able to say, "can we now have a plan 1, 2, and 3" for what happens as we enter a decline.

Why can't you give me a date, even if you cancel it again?

The OHSU and Legacy Trans Health Programs understand how uncertainty about the future impacts all of our mental health. The challenge is that scheduling and cancelling can also increase despair and anxiety. It also requires more staff time to do that scheduling, which limits their time spent on patient care. They ask that if you are in distress, reach out to them or to a therapist.

Uncertainty is increasing my depression, hopelessness, suicidality.

What can I do?

We all know there is no easy answer that fixes this. Here are some ideas from others in the same situation for getting through it, day by day.

- Check out Brave Space's resources page, www.bravespacellc.com/resources for more info on finding a therapist, groups, other providers, and ideas.



- Reframe “social distancing” to “physical distancing.” See people virtually or in person to keep connections alive.
- If you’re around a lot of folks that don’t call you the right name/pronoun, or don’t know you deeply, consider finding places that might happen.
- Create contracts with supportive people that you can check in on bad days and hear that you’re not a burden.
- Join a chat group, talk to a counselor, see your affirming community more often. Being affirmed really makes a difference.
- **Trans Lifeline 877-565-8860** can offer affirming safety planning if you’re in crisis.
- Use the privacy of right now to express your physical self—new outfits, new hair, new makeup. Take a pic of yourself in this “me” wear, and look at yourself. Affirm yourself.
- Make a game of it. Dark humor, or little ways to push back on the system in a playful way, matters.
- TransActive Gender Project’s and SMYRC’s Teen groups are online.

What do I do while I’m waiting to get my surgery?

This is a good time to revisit your after-care plan. Did your insurance change? Housing? Support person’s travel/stay? Yours or their ability to take time off work? Childcare needs change? Create your own Plan A, Plan B, and Plan C. Ask your therapist or friends to help.

Get all your forms ready—have your therapist letters and PCP referrals into the surgeon. Plan for your transport to/from surgery, identify your support people, get supplies, and plan for your after care. Check out Brave Space’s [Surgery Planning Guide](#) if you want a lot of detail to think about!

My letter from a therapist might “expire” due to this delay. Will the surgeons or OHP require me to get a new letter?

OHSU and Legacy will advocate for your letter’s date and the authorization for surgery to be extended in order for you to get your care. If you have been told by a surgeon’s office or OHP that you need an updated letter, contact that hospital’s Trans Health Program first to see if they can help advocate for you. The OHA Ombudsmen program can also help advocate for extension of letters/auths. All of these programs will want to know if there is discrepancies between the types of OHP CCOs (see below for an explanation).

Brave Space will update letters we write with new dates without an additional appointment if your surgery is delayed over a year from our writing. If we didn’t write it, you can ask your letter-writer to update the letter with a brief check-in and resend it. If your prior letter writer is not able to get you an update, contact Brave Space for an expedited letter: 503-486-8936, info@bravespacellc.com.



INSURANCE FAQ

I have a renewal with OHP coming up. Will I lose my OHP insurance?

During the current state of emergency, OHP benefits will not change for anyone who had benefits as of March 18, 2020 or later. This means:

- OHP benefits will not be closed or reduced for anyone who had benefits on March 18, 2020 or later. Even if you received a notice saying your benefits will end.
- You still need to report changes. Learn about what to report at [OHP.Oregon.gov](https://www.ohp.org).
- OHP will not act on changes you report that would close or lower your benefits. For example, if your income increases, you must tell them. However, if the income increase means your benefits would end, they will not act on that change. During the emergency period, your benefits will continue.
- If you report changes through your online account, you may receive a message saying your benefits are being closed or reduced. Please ignore these messages. They are not able to stop sending them at this time.

My therapist/I, as a therapist, can't keep seeing clients who have lost private insurance as they start OHP. What can we do?

OHA's ombudsmen office wants to know if you're running into any barriers with contracting; find their contact info below.

- The therapist MAY be able to get a "Single Case Agreement" to continue seeing you.
- The client's member card should tell you the Coordinated Care Organization (CCO) that covers behavioral health. CareOregon Behavioral Health covers the metro region: 503-416-4100. Their website is <https://careoregon.org/providers/behavioral-health-providers>
- The therapist can call the CCO to determine if they could get a single case agreement, and what documents should be included. Therapists: know that you will need to submit a thorough mental health assessment and a treatment plan with SMART goals/objectives from within the last 2 months. Be sure to list COVID-related insurance changes as a reason for issuing the authorization.
- Therapists, please feel free to contact Kate Kauffman at Brave Space, LLC if you would like help filling out forms, billing, or other navigation: kate@bravespacellc.com.

If your therapist is not able to, or does not wish, to contract with OHP, you can find a list of therapists who take OHP on Brave Space's website, www.bravespacellc.com, or you can contact us for a referral at 503-486-8936, or info@bravespacellc.com.

Will a switch in insurance cancel or delay my care?

OHSU and Legacy have confirmed that they will not put you at end of line just because your insurance changed. Contact your surgeon to update them with your new insurance.



I just switched from private insurance to OHP, and had already scheduled a consult or surgery. What do I do?

- First, know that **you shouldn't lose your place on the waitlist due to an insurance change, UNLESS the surgeon's office does not take your new insurance.**
- Please read [our Guide to Understanding OHP](#) to better understand how OHP manages your insurance through 5 medical health plans. This matters because not all surgeon's offices take each health plan.
- Call your surgeon's office as soon as you know your new insurance type to see if they take it, and to start the authorization process.
- Your surgeon's office will submit your PCP's referral and your mental health letter(s) to your new insurance. The authorization may take 2-4 weeks to finalize.
- Surgeons often will not confirm a surgery date with you while this authorization is pending...but know that your place in line should remain the same to be scheduled, regardless of needing to get a new authorization.

How do I apply for OHP? What might delay my application?

- You can apply online at: <https://one.oregon.gov/>
- You can fill out a paper application and mail/bring them to dhs office. Download the application at <https://www.oregon.gov/oha/HSD/OHP/Pages/apply.aspx#apps>
- You can use a community partner such as Cascade Aids Project or Outside In to help you apply. They can be reached at:
 - Cascade Aids Project: <https://www.capnw.org/health-insurance>, 503.223.5907
 - Outside In: 503.583.6659
- You can call OHP member services and can do it over phone (note their wait times can exceed 45-90 min): 800-699-9075

OHP will likely have delayed processing due to high demand. Applications can be delayed for the following reasons:

- If you don't include all required info (look for the asterisks (*) as mandatory questions)
- Your income info is accurate
- You don't submit proof of income
- You don't sign the document

Are there electrologists paneled with OHP to treat me?

Most of the panelists agreed that there is a shortage of electrologists, and there are long wait times. Currently electrologists have postponed care during the stay-at-home order. Note that only pre-surgical site electrolysis is covered by OHP at this time.

Each OHP CCO independently addresses their contracting of electrologists, and each electrologist has to decide if they're able to contract and see more clients. Several organizations represented in these responses have advocated with the CCOs to contract more electrologists, but currently there is still a shortage.



I live in a rural town and need a gender-affirming provider. How do I find one?

Check the [Brave Space Resource Guide](#) for a therapist near you. Also, teletherapy has allowed therapists in larger cities to serve people in rural communities; check with providers if they are offering teletherapy and can take your insurance. OHSU and Legacy are state-wide resources for medical care, and would be happy to help you. Their contact information is below.

Contacts

OHA Ombudsperson Program: Ellen Pinney, 877-642-0450,
OHA.OmbudsOffice@dhsosha.state.or.us

OHSU Trans Health Program: Amy Penkin, Jess Guerriero, 503-494-7970
transhealth@ohsu.edu

Legacy Trans Health Program: Hayes Young, 503-413-5600, transhealth@lhs.org
Kaiser Gender Pathways: [503-249-6748](tel:503-249-6748)

Brave Space, LLC: Kate Kauffman, 503-389-5801, kate@bravespacellc.com

Basic Rights Oregon: Nancy Haque, 503-222-6151, info@basicrights.org