

1 **Supporting Physical Activity for Transgender and Gender-Diverse Individual**

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4 **Abstract**

5 While physical inactivity is a growing problem among all populations in the United States, transgender
6 and gender-diverse (TGD) individuals experience stigma, discrimination, and other additional barriers to
7 being physically active. Recent literature suggests that TGD individuals engage in much less physical
8 activity than cisgendered individuals, with transgender women reporting the lowest levels of physical
9 activity among all genders. This policy statement recommends several interventions to support TGD
10 individuals' engagement in physical activity. It calls on existing organizations that implement physical
11 activity programs to create TGD-inclusive policies. Researchers need to develop and implement
12 evidence-based TGD-specific interventions, especially for TGD adults. In addition, federal agencies that
13 promote physical activity must create TGD-specific materials as they have for other populations
14 experiencing limited engagement in physical activity.

15

16 Key word: physical activity, transgender, gender-diverse

17

18 **Relationship to Existing APHA Policy Statements**

- 19 • APHA Policy Statement 20211: Supporting Physical Education in Schools for All Youth
- 20 • APHA Policy Statement 20172: Supporting the Updated National Physical Activity Plan
- 21 • APHA Policy Statement 20079: Building a Public Health Infrastructure for Physical Activity
22 Promotion
- 23 • APHA Policy Statement 9709: Promoting Public Health Through Physical Activity
- 24 • APHA Policy Statement 20058: Supporting the WHO Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity
25 and Health
- 26 • APHA Policy Statement 200619: Urgent Call for a Nationwide Public Health Infrastructure and
27 Action to Reverse the Obesity Epidemic
- 28 • APHA Policy Statement 201514: Building Environments and a Public Health Workforce to
29 Support Physical Activity Among Older Adults
- 30 • APHA Policy Statement 20121: Supporting the National Physical Activity Plan
- 31 • APHA Policy Statement 201415: Support for Social Determinants of Behavioral Health and
32 Pathways for Integrated and Better Public Health
- 33 • APHA Policy Statement 20142: Reduction of Bullying to Address Health Disparities Among
34 LGBT Youth

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- 35 • APHA Policy Statement 202111: Sexual and Gender Minority Demographic Data: Inclusion in
36 Medical Records, National Surveys, and Public Health Research
- 37 • APHA Policy Statement 20169: Promoting Transgender and Gender Minority Health through
38 Inclusive Policies and Practices
- 39 • APHA Policy Statement 20189: Achieving Health Equity in the United States
- 40 • APHA Policy Statement 9933: The Need for Acknowledging Transgendered Individuals within
41 Research and Clinical Practice
- 42 • APHA Policy Statement 9819: The Need for Public Health Research On Gender Identity And
43 Sexual Orientation

44

45 I. Problem Statement

46 Physical activity is a fundamental aspect of health and well-being, with numerous physical, mental, and
47 social benefits.[1] Research has shown that engaging in insufficient physical activity is the fourth leading
48 risk factor for noncommunicable diseases.[2] Transgender and gender-diverse (TGD) individuals are
49 those whose gender identity differs from the sex assigned at birth, and as a result they may experience
50 stigma, discrimination, and barriers to accessing health care and other services.[3] However, TGD
51 individuals face unique challenges that may affect their ability or motivation to engage in physical
52 activity, which can contribute to health disparities and poorer health outcomes.[4] These challenges may
53 also affect their likelihood of engaging in physical activity, including sports, fitness, and recreational
54 activities.[3] In addition, TGD individuals are at a much greater risk of experiencing homelessness, which
55 worsens mental and physical health and decreases access to community-based sports and healthy physical
56 activity.[5,6]

57

58 The health disparities experienced by TGD individuals are well documented and include higher rates of
59 mental health problems, cardiovascular disease, and cancer.[7] APHA policy statements supporting
60 physical activity (e.g., Policy Statements 9709 and 20211) highlight its numerous benefits. While the
61 literature on physical activity for TGD individuals is new, the studies published reveal consistently lower
62 levels of lack of physical activity among TGD populations.[8] Data from the Behavioral Risk Factor
63 Surveillance System, the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, the Minnesota Student Survey, the College
64 Student Health Survey, and the National College Health Assessment all show lower levels of physical
65 activity among TGD populations than among their cisgender peers.[8–13] Voss et al. reported that TGD
66 youth are less than half as likely to participate in physical activity.[12] Bishop et al. and Espinoza et al.
67 reported that TGD youth are less likely to participate in structured and unstructured physical activity than
68 cisgender individuals.[8,10] College-aged and adult TGD individuals also engage in less physical activity

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69 than their cisgender peers.[9,11,13] Among LGBT+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) individuals,
70 only 24.3% of transwomen report engaging in physical activity, as compared with 35.6% of lesbian
71 women, 36.9% of transmen, 38.3% of gay men, and 41.0% of genderqueer or nonbinary individuals.[14]

72

73 Physical inactivity is also a significant contributor to these health disparities, as lower levels of physical
74 activity increase the risk of obesity, diabetes, and other chronic conditions.[1] TGD individuals may face
75 additional barriers related to physical activity due to concerns about their safety, privacy, and access to
76 gender-affirming facilities.[3,4,7] In addition, TGD individuals may face unique challenges related to
77 physical activity including discrimination, harassment, and exclusion from fitness programs.[4] TGD
78 individuals may also face challenges related to body dysphoria, which can affect their ability to feel
79 comfortable and confident in their bodies during physical activity.[15]

80

81 According to the literature, TGD individuals engage in less physical activity than cisgender people.[4,16]
82 As is the case with most populations, physical activity levels vary within this population. Specifically,
83 TGD people who are taking hormone therapy have been found to engage in more physical activity than
84 TGD people who are not.[16] In addition, predictors of physical activity participation among TGD
85 individuals may vary. Specifically, high body satisfaction is the best statistical predictor of physical
86 activity among transgender individuals currently using hormone therapy, whereas high self-esteem is the
87 best statistical predictor of physical activity among transgender people who are not taking hormone
88 therapy.[16] TGD individuals report that gender-binary facilities (male- and female-only locker/changing
89 rooms and gyms) are particularly traumatic and unsafe environments that discourage participation in
90 physical activity.[17–19] Swimming pools are also noted by TGD individuals as unwelcoming
91 environments, even though swimming is reported by TGD individuals as having a positive effect on well-
92 being.[20,21]

93

94 As discussed, disparities in physical activity among TGD individuals exist, which affect their overall
95 health and well-being. Policy, environment, and system changes are needed to reduce TGD stigma in
96 physical activity settings. Legislation is currently being developed and implemented in the United States
97 regarding TGD individuals and their place in physical activity. It is crucial that policy initiatives promote
98 inclusion and equality in fitness programs, including the need for gender-affirming facilities that can meet
99 the specific needs of TGD individuals.

100

101 Evidence-Based Strategies to Address the Problem

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102 Physical activity is essential in promoting overall health and well-being among individuals, including
103 TGD persons. Engaging in regular physical activity has been associated with numerous positive
104 outcomes. However, the literature on physical activity among TGD individuals is sparse. To date, only 36
105 articles have been published on the topic.[7] There is a critical need for evidence-based strategies to
106 support TGD individuals in organized physical activity. This policy statement addresses this gap by
107 proposing interventions and strategies that promote physical activity among TGD individuals.

108

109 Strategy 1—Support professional development for physical education teachers: Children’s participation in
110 physical activity is crucial for their physical, cognitive, and social development. Physical education (PE)
111 teachers play a vital role in shaping the experiences and opportunities of TGD individuals in physical
112 activity settings. Targeted interventions and strategies are needed to promote physical activity among
113 transgender children. Research conducted by Berg and Kokkonen suggests that incorporating education
114 related to equity and gender awareness into PE teacher training can have a positive impact.[22] To help
115 support PE teachers in creating inclusive environments, comprehensive professional development
116 programs targeting these educators are essential. TGD students report that teachers are instrumental in
117 supporting physical activity.[22]

118

119 Scientific evidence supports the effectiveness of inclusivity training for PE teachers. Research emphasizes
120 the importance of incorporating equity and gender awareness education into PE teacher training.[23]
121 Professional development programs such as School Athletics for Everyone (SAFE) have proven effective
122 in promoting affirming practices by providing PE teachers with the knowledge they need to create
123 inclusive environments.[23] The SAFE program focuses on educating teachers about transgender issues
124 including terminology, understanding the challenges faced by TGD individuals, and fostering inclusive
125 practices within physical activity settings.

126

127 Implementation of professional development programs for PE teachers can have a significant impact on
128 increasing support for TGD individuals in physical activity settings. Teachers who undergo inclusive
129 training are more likely to create an environment that respects the gender identities of their students. This,
130 in turn, has a positive impact on the physical activity participation of TGD individuals, reducing barriers
131 and promoting their overall well-being. This strategy is feasible and in line with the current paradigm on
132 teacher preparation. If such training is included during teacher education/preparatory work, teachers can
133 be prepared as early as possible in their career to support TGD students. If equipped with the knowledge
134 and skills needed to create inclusive and affirming environments, teachers can encourage transgender
135 children to engage in physical activity with confidence.

136

137 Strategy 2—Support policies for inclusion of TGD individuals in physical activity: Policies play a crucial
138 role in shaping the landscape of physical activity for TGD individuals. Existing policies should be
139 critically examined and modified to ensure the inclusion of TGD individuals in physical activity. While
140 the evidence is sparse on which policies promote physical activity for TGD individuals, discriminatory
141 policies that limit participation in physical activity in this population should be eliminated. This policy
142 statement advocates for a continual review of policies in concurrence with the expanding literature on the
143 topic.

144

145 Scientific evidence supports the role of inclusive policies in creating safe and welcoming spaces for TGD
146 individuals engaging in physical activity. Inclusive policies have a positive impact on increasing physical
147 activity participation and amplifying its benefits for TGD students.[12] By implementing inclusive
148 policies, schools and organizations can create environments where TGD individuals feel validated,
149 supported, safe, and encouraged to participate in physical activity. Advocacy efforts should focus on
150 assessing potentially discriminatory policies and promoting evidence-based policies that prioritize
151 inclusivity and equal opportunities for all individuals, regardless of their gender identity.

152

153 Many current policies related to TGD individuals adopt an activity-specific approach wherein TGD
154 individuals' eligibility to participate is determined on the basis of their sex assigned at birth, gender
155 identity, hormone levels, or other criteria. Such policies perpetuate discrimination and exclusion, creating
156 barriers to physical activity engagement among TGD individuals. Advocacy for policies that promote
157 inclusion and ensure equal opportunities for participation in physical activity is essential. Inclusive
158 policies should recognize the diverse gender identities within the TGD population and provide clear
159 guidelines for their inclusion in physical activity settings. These policies should prioritize respect, safety,
160 and fairness without compromising the rights and identities of TGD individuals. Widespread adoption
161 and implementation of evidence-based policies is recommended to transform environments to promote
162 physical activity participation and improve the overall health and well-being of TGD individuals.

163

164 Strategy 3—Create inclusive physical activity spaces: Creating inclusive physical activity spaces that are
165 safe, affirming, and welcoming can reduce barriers to participation in physical activity among TGD
166 people. Prioritizing inclusivity and creating welcoming physical activity spaces remove barriers and
167 promote active participation. The physical environment has the potential to increase physical activity
168 levels and contribute to improved physical and mental well-being, social connection, and overall quality
169 of life for TGD individuals.

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170

171 Scientific evidence supports the role of inclusively designed physical activity spaces for promoting
172 physical activity among TGD individuals.[24] Inclusive practices can serve as catalysts for improving the
173 well-being of this population. Studies show that when TGD individuals feel safe and supported in their
174 environment, they are more likely to engage in physical activity and experience the associated health
175 benefits.[25] One key aspect of creating inclusive physical activity spaces is an examination of the
176 physical environment itself. Facilities should strive to provide gender-neutral, private, or semiprivate
177 changing rooms and shower facilities to accommodate diverse user needs and preferences. Students
178 should determine which facilities are consistent with their gender identity. Furthermore, schools should
179 designate any existing facilities that are designed to be used by only one person at a time as accessible to
180 all students regardless of gender. At no time should students be required to use a single-user facility
181 because they are transgender or nonconforming. Centering diverse user needs can help alleviate concerns
182 about judgment, discomfort, and potential discrimination in shared spaces, benefiting individuals beyond
183 the TGD community. In addition to the physical environment, staff and instructors should receive training
184 on TGD inclusion and sensitivity. This should include education on gender diversity, respectful language
185 use, and the unique experiences and challenges faced by TGD individuals. With appropriate training,
186 personnel are better equipped to create a supportive atmosphere where TGD individuals feel comfortable
187 and empowered to participate in physical activity by fostering a culture of inclusion and respect. Bullying,
188 harassment, and discrimination based on gender identity or expression should be prohibited within school
189 districts. These policies should include language to ensure that any incident is given immediate attention,
190 including investigation and age- and developmentally appropriate action. Enforcement of antibullying
191 policies should focus on education and prevention rather than exclusionary discipline.

192

193 Practical strategies for supporting TGD youth in physical activity settings are needed.[24] Increased
194 inclusion and safety measures, such as developing anti-transgender harassment policies and educational
195 interventions, can have a positive impact on the physical activity participation of TGD adolescents.[24]
196 Addressing weight-based harassment and promoting positive body image among TGD youth can also
197 prevent unhealthy weight-related behaviors associated with bullying.[25,26] Moreover, creating gender-
198 neutral facilities, such as showers and changing rooms, can enhance the sense of safety and inclusion
199 among transgender adolescents.[27]

200

201 Inclusive environments and policies are crucial to increase physical activity participation among TGD
202 individuals in college settings. Physical activity practitioners need to prioritize efforts to develop and
203 maintain inclusive leisure settings and programs, providing increased social support for TGD

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204 individuals.[11] Colleges should develop sport and physical activity policies that acknowledge a broad
205 range of gender identities, moving away from a binary male/female framework.[28] Advertising and
206 communicating trans-inclusive policies are essential to create an inviting and supportive environment for
207 transgender college students.[28] In addition, creating equitable race opportunities, fostering supportive
208 environments, addressing harassment, and offering equal prize pools can promote participation and
209 inclusivity among women and gender-diverse athletes.[29]

210

211 The impact and extent of creating inclusive physical activity spaces depend on the widespread adoption of
212 these practices across various settings. Fitness centers, sports clubs, and community organizations should
213 prioritize inclusivity in their policies and practices. Collaborative efforts among stakeholders such as
214 transgender advocacy groups, facility managers, and health and design professionals can enable the
215 implementation of best practices for creating inclusive physical activity spaces.

216

217 Strategy 4—Encourage programs and activities that create social support networks and groups promoting
218 physical activity and inclusivity: Encouraging programs and activities that create social support networks
219 and groups is a valuable strategy to promote physical activity among TGD individuals. These networks
220 and groups provide a sense of community, connection, and support, which can play a crucial role in
221 fostering physical activity engagement and overall well-being.

222

223 Existing scientific evidence shows that social support networks play a significant role in promoting
224 physical activity among TGD individuals.[10] These networks provide encouragement, accountability,
225 and a sense of belonging, which can positively influence motivation and adherence to physical activity
226 routines. Programs and activities that facilitate the formation of these networks increase the likelihood of
227 sustained physical activity engagement among TGD individuals. Among adolescents, school clubs such
228 as gay-straight alliances can help to reduce bias-based bullying, attenuating various adverse health
229 outcomes. Transgender-specific physical activity programs or groups can be designed for the unique
230 needs and interests of TGD individuals, providing a safe and inclusive space for them to engage in
231 physical activity and creating a supportive network that motivates and encourages participation. In
232 addition, it is vital to foster inclusivity within existing physical activity groups and organizations. This
233 can be achieved by implementing educational initiatives to raise awareness about TGD issues and
234 promote understanding and acceptance within these settings. Existing groups and organizations can build
235 and foster an inclusive culture to be more welcoming and supportive of TGD individuals who wish to
236 engage in physical activity.

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238 A supportive environment that motivates and empowers TGD individuals to engage in physical activity is
239 created by encouraging programs and activities that foster social support networks promoting physical
240 activity and inclusivity. These initiatives have the potential to enhance physical and mental well-being,
241 promote social connections, and contribute to a more inclusive and equitable society.

242
243 There is a significant gap in research regarding interventions and strategies to increase physical activity
244 specifically among TGD individuals 40–59 years of age. To address this gap, further scientific research is
245 needed to understand the unique barriers to and facilitators of physical activity engagement among
246 transgender adults. Rigorous studies and gathering of evidence can lead to the development of tailored
247 interventions addressing the specific challenges faced by older transgender adults. This may involve
248 addressing issues related to access to affirming health care, social support, and inclusive physical activity
249 programs. While more research is needed to inform evidence-based strategies, acknowledging the
250 importance of inclusivity, tailored interventions, and social support can lay the groundwork for promoting
251 physical activity among older transgender adults. Efforts should be made to ensure that transgender adults
252 have equitable opportunities to engage in physical activity and that barriers are minimized.

253
254 Future strategies for a developing research field: The research on physical activity among TGD
255 individuals is developing. While it is clear that TGD individuals engage in less physical activity than
256 other groups, evidence-based interventions to increase physical activity are lacking. As the research on
257 the topic develops, policymakers and practitioners should rely on trusted resources such as the
258 Community Guide for Preventive Services to conduct reviews and provide support on which evidence-
259 based interventions are appropriate. To effectively promote physical activity among TGD individuals,
260 development of a comprehensive community guide for TGD individuals is recommended. Resources
261 should be tailored to the specific needs and preferences of TGD individuals and draw upon existing
262 programs while making necessary modifications to ensure inclusivity and effectiveness. The community
263 guide can serve as a valuable resource for health care providers, community organizations, and
264 individuals within the TGD community. It should provide evidence-based interventions and strategies that
265 focus on promoting physical activity and overall well-being among TGD individuals. Furthermore, the
266 guide should emphasize the importance of creating safe and affirming environments for TGD individuals
267 to engage in physical activity. This may involve recommendations for inclusive policies, staff training,
268 and the development of gender-affirming spaces within fitness facilities, recreational centers, and
269 community programs. This will allow for continuous improvement and adaptation to changing needs and
270 emerging evidence.

271

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272 Alternative Strategies

273 There are potential alternative strategies to increase physical activity for everyone that may also affect
 274 TGD individuals. There is a robust literature on the impacts of physical activity interventions in health
 275 care settings, schools, neighborhoods, and other settings.[30] These interventions are effective in
 276 improving physical activity in certain populations and should be implemented to improve the health and
 277 well-being of everyone.[30] However, physical activity interventions largely have not been studied in
 278 TGD populations. The strategies that this policy statement proposes focus on the unique barriers that
 279 TGD individuals face and are proposed to reduce inequity in physical activity in this population.

280

281 Action Steps to Implement Evidence-Based Strategies

282

| | Evidence-Based Strategy | | Action Steps |
|---|--|----|--|
| 1 | Support professional development for PE teachers, exercise class instructors, and other instructors. | 1a | Professional organizations should develop training for PE teachers and other instructors in promotion of physical activity for TGD youth. |
| | | 1b | State education departments, legislatures, and school-based organizations should develop and implement policies to support TGD individuals so that they feel validated, supported, and encouraged to participate in physical activity. |
| 2 | Support policies for inclusion of TGD individuals in physical activity. | 2a | Federal and state legislatures should develop and implement policies that support physical activity for all people, including transgender individuals. |
| | | 2b | State departments of education should continually review policies that may limit physical activity for TGD individuals and implement policies and programs that increase TGD inclusion while decreasing bullying and weight-related harassment. APHA state affiliates should work with state |

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| | | | |
|---|---|----|--|
| | | | departments of education to implement policies to reduce bullying. |
| | | 2c | All levels of education (primary, secondary, and postsecondary) should develop TGD-inclusive physical activity policies (gender-neutral changing rooms and spaces to shower) and programs (nonbinary physical activity programming). APHA state affiliates should work with universities to implement inclusive policies. |
| 3 | Create inclusive physical activity spaces. | 3a | All public entities should establish and maintain gender-neutral facilities, such as bathroom, showers, and changing rooms, to support physical activity. |
| 4 | Encourage programs and activities that create social support networks and groups promoting physical activity and inclusivity. | 4a | Federal agencies that promote physical activity should develop specific strategies to increase physical activity among TGD individuals. Specifically, the Community Guide for Preventive Services should establish materials that highlight available evidence on physical activity for TGD individuals and describe appropriate interventions to increase physical activity in this population. |
| | | 4b | Organizations (e.g., nonprofits, for-profit organizations, parks and recreation departments, fitness centers, sports clubs) that regularly promote and implement physical activity programming should create environments that are safe, affirming, and welcoming to TGD people, encouraging formation of social networks that support physical activity. |

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| | | | |
|---|--|----|---|
| | | 4c | Researchers should develop, implement, and evaluate TGD-specific physical activity interventions for adults to advance the understanding of physical activity for this population. |
| 5 | Encourage researchers to conduct studies on physical activity for TGD individuals. | 5a | Researchers should conduct rigorous studies to understand issues associated with physical activity for TGD individuals and develop and test interventions to increase physical activity in this population. |

283

284 Opposing Arguments

285 Some opponents of inclusive policies to support transgender people’s engagement in physical activity
 286 argue that transgender individuals have an unfair advantage in sport. While this argument is exclusively
 287 targeted at transwomen, it also reinforces hegemonic masculinity. This argument also has little to do with
 288 population health. Most Americans engage in individual physical activity, not sport. However,
 289 recreational, youth, and intermural sports should be inclusive to all individuals, including transgender
 290 individuals. It is clear that very few transgender individuals are participating in competitive sport.[31]
 291 Only one transgender girl is playing sports in the state of Utah, highlighting how this issue has been
 292 magnified by those in opposition. A review of extensive media campaigns against transgender athletes
 293 revealed no evidence to support claims that these athletes are dominating their fields or that there has
 294 been an impact on women’s sports.[32] Sports organizations are continuing to evaluate the evidence on
 295 TGD athletes. While this process occurs, it is important to continue to support nonathletes’ engagement
 296 in physical activity. Public health should support TGD individuals across the life span in engaging in
 297 physical activity for health and well-being.

298

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