GENDER AFFIRMING HEALTHCARE

Northern Ireland's sole adult Gender Identity Service, the Brackenburn Clinic, as well as the young people's service Knowing Our Identity (KOI), have both been in a state of disarray over the past 5 years. At time of writing, the Brackenburn Clinic is only seeing individuals referred up to late 2017, meaning many trans people have been waiting 6+ years for an initial assessment at the Clinic. Trans people, young and old, have been forced into paying for expensive private care due to the complete lack of services locally, with some seeing no option but to source their own hormones and self-medicate with limited monitoring due to lack of funds.

This, however, is only the symptom of a wider problem. Gender affirming healthcare is still delivered within the framework of mental health, treating trans identity as a mental illness, resulting in lengthy and often invasive assessments prior to receiving treatment.

Trans communities in Northern Ireland have long been demanding ground-up reform of gender affirming care. This can and should come alongside work to improve healthcare for all LGBTQIA+ people, including access to IVF and adoption for LGBTQIA+ couples, better mental health support, and a greater focus on including and supporting LGBTQIA+ people in mainstream healthcare settings.

Fit-for-purpose Gender Affirming Healthcare must:

- Deliver well-funded, well-staffed services capable of meeting the needs of trans communities and being accountable to those who need this care.
- Remove stigmatising and pathologising practices, moving gender affirming care out of the realm of mental health and into sexual health, in line with international best practice.
- Create services accessible to trans people of all ages, identities and experiences, with holistic and locally-based support for all those who need it.