

Transgender denied! Healthcare stigma & discrimination in rural America

*featuring Ash Orr,
National Center for Transgender Equality*



This time on Code WACK!

What unique challenges do transgender individuals face when it comes to accessing health care - especially in rural America? Why is gender affirming care considered potentially life saving for trans and nonbinary individuals?
How do inaccessible health care, employment discrimination and medical mistreatment intersect for trans people?

To find out, we spoke to **Ash Orr**, a trans organizer from West Virginia and press relations manager for the [National Center for Transgender Equality](#) or **NCTE**. Ash is also a National Storyteller for Planned Parenthood, leveraging their personal experiences with abortion care and transition-related healthcare to help dispel societal stigmas around these topics. *This is the first episode in a two-part series.*

SHOW NOTES

WE DISCUSS

How did you get involved in the fight for transgender rights?

"I am from West Virginia, and I really got started in my activism organizing around trans issues, I would say, around the 2012 elections is when I really started becoming more vocal and stepping out of my comfort zone.

"And at that point in time, I was not out as a trans person fully, I was still living just as simply a queer person. So during that time, I was doing a lot of activism around the entire LGBTQ-plus community and in general.

"And then as time progressed and as I finally came out as trans, that's when I really hit the ground running and started getting into the hills and hollers here in West Virginia and throughout Appalachia to work on the ground with other trans communities and to really start finding where are these gaps here in West Virginia and in Appalachia between the trans community and our elected officials." – **Ash Orr**

What is gender-affirming care, and why is it so important to the wellbeing of people who are non-binary?

"...gender-affirming care, as defined by the World Health Organization, encompasses a range of social, psychological, behavioral, and medical interventions that is "designed to support and affirm an individual's gender identity" when it conflicts with the gender that they were assigned to at birth.

"And these interventions help trans individuals, including non-binary folks, align various aspects of their lives, be it emotional, interpersonal, and biological, with their gender identity. So something that I want to really emphasize here is some, but not all trans or non-binary people undergo

medical treatments to make their bodies more congruent with their gender identity and help them to live happier, healthier lives. And when they do this, this is called a medical transition.

“And while transition-related healthcare is critical and lifesaving for many trans and non-binary folks, not all trans and non-binary people will transition medically and that's often due to personal choices, lack of access to medical care, like healthcare deserts or insurance issues, lack of support and a variety of other reasons. However, a trans or non-binary person is still trans or non-binary regardless of whether or not they undergo medical transitions.” – **Ash Orr**

Transgender people face a variety of unique health challenges. What can you tell us about that?

“...different trans people may need different types of care ... and people should be able to make these decisions about their care based on their individual needs. And these types of procedures can, you know, look like hair growth or removal treatments, hormone therapy, various surgeries to help one be more in line with one's gender identity.

“... [these procedures] should be covered by private and public insurance. So one of the issues that we run into ... is the lack of health care or health insurance access.

“And another issue that we really run into in states such as mine...is many trans people in rural areas also experience frequent mistreatment by both their healthcare providers and among those who do have insurance, their healthcare insurers.

“... according to the 2015 United States Trans Survey, the USTS, nearly one quarter of trans people reported that they did not seek healthcare that they

needed in the year prior to completing the survey due to fear of being mistreated as a trans person.

“And 33% did not go to a healthcare provider when they needed it because they couldn't afford it. And all of these issues, they intersect, especially when you look at rural and red areas or even trans folks in more accepting states ... it's difficult to obtain health insurance.

“And if you do have health insurance, finding a doctor that is well versed with trans healthcare and [who] is not discriminatory is also another hurdle that folks have to jump over. A lot of these issues while they seem separate, they all do intersect. And it is unfortunate that it is such a struggle for trans individuals to find reliable and safe health care.” – **Ash Orr**

Helpful Links

[National Center for Transgender Equality](#)

[U.S. Transgender Survey Reports](#), *National Center for Transgender Equality*

[West Virginia's Equality Profile](#), *Movement Advancement Project*

[Trans people have a long history in Appalachia – but politicians prefer to ignore it](#), *The Conversation*

[Transgender people in rural America struggle to find doctors willing or able to provide care](#), *CBS News*

[What is gender-affirming care? Your questions answered](#), *Association of American Medical Colleges*

[Understanding The Dire Economic And Health Inequities Facing Transgender Americans](#), *National Community Reinvestment Coalition*

[What Does Medical Care Look Like When You're Transgender?](#), *Yale Medicine*

Episode Transcript

Read the [episode transcript](#).

Guest Biography - Ash Orr

Ash Orr (he/they) is a trans organizer from the beautiful state of West Virginia.

They currently serve as the Press Relations Manager for the National Center for Transgender Equality as well as a National Storyteller for Planned Parenthood, leveraging their personal experiences with abortion care and transition-related healthcare to help dispel the societal stigmas surrounding these topics.

In their spare time, Ash enjoys hiking, traveling, researching quantum physics and black holes, collecting rocks, chasing tornadoes, and playing board games with their spouse.

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