

Surgery Readiness Letters for Gender Affirming Surgeries

Why are letters required?

Surgery readiness letters (SRL) also known as mental health letters (MHL) state that the gender affirmation surgery you are seeking is *medically necessary*--a criterion insurance policies use to determine coverage for procedures. It also states that you understand the risk and benefits of surgery, are mentally stable and that your mental health provider is available for follow up. SRLs are a requirement outlined by the WPATH SOC (World Professional Association for Transgender Health Standards of Care). Temple Gender Affirming Surgeries Program adheres to WPATH SOC as do most insurances. Having your letter/s at the time of your consult is helpful for surgery planning and timing.

of Letters Required

In accordance with WPATH 8 SOC:

- Gender affirming surgeries required 1 letter from a credentialed mental health provider
- Please check with your insurance to see if they have updated to SOC 8
 - Many insurances have not updated and still use SOC 7 please see below
- If you feel empowered to advocate for SOC 8, please ask your insurance provider update to SOC 8; link for SOC 8 is listed in the resources at the end of this document

In accordance with WPATH 7 SOC:

- Top surgeries require 1 letter from a credentialed mental health provider.
- FGCS/FFS (facial gender confirmation surgery/facial feminization surgery) & trach shave require 1 letter from a credentialed mental health provider.
- Bottom surgeries: vaginoplasty, vulvoplasty, orchiectomy, hysterectomy, metoidioplasty and phalloplasty require 2 letters, from two separate credentialed mental health providers.

Additional Letter for FGCS

- Not Required but may increase likelihood of coverage for procedures
- Additional letter for Facial Gender Confirmation Surgery
 - Can be written by a mental health professional or your primary care provider
 - Please reach out if you would like to be scheduled with Dr. Grand the program psychologist for an additional letter

Timeline for Surgery Letters

SRLs typically expires after 12 months. Some insurances require letters be dated within 6 months of your surgery date. Please check your specific insurance policy for details. Temple Gender Affirming Surgeries Program requires letters be dated within one year of surgery.

Template for Surgery Letters

- A referral letter template can be found on the APA website.
 - **American Psychiatric Association: Writing Letters of Support to Insurers and Surgeons**
<https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/diversity/education/transgender-and-gender-nonconforming-patients/letter-writing>
- In addition to the WPATH requirements Temple GA Surgeries Program also requires that the letter include your recovery plan. Recovery plan includes financial considerations, time off of work if applicable, confirmation that

you have safe and stable housing and who will be your support person/people/network (at least one support person is required for all gender affirming surgeries). Please be sure to share these requirements with the mental health provider writing your letter for surgery.

Finding a Mental Health Provider

If you do not have a mental health provider and need a referral, the Gender Affirming Care Navigator can provide a list of local gender affirming therapists. All are well versed in writing letters for gender affirming surgeries that meet WPATH SOC requirements.

+ If you are a patient of Mazzoni Center or Philadelphia FIGHT, please check in with the Behavioral Health Consultant on staff.

Working with Your Existing Mental Health Provider

If you already have a mental health provider who you have been working with, speak with them about your gender affirming surgery goals and request a letter for surgery.

+ If they are new to the process, please direct them to the APA website and WPATH SOC listed and linked in this handout.

2nd Letters are available through Temple, if you have decided to have your surgery with Temple.

If you are in need of a properly credentialed mental health provider for your second letter, please reach out and request to be scheduled with Dr. Grand. Once we have received your initial mental health letter, and if you are choosing Temple for your gender affirming surgery, you may be scheduled with Dr. Grand for your second mental health letter. This is only required for those who are planning for bottom surgery and do not already have a mental health provider who meets WPATH SOC requirements for the second letter.

+ This letter written by Dr. Grand is only for those seeking gender affirming surgeries with Temple, it cannot be used for outside surgeons.

Completed and signed letters can be sent as a PDF

- Letters can be emailed as PDFs to genderaffirmingsurgery@tuhs.temple.edu
- Letters must be sent as a signed PDF. Please do not send pictures or other file types.
- Letters should be specific about which gender affirming surgery you are planning for.
- Letters are scanned into your medical chart and submitted to insurance.

Resources for Letter Writing

American Psychiatric Association: Writing Letters of Support to Insurers and Surgeons

<https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/diversity/education/transgender-and-gender-nonconforming-patients/letter-writing>

WPATH 7 SoC (World Professional Association for Transgender Health 7 Standards of Care)

<https://www.wpath.org/publications/soc>

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<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/26895269.2022.2100644>

GALAP Harm Reduction Guide to Letter Writing

<https://thegalap.org/resources/Documents/GALAP%20Harm%20Reduction%20Guide%20to%20Letter%20Writing%20v3%20082119.pdf>

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