Gender-affirming care is supported by Canadian professional Codes of Ethics in nursing, medicine, psychology, and counselling

What did we do?

We analyzed four Codes of Ethics from Canadian professional associations in nursing, medicine, psychology, and counselling, to determine how these codes relate to the provision of gender-affirming care in Canada.

How did we do it?

We selected five common scenarios encountered in practice to interpret how the Codes can guide professionals in challenging situations:

1. Practicing in jurisdictions with legal restrictions or bans on care
2. Caring for pediatric patients with unsupportive families
3. Encountering health misinformation in public
4. Working with colleagues citing conscientious objection
5. Providers experiencing moral distress or burnout related to the adverse context for gender-affirming care

Why is this important?

These Codes of Ethics can point to how providers enact their profession's moral stance in the current landscape for care provision and the potential role of professional and regulatory associations in addressing these issues

What did we find?

Only the nurses' Code of Ethics explicitly mentioned gender-affirming care as an area where providers should be aware of existing regulations. While the Codes did not provide direct guidance, interpretations drawn from their general guidance can be made.

Shared aspects	Differences
• Centring the client's welfare, respecting their dignity, and promoting compassionate care • Addressing social determinants of health, seeking social justice, and respecting Human Rights. • Responsibility to provide accurate information in public statements • All professions recognized the importance of self-care	• Only psychology called for addressing misinformation • Only the medicine and nursing codes defined conscientious objection and set expectations to ensure appropriate care when used. • Only the nursing and medicine codes called for systemic and structural change to improve providers' well-being

What are the implications of this work?

The Codes' stances on social determinants of health, justice, and Human Rights call for broader professional action to address the drivers of the adverse context for gender-affirming care impacting providers.

Examining the ethical responsibilities in gender-affirming care provision emanating from Canadian professional associations' codes of ethics in medicine, nursing, psychology, and counselling

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