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The politics of invisibility: Why transgender youth deserve better legislation

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On 19 March 2021, at 15 years and 5 months old, I ended my first relationship. This destructive 15-year-long relationship was not with a particular person but rather with the male gender, as I came out as nonbinary. Ending a harmful relationship is complex, because whilst you know it will benefit your mental health, letting go of someone you lived with for years is a strenuous task. I found those past 15 years and 5 months as a man to be difficult, because I never felt like one. The title of Mr and Master on my passport and NAPLAN never felt right, sleeping in the boys' cabin on school camp never felt right, having a bar mitzvah never felt right, and the way my body looked never felt right.

For years it felt like there was a switch that needed to be flicked and, on Friday 19 March 2021, I finally found that switch, and I yanked it.

Establishing a connection between my Jewish and transgender identities has been an arduous and never-ending journey. According to Genesis, '...in the image of God he created them; male and female'.

Grappling with the idea that God loves me as a Jewish person but that I was not created in their image as a nonbinary person is a mind-twister. At Friday night Shabbat (Sabbath) dinners I am still asked every week to wear a Kippah, or Jewish men's hat, by a more traditional family member, because that is what is expected of me, regardless of whether I am still a man. My bar mitzvah certainly didn't help with my then-undiagnosed gender dysphoria. In the

13 years before the ritual, people could call me a boy, but I was at least still a child. No one could call me a man yet, because at least in a Jewish sense, I wasn't one. But, on 6 October 2018, I was forced to walk down a narrowing hallway that led to one thing and one thing only, manhood.

After I read from the sacred Jewish bible, my father recited a sacred prayer with the translation meaning: 'Blessed be He who has released me from being punishable for this boy, now a man'. On what was meant to be the most important day of my Jewish life, I had never felt so disconnected from my Jewish identity.

After I came out as transgender, the truth that had haunted and weighed me down for 15 years was finally lifted, yet now I had to confront the gender dysphoria and depression that had been plaguing my body, so I applied for a meeting at the Royal Children's Hospital gender clinic in Melbourne, being told I would have to wait 6–8 months. For any average person, 6–8 months doesn't seem like long, but for a mentally ill transgender teenager it can feel like a lifetime. The months of waiting began to pile up and, on 3 September 2021, almost 6 months after I came out as transgender, I attempted to end my own life. I felt so claustrophobic within my own body, staring at my genitals for hours a day praying they would just disappear, praying that I would become some kind of genderless higher being. Yet I woke up every morning, stuck in my body, silently screaming to escape. I attempted to end my own life, and in the ambulance, high off of the fentanyl the paramedics gave me, and Lady Gaga's '911' from

her Chromatica album pounding in the background thanks to the gay paramedic, I did in a way reach the genderless euphoria for a brief 10 minutes, yet was soon snapped back to reality.

After that visit to the hospital, I would wait almost 12 more months until I would be given an appointment at the Royal Children's Hospital, a year longer than I had expected. After I was finally given an appointment in July 2022, there was a particular allied health service that offered exactly what I was looking for, and I expressed my interest.

However, 2 months later I was contacted to be told that that service was no longer available due to budget costs. This is in no way an attempt to blame or villainise the Royal Children's hospital, their care is excellent and I know many transgender youth who have benefited from their services, this is the fault of the Australian Government.

The parliamentary discussions and debates surrounding the proposed Religious Discrimination Bill in February 2022 proved a particular set back in my mental health. Aside from the emotional strain of watching my identity and personhood dissected and argued for and against on the national stage at only 16 years of age, the Bill breached my United Nations Rights of the Child. In the convention, which Australia signed in August 1990, I possessed the undebatable 'right to an education' (Article 28), and the promise that 'governments must protect children' (Article 32), yet the Liberal-National Party showed no remorse or regard for either of these crucial liberties.

The election of the Labor party in May 2022 gave me excitement and hope for the futures of trans youth in Australia: we would finally get the support we rightfully deserve. Three days before the federal election in 2022, the Labor Party stated:

Labor will work closely with LGBTIQ+ Australians and advocates to develop policy that will ensure equality before the law and strengthen Medicare so that LGBTIQ+ Australians have full access to our treasured universal healthcare system.

It's been 2.5 years, and we're still waiting for that promised support. Labor's 2024 budget represented a complete betrayal of queer Australians, with the party choosing a \$9.3 billion surplus over the 10 Year National Action Plan on LGBTQIA+ Health and

Wellbeing, as well as failing to remove out-of-pocket expenses for gender affirming care. These legislative expenses would cost but a small fraction of the \$9.3 billion, so why is Anthony Albanese so set on Mardi Gras photo opportunities, instead of life-saving financial investments in transgender health care? These failures by our so-called 'progressive' government don't stop here.

In March 2020, the Royal Australian College of Physicians cautioned against an inquiry and provided advice to the Minister for Health that stated that the prohibiting of medical care to transgender youth is 'unethical' and demanded a national framework for the Government to adopt. Whilst, of course, the Liberal Shadow Ministry refused to adopt any framework, the Albanese Government has disregarded the RACP's advice too.

If the Labor Government want to truly show their solidarity with transgender youth and support one of the most at-risk communities to suicide in Australia, they must invest; they must adopt the proposed national framework, and they need to act like they care.

So, my question for the Albanese Government is, when will the struggles of transgender youth in accessing life-saving health care end?

The Government claims to care about the lives of transgender youth, yet fails to attribute suitable funding or framework. The Prime Minister Anthony Albanese claims to be such an ally, being the first Prime Minister to walk at Mardi Gras earlier this year, yet contrastingly declared in an interview in May 2022, in preparation for the election, that 'Men can't have babies', invalidating the lives of thousands of transgender men in Australia. Labor must begin the work of cultivating an environment in Australia where transgender youth feel supported, safe and included, and that starts with investing in our futures.

Despite the lack of support I have received from the Australian Government, I believe that due to my personal strength and the unbelievable support I have received from my close family, friends and community, I have been able to overcome the challenges and traumas associated with growing up as a transgender child. But transgender youth shouldn't have to depend on strength, and many do not have access to the support I have received from my communities. Gender diverse youth are yelling for help, and change needs to happen.

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