

# Sex Reassignment Surgery

June 2014

## Background

The process leading up to sex reassignment surgery (SRS) is complex and typically involves a number of stages. This can include counselling, medical assessment, endocrine (hormone) therapy, surgery, and follow-up care.

As of April 1, 2014, Nova Scotia publically funds some sex reassignment surgeries in addition to the required counselling and hormone therapy it has funded for years.

SRS can be broadly categorized into three areas:

- Removal of the internal and external organs associated with the current sex
- Reconstruction of the external characteristics of the desired sex
- Procedures to enhance the appearance and more closely match the desired sex

## Process to access Insured SRS benefits in Nova Scotia

Nova Scotia will follow the lead of other provinces in the types of procedures for which it provides public funding and the process it uses to provide access to care.

To access sex reassignment surgery, a patient should start with their family physician, Community Mental Health or access prideHealth through the Capital District Health Authority. Clinical eligibility for SRS will be determined through application of the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) criteria for assessment. This involves an initial psychiatric and medical assessment and management before considering surgery and is consistent with other Canadian jurisdictions that insure SRS.

Medical assessment and management may include counseling, and determining clinical eligibility for endocrine treatment depending on a particular patient's needs. A physician,

community mental health team member or prideHealth care provider will assist the patient in making the necessary connections to these services.

Once a patient has received a positive recommendation to continue with surgery, from a specialist, they work with their physician and a surgeon or surgeons (depending on the number of surgeries being performed) to develop a surgical plan. The patient will discuss with the surgeon or surgeons and their family physician about what after-care could be needed after SRS, and how that will be administered.

To be approved for public funding, patients and their treating physician/specialist must complete a **Sex Reassignment Surgery Approval Request** form prior to having surgery. This form can be found at <http://novascotia.ca/dhw/sex-reassignment-surgery/>

This is especially relevant for patients who are required to travel outside the province for surgery. Patients seeking out of province coverage for SRS require pre-approval by MSI via the **SRS Approval Request Form**. Out-of-Province surgeries will only be approved for funding if they are to be performed at the Clinique de Chirurgie, Montreal, Quebec.

## Surgeries Insured in Nova Scotia

Following extensive analysis of what surgeries are publically funded in other provinces in Canada and what surgeries are currently available in Nova Scotia, the Department of Health and Wellness has determined that the following surgeries will be publically funded in Nova Scotia for the purposes of sex reassignment surgery:

### A. Removal of the external and/or internal organs associated with the current sex:

Female to Male (FtM):

- Mastectomy
- Oophorectomy
- Hysterectomy

Male to Female (MtF):

- Penectomy
- Orchiectomy

**B. Reconstruction of the external characteristics of the desired sex:**

Female to Male (FtM):

- Phalloplasty
- Metoidoplasty

Male to Female (MtF):

- Vaginoplasty

Some of these surgeries will require travel out of the province, as they are not all currently performed in Nova Scotia.

**Surgeries to be performed in NS:**

- Hysterectomy and oophorectomy

**Surgeries to be performed in Clinique de Chirurgie, Montreal, Quebec:**

Female to Male (FtM):

- Mastectomy
- Phalloplasty
- Metoidoplasty

Male to Female (MtF):

- Penectomy
- Orchiectomy
- Vaginoplasty

The Department of Health and Wellness is gathering information on which surgeons in the province are competent in performing mastectomies for the purpose of SRS. Until the department has a list of surgeons that it can share with family physicians, patients will be referred to Montreal to have these surgeries. This will help ensure access to quality care.

For eligible individuals who travel to Montreal for SRS, many costs directly associated with the procedure are covered and also include transportation and accommodation costs as per the **Nova Scotia Out-of-Province Travel and Accommodation Assistance Guidelines**. This policy ensures that eligible individuals can receive up to \$1,000 in travel assistance (round trip) and \$125 per night up to \$1,500 per month in total accommodation assistance. Any additional costs such as take-home medications, equipment, meals and other personal expenses are the responsibility of the patient. Further information on the **Nova Scotia Out-of-Province Travel and Accommodation Assistance Guidelines** can be found online at:

<http://novascotia.ca/dhw/Travel-and-Accommodation-Assistance/>

To speak to someone directly about this coverage, please contact the Department of Health and Wellness at 1-877-449-5476 (toll free) or 424-7538.

It is important to note that there is no coverage available for:

- SRS services outside of Canada;
- Procedures not deemed medically necessary such as facial feminization, liposuction, tracheal shave and voice pitch surgery.
- SRS services received without prior approval from Medical Services Insurance (MSI).

If you are interested in accessing sex reassignment surgery, you are encouraged to contact your family physician, a community mental health provider in your area or prideHealth (<http://www.cdha.nshealth.ca/pridehealth>)

For questions about how to access public funding for these surgeries, please contact MSI at [MSI@medavie.ca](mailto:MSI@medavie.ca) or toll free at 1-800-563-8880 (in Nova Scotia).

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## Implementation of Funding for Sex Reassignment Surgery Q&A

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### **How do I apply to get funding for sex reassignment surgery?**

A licensed Nova Scotia (NS) physician or specialist or WPATH trained health professional may apply to MSI on behalf of a patient to request approval for funding for SRS. The application must come in on the **SRS Request Approval Request Form** available at <http://novascotia.ca/dhw/sex-reassignment-surgery/>. The application must include a referral from one specialist and, for genital surgeries, in addition to the specialist referral a letter of support from a physician, specialist OR WPATH trained health professional.

MSI must provide prior approval before any SRS procedure is received. Following review of all application materials above, MSI will respond to the patient's referring physician/specialist/WPATH trained health professional with a decision regarding funding. If approved, the health provider will notify the patient, who will then proceed to work directly with their primary healthcare provider and the surgeon performing the surgery in NS or at the Clinique de Chirurgie in Montreal, as appropriate to make arrangements to receive SRS.

### **What if a patient doesn't have a family physician?**

Those who wish to begin the process of sex reassignment surgery and who are without a family physician can go to the Department of Health and Wellness website <http://novascotia.ca/dhw/physicians/> or Community Mental Health in their area.

### **If a comprehensive assessment is required, can someone be refused sex reassignment surgery?**

An assessment is required to ensure the health, wellness and safety of the patient. A positive recommendation for sex reassignment surgery or refusal would be determined after the assessment by a healthcare professional. The assessment was developed by the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) and is used by other Canadian jurisdictions that insure these surgeries.

### **Is chest masculinization and/or chest contouring now publically funded?**

The province is now funding mastectomies, including nipple-sparing mastectomies which can be part of a transition from Female to Male. The outcome of mastectomies for a FtM transition would be to create a chest that more closely resembles a male chest. Chest masculinization is the outcomes provided by a mastectomy for the purposes of SRS. The province is not covering chest contouring, which typically involves liposuction and implants.

### **What will the cost be per patient? How many patients annually are expected to apply for sex reassignment surgery?**

We have estimated that about four to eight patients annually will request funding for sex reassignment surgery. This is based on our analysis of other provinces. It is difficult to determine the cost per patient. It depends on the type and amount of surgeries required. The costs for transitioning from male to female and from female to male differ.

### **Are there enough doctors in Nova Scotia trained to help patients with these transitions?**

We will be monitoring the demand for these health services and the distribution of public funding, to determine whether action is needed to improve access to treatment.