

CONVERSION THERAPY



Bans on conversion therapy often employ overly broad definitions of conversion therapy. These laws seek to criminalize any effort to change a person's sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. ARPA Canada's report focuses on ways that Parliament can prevent harmful forms of conversion therapy while leaving room for beneficial body-affirming and biblical counselling.

Sexual orientation and gender identity are fluid, which means they are not unchangeable, innate categories like biological sex. Studies show that the vast majority of gender dysphoric youth eventually come to accept their biological sex on their own. The first treatment option for those struggling with gender dysphoria should always be the least invasive: to seek to help people feel comfortable with the body they have been given.

Body-affirming counselling is voluntarily sought and received, usually in the form of talk therapy where the counsellor and the client explore the issue and define the problem and desired outcomes together. Overbroad conversion therapy bans throughout Canada forbid such counselling which strives to help young people with gender dysphoria to love or accept their biological bodies or to manage unwanted sexual desires or urges.

By contrast, conversion therapy bans allow, and even promote, sex-change treatments which are physically invasive, often irreversible, and cause both physical and psychological harm. Studies show that while sex-change surgeries may result in short-term psychological relief, health and psychological outcomes deteriorate in the long-term.

Public policy should promote helpful alternatives to medical transition and should respect the role of parents and counsellors in helping children and youth understand their gender and sexuality.

ARPA Canada rejects the notion that a social concept of gender identity is more important than biological sex. ARPA Canada's recommendations focus on criminalizing coercive and aversive conversion therapies, as well as banning unethical and harmful sex change treatments, while ensuring that individuals have the liberty to address unwanted sexual feelings and questions of personal identity with help from parents, counsellors, or other professionals.

For more information about this topic, please refer to our related policy report document. This report can be found on our website at [ARPACanada.ca/publication/conversion-therapy](https://www.arpacanada.ca/publication/conversion-therapy).