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Reflection on the internship itself:

When I arrived at the Bozeman Yellowstone “International” Airport, I was a little surprised. I’m from Montana, but I had not been home for three years. So I found myself alienated from the land of my own upbringing, and to such an extent that I imagine it was how newcomers must feel when they arrive in Montana. For the first time, I understood how severe everything is in Montana: the weather, the mountains, the people.

My brother showed me all the changes and developments in the three years I’d been away. They built a Whole Foods, a bunch of minimalist gentrified bars popped up overnight, everything became insanely expensive and unlivable and there’s a bunch of homeless people now. And lots of my favorite spots had disappeared, like the only Korean restaurant in town or the Goodwill. This is a story that’s been playing out in many places across the U.S. lately. But where Montana is large in geography, it is small in demography. I live in a major city now, so I had forgotten what it’s like to be able to walk around for a while right out of your house and just see no other human beings for long stretches of time. It’s nice, and I missed it. Every hour of the day or night that I go outside in the city, there’s like a million people walking around, going someplace for some reason.

I was placed with Catalyst Montana, an advocacy organization formed from a merger between the Montana Human Rights Network and Montana Women Vote. There’s not a lot of people in Montana, which made the Bard’s focus in the internship particularly interesting and challenging. How do we deal with hatred in a small, relatively closed off community? This proximity makes hatred less abstract and more personal than it is in urban settings, where there’s larger buffer

zones between people. Growing up in Montana, one develops an understanding of these dynamics firsthand, such as through hearing hateful words coming out of your little classmate's mouths. And back when I was also a little classmate, I would ask myself "where did that come from?"

So it was very rewarding to be able to return and try to figure out where those words and all those things came from as a young adult. It requires developing a more nuanced understanding of how hate manifests when 'perpetrators' and 'targets' are just regular people in your community that you also share social spaces with, attend the same schools with, or work with. For example, McKenzie, my coworker and mentor I worked with at Catalyst, told me some stories about this one white supremacist who lived in town, and with whom McKenzie personally had firsthand experiences with. His fiancé used to work with this guy, and McKenzie told me a story about the guy that I cannot recall all of the details of, but which definitely involved the white supremacist guy driving around on one of those giant lawnmowers and yelling slurs at people.

McKenzie and all the nice folks at Catalyst were able to provide me with a wide view of the organization's work. McKenzie's work mostly focuses on counter extremism and right wing monitoring of local hate groups. We also discussed and saw the effects of mainstream fascism, which makes these hate groups bolder, louder and less ashamed of themselves. The normalised forms of 'Trumpist-fascism' through recent events, such as ICE raids on migrant communities, police violence and the attacks on trans rights, attacks on free speech, and attacks on abortion rights, have revealed the ugliness that used to be hidden in the shadows.

For example, the vast majority of right wing group activity in Montana used to take place on Telegram, Signal or other types of dark web channels which are difficult to gain access to and are not directly available to the general public. But now, there are Montana hate groups active on FaceBook. Right in Bozeman, we monitored this one group called Gallatin Valley Sentinel, which is a hate group that calls for ICE raids on the migrant community and cleansing of the

homeless population, and is active right on FaceBook and its publicly accessible webpage. The threshold for what is designated as being distinctly racist, white supremacist or fascist is far lower than it was even a few years ago. Fascist and racist messages have become normalised into mass American consciousness that we have accepted them as the “new normal.” The discrepancy level has vanished.

McKenzie provided me with comprehensive training in counter-extremism work and Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) methodology, among other forms of monitoring technologies, that formed the foundation of my internship experience. The resources and activities he prepared helped me understand the technical and analytical aspects of monitoring extremist activities. There are other types of monitoring strategies, but OSINT is unique in that it's widely accessible. This type of intelligence is open source, which means that anyone can access these resources to keep their communities safe. The skills I learned helped me in my activist work, and are surely something I'll pass onto my communities. The training went beyond theoretical frameworks to include practical skills in research methodology, data analysis, and the ethical considerations involved in monitoring hate groups and extremist organizations. But at the same time, one doesn't need to dig very deep anymore to find a lot of this stuff for reasons stated previously.

One of the more difficult aspects of the internship involved regular exposure to anti-LGBT sentiment and anti-Semitism as part of monitoring extremist activities, as these are groups to which I personally belong. This exposure required me to develop a type of immunity to such content. McKenzie was also very supportive, offering to step in if things became too overwhelming. When one is not part of a group that is the target of hateful rhetoric, it's much easier to digest. This is also why allyship is crucial in this work. In any case, engaging intimately with right-wing rhetoric and messages enhanced my ability to engage with difficult subject matter while maintaining analytical objectivity.

The most rewarding aspects of my internship involved direct community engagement and empowerment. Helping out at Pride events while traveling to different parts of the state allowed me to witness firsthand the Network's community organizing efforts. When I was growing up, there was not a widespread effort for pride like this in Montana, at least not that I was exposed to. I was a little jealous that I missed out and at the same time happy that things are getting better for the next generation. I was surprised by how much it changed in this sense too: I witnessed rainbow families and parents joining their LGBT children and supporting them in their identities.

Small towns also have a potential to be wonderfully progressive and humane, especially in light of their smallness. Positive and meaningful interactions with diverse or marginalized peoples can have the power to change more closed-off people's perceptions of their identities and the groups to which they belong, which may also be less frequent and meaningful in urban areas. These experiences on the ground were particularly valuable given my social inclinations and provided opportunities to meet advocates and activists who were uniquely Montanan, including a trans man who works to rehabilitate former Nazi's, or a lady who stands on a corner holding up a social justice sign for hours everyday in Kalispell. Everyone carried with them a unique perspective on the human rights landscape in Montana.

For my internship project, I ended up writing a toolkit to pass onto the organization called "Trans in Montana: a Toolkit." I hope it will be a lasting contribution to the Network's advocacy efforts. On the ground in Montana, I was able to feel with new eyes how trans rights are under threat and must be fought for. One way to do that is creating resources and toolkits for advocacy work. The project allowed me to apply the research and analytical skills I had developed while contributing to concrete advocacy efforts that could support a vulnerable community.

As I return (reluctantly) to my urban life, I carry with me a deeper understanding of how hate manifests in small communities and how resistance must adapt to meet it. The work continues, but now I understand better both where the hatred comes from and, more importantly, where the hope comes from too.

“Trans in Montana: a Toolkit”

A toolkit written by Clara Lieber

**In collaboration with the Bard Center for the Study of Hate Summer Internship program
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Table of contents:

Section 1: <i>How to use this toolkit</i>	2
Section 2: <i>Basic trans terminology to learn about</i>	9
Section 4: <i>Trans myths and realities</i>	14
Section 5: <i>Understanding the challenges of trans people in Montana and the U.S.</i>	20
Section 6: <i>Types of gender affirming care</i>	24
Section 7: <i>Conclusion and further resources</i>	35

Section 1:

Introduction and how to use this toolkit

Whether you are trans yourself, have just learned about trans people today, or a friend or family member of a trans person, this resource is for you. If you are new to all of this stuff, you may believe that you have never met a transgender person, but you'd likely be mistaken. It is probable that you actually know and are in a community with quite a few transgender people. In fact, nearly a third of Americans know a trans person [5. Vast majority of Americans know someone who is gay, fewer know someone who is transgender](#). Trans people are librarians, electricians, lawyers, waiters, teachers, gardeners, doctors, cashiers, plumbers, students, and tattoo artists: trans people are your neighbors, your family members, your friends, your roommates: trans people are people.

When consulting this source, it is important to leave behind what massive narratives and media have taught us to believe, and instead attempt to learn about trans people from the inside out. Simply put, transgender people are individuals whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. Some identify as binary trans men or trans women, while others are nonbinary, agender, genderfluid, or gender non-conforming (GNC). The experiences, intersecting identities, and needs of transgender people vary widely, and no one narrative or label can fully capture what it means to be trans.

While the broader society may treat this as a new or controversial concept, trans people have always existed right here in Montana. From Sammy Williams [The Forgotten Trans History of the Wild West - Atlas Obscura](#), a transgender man and lumberjack living in Manhattan, Montana in the 1800s, to Finds Them and Kills Them, A 19th-century Two-Spirit warrior and spiritual figure of the Crow Nation, renowned for rescuing a friend in battle and serving vital ceremonial and caregiving roles

<https://historyroundtablepodcast.medium.com/the-two-spirits-of-montana-1b5af0a390b6> , to Mrs. Nash [The trans midwife who cared for General Custer's army - LGBTQ Nation](#) , a transgender woman and midwife who served Custer's army, history is rich with examples of trans people living full, complex lives across time and place. Despite being only about 0.5% of the U.S. population today, trans people are a vibrant and vital part of every community [How Many Adults and Youth Identify as Transgender in the United States? - Williams Institute](#). They are small in number, but their presence and contribution, like grains of salt, add flavour to the world around us.

Being transgender is a natural form of human diversity. Trans people, like anyone else, seek community, safety, and autonomy. What makes the trans experience difficult isn't being transgender itself. It's having to navigate a transphobic and rigidly binary world.

Trans people suffer from a lack of understanding and a lack of adequate legal protections, making them a population vulnerable to discrimination. They are disproportionately affected by social issues. To name a few of the challenges trans people face, they suffer from higher rates of poverty (29% of trans adults live in poverty, more than double the 11% of the general U.S. population who lives in poverty [Poverty in the United States: 2022](#)), discrimination (27% of trans people have been discriminated against in the workplace), violence (one in ten trans people have been physically assaulted between) and a lack of adequate healthcare (29% of trans people have been denied healthcare because of their gender identity) [HRC | Understanding the Transgender Community](#).

In recent years, transgender people have also been cynically used as ideological props by right-wing movements. This is not because they pose any real threat, but because fear-mongering about a misunderstood minority group is politically useful. The growing attention

on transgender people, particularly in political and media spaces, has brought both visibility and violence. But trans people have long existed and resisted.

This toolkit aims to provide an accessible overview to build understanding and support for a population which is often the target of discrimination and hatred. It does so by providing education on this population, on what gender-affirming care means and what it can look like, and how to support transgender individuals in their journey as community members. In later sections, it also aims to support and empower the trans community by collecting some resources available to them in Montana, in order to support their gender journey through support groups and healthcare.

The purpose of this toolkit is to expand understanding, offer guidance on where to find resources, and highlight the importance of collective responsibility in supporting transness within the context of this region. It is not here to judge anyone's choices, prescribe specific medical paths, or debate the legitimacy of transgender identities and choices. It is also not a medical manual for steps like hormone replacement therapy or surgery. These steps are better covered in more detailed, specialized resources.

Instead, this is a living resource that invites thoughtful engagement and ongoing learning. Use it as a starting point for conversation, a map for finding support, and a tool to counter transphobia in your communities. Above all, this toolkit supports and educates about the autonomy, dignity, and diverse experiences of trans people across Montana and beyond.

Section 2:

Basic trans terminology to learn about

If you don't know what "non-binary" is, or what the difference between gender and sex is, worry not! These terms are covered in the following section. All you need to be a good ally and a community member to the trans community is an open heart and humility. Especially in Montana, where one may have less daily exposure to people who are out and proud, it is okay to make mistakes and to not know everything. The most important thing is to keep your intention set on supporting trans people's rights, and advocating for their full participation in life.

Sex: sex is one's sexual and physical characteristics. People may be "assigned male at birth" (AMAB) or "assigned female at birth" (AFAB), depending on what sexual and physical characteristics they display at birth. Intersex people have a mix of both sexual characteristics, such as having external sexual organs from one assigned sex and internal sexual organs from another assigned sex.

We all have different physical and sexual characteristics. No single physical sex characteristic is inherently aligned with a certain gender by its nature. Instead, we are taught to associate certain sex traits with certain genders.

All women display at least some physical characteristics commonly associated with men, and vice versa. If you've ever seen a woman with awesome biceps, or a man with long hair, these are great examples! Another example would be how many women remove hair from their legs. When they do this, they are removing a physical trait that both sexes naturally develop, but is only assigned as socially acceptable or expected for the male gender. In doing so, they are altering a sex characteristic in order to fit in with a social construction of what it means to be a certain gender.

Gender: gender is a socially constructed set of norms and behaviors assigned to the two socially constructed genders. Simply put, male/female = sex, man/woman/transman/transwoman/nonbinary person = gender. The dichotomy between male and female, man and woman, is sometimes referred to as the “gender binary,” which just refers to the two main gender roles found in many human societies.

Some theorists even think of gender as a performance. Women could perform being a “woman” by wearing a dress, and men could perform being a “man” by wearing jorts and sandals. These clothing items aren’t something they inherently have to wear or come out of the womb wearing, but they often choose to wear these things that make them feel comfortable in their gender identity.

It goes further than clothing too. Sadly, many people find they have to cut off or lessen parts of themselves in order to fit into a certain gender identity. Women are expected to be listeners, caretakers, and more emotional, whereas men are expected to be more assertive, breadwinners, and unemotional. These behavior sets are not inherent to anybody, regardless of what sex was assigned to them, and are merely behaviors one feels pressure to perform in order to fit into a socially constructed gender performance.

These norms vary by context and region too, and are not universal. In Montana, we generally respect and admire manliness, and a pull-yourself-up-by-the-bootstraps-can-do attitude, which can give more masculine or strong AFABs (persons assigned female at birth) a chance to express themselves more freely. But at the same time, this value in our society can lead to lots of hatred and bigotry towards AMABs (persons assigned male at birth) who express themselves more femininely, since they’re not performing their gender in a way that aligns with societal values. It also shows how different kinds of trans people face different challenges within this area.

Cisgender: a cisgender person is someone who is happy living as the gender identity they were assigned to at birth. To elaborate further, they are happy living with the gender they were assigned to at birth based on their sex characteristics that they do not transition to another gender identity and the set of gender roles and norms that come with it. Again, gender refers to the social identity in the binary, and sex refers to the physical characteristics.

Transgender: a transgender person is someone who is happier living as a gender that was not assigned to them at birth. Someone who is assigned male at birth (AMAB) could transition to a more feminine gender expression, such as living as a transgender woman or nonbinary person. Someone who is assigned female at birth (AFAB) could transition to a more masculine gender expression, such as living as a transgender man or nonbinary person. Intersex people, who have physical sex characteristics from both male and female sexes, are sometimes forced or encouraged to live as one gender or the other as children, and may or may not choose to transition to another gender identity when they are older.

Nonbinary, gender non-conforming (GNC), agender, gender fluid, etc.: These are some terms for different gender expressions which all lie on different points on the gender identity spectrum, and in different ways. Someone who is gender fluid may express themselves more femininely one day, and more masculinely the next day. Someone who is non-binary may feel like a mix of both genders, and someone who is agender may feel like neither gender. People in this space between may use “they/them” pronouns, or other pronouns. And everyone’s gender identity is valid and unique.

Cis people also have unique gender expressions. Some men are lumberjack guys, some men are surfer boys, some men are gymbros, some men are scrawny nerds and some men are podcasters. They are all men, but different kinds of men. The same principle applies for people who don’t conform to gender binaries: their gender expression is unique and personal.

Gender affirming care (GAC): Gender affirming care (GAC) is the range of social, psychological, and medical forms of support that help transgender people survive and thrive. Gender affirming care helps align a person's gender identity with how they live and how they are treated by others. This care can include social, psychological, and medical aspects. Examples of GAC include: using someone's correct pronouns, gender-affirming psychological therapy, educational tools (reading resources like this toolkit counts!), support groups, voice training, hormone replacement therapy (often shortened to HRT), puberty blockers for youth, and surgeries like chest reconstruction or facial feminization.

A common misconception is that GAC is a purely medical process. It's not only medical. It can also be as simple as letting a person wear the clothes they feel comfortable in, or respecting their gender in school and at work. GAC looks different for everyone, but the bottom line is that it's all about helping people feel supported and comfortable in who they are. GAC is essential for trans people to live happy and fulfilling lives in a world that often is actively harmful and hostile towards them.

Gender dysphoria: Gender dysphoria is a state of severe distress that many trans people experience when their physical or behavioural characteristics do not align with their gender identity.

"Dysphoria" as a term may sound intimidating, but it's something cis people may be able to relate to as well. Imagine your dad is a soccer coach and you are his nerdy son who loves computers and chess. Your dad forces you to live and breathe soccer: you have to wear the uniform everyday and compete on the team. But you hate every second of it. You constantly feel awful and deeply uncomfortable, because your soul desires to wear sweater vests and play video games. Through every tortuous moment, forced to express yourself in a way that is not true to you, you just count the moments until you can move out and live the life that better aligns

with who you are inside. Or, if you're a girly girl who feels uncomfortable going out in sweatpants, or a tomboy who hates wearing dresses, you can begin to imagine what the feeling of gender dysphoria is like, but crank it up about ten notches.

Some transgender men feel deeply uncomfortable, or dysphoric, about having breasts. But unlike with clothing, they cannot just remove them overnight. They have to live with them constantly until they can locate and afford surgery to get them removed. Different trans people may feel dysphoric about different things and to different degrees: some trans women feel dysphoric about their voice, so it's really important to them to do voice training in order to achieve a voice that makes them feel comfortable when they speak. Gender affirming care, particularly the forms of care that have to do with physical appearance, such as clothing choices or medical care, can help alleviate the suffering of dysphoria, and improve the quality of life for transgender people.

Section 3:

Trans myths and realities

Gender roles are strictly enforced in many societies. In some way, big or small, we act out our gender roles everyday in every action during our lives. Thus, people who have the courage to deviate from these norms can incite intense feelings of vitriol and hatred. For example, there are stereotypes and commonly held beliefs from many forms of popular culture and media that transgender women and men, or people who dress and act as another gender than the one assigned to them at birth, are dangerous criminals, serial killers, or perverts. This is evidenced by films such as *Silence of the Lambs* (1991), *Psycho* (1960), *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), and in many TV shows such as *CSI*, or in the public brigade from public figures such as J.K. Rowling and Elon Musk.

In reality, transgender people are much more likely to be victims of violence than they are to perpetrate it. In 2020, The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights found that one in five trans and intersex people had been physically or sexually attacked in the previous five years, a rate which is double the rate for other LGBTQ groups [Books and movies keep creating transgender aggressors](#).

Another big misconception in the media is the targeted and close minded focus on the medical status of trans people. In reality, the trans experience is much more than medical intervention. As transgender activist and actress Laverne Cox put it, "The preoccupation with transition and surgery objectifies trans people. And then we don't get to really deal with the real lived experiences. The reality of trans people's lives is that so often we are targets of violence. We experience discrimination disproportionately to the rest of the community. Our unemployment rate is twice the national average; if you are a trans person of color, that rate is four times the national average. The homicide rate is highest among trans women. If we focus on transition,

we don't actually get to talk about those things.”

<https://touchstonesupport.org.uk/lgbt-history-month-laverne-cox/>

Hatred is as structural as it is personal. The issues Cox speaks of don't just come from individual prejudice but from policies and systems that make it harder for trans people to survive. The lack of social safety nets in the U.S. affects every American, not just trans people, but trans people are especially harmed by this because they are often abandoned by family structures in addition, and then are also ousted from accessing the weak and inadequate social structures that do exist. Thus, many trans people are left to face poverty, homelessness, and mental health struggles alone. These unique challenges combined with the objectification of trans bodies and their private medical decisions, as well as a hateful attitude towards trans people in general, makes it even more difficult to improve the quality of life for trans people and achieve social equality. This is not to say that all trans people have terrible lives— many are able to live fulfilling and happy lives as regular members of society— but trans people are more likely to suffer more from societal failings.

In a society that often treats gender nonconformity as a threat, being openly transgender often means living under constant scrutiny, stigma, and danger, especially in a place like Montana. These conditions are worsened by the persistence of harmful myths and misinformation that distort public understanding and fuel discrimination. Alex Schmider, a director at GLAAD writes on the impact of media accordingly: “Media is such an informant of culture and public understanding. And these representations that we see on screen do not just live on screen, they affect people's lives ... we've seen that in a lot of the policy and legislation that's been introduced over the past few years, in narratives about trans people.” [Books and movies keep creating transgender aggressors.](#)

The following section addresses and corrects some of the most common misconceptions that contribute to the marginalization of trans people today.

COMMON MYTHS & MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT TRANSGENDER PEOPLE AND GENDER-AFFIRMING CARE

MYTH: “Trans people are just confused.”

Reality: The gender identities of trans people are strong and enduring. It is not a fleeting phase or a misunderstanding. Some trans people know who they are early in their lives, while others may take more time to fully grasp their identity. Everyone’s gender journeys are valid. The real challenge comes from living in a society that often denies and marginalizes them for simply being themselves.

MYTH: “Trans people are mentally ill.”

Reality: Being transgender is not a mental illness. Major medical and psychological organizations, including the American Psychiatric Association and the World Health Organization, affirm that gender diversity is a natural part of the human experience. While many trans people do experience stress, anxiety, or depression, these issues are usually the result of the world around them, which creates social rejection, discrimination, and an overall lack of support. These stressors do not result from being trans, rather, from a transphobic world.

MYTH: “Trans people just want attention or special treatment.”

Reality: Trans people do not want special rights. Trans people just want equal rights. They want access to healthcare, safety in public, jobs, housing, and the ability to live freely, just like anyone else. Being transgender often results in greater hardship, not advantage. There are no “benefits” to being trans in a society hostile and hateful towards transness. In fact, trans people face disproportionate rates of structural forms of violence such as homelessness and unemployment, and literal violence in hate crimes and attacks.

MYTH: “Kids are being forced into transitioning.”

Reality: No one is forcing kids to transition. In fact, we live in a world that actively discourages transgender people from transitioning, and in doing so, hurts transgender people and transgender children. Those who force themselves and the world around them to constantly conform to gender roles as a means of control and division mistake supporting children’s autonomy and decision making for the compulsive gender roles they are familiar with.

Gender-affirming care for youth is highly regulated, gradual, and cautious. The majority of care for minors and youth involves social support, such as using a chosen name or pronouns, and only after lengthy psychological assessments and parental involvement are any medical steps like puberty blockers considered. These blockers are safe, reversible, and give young people more time to understand themselves before puberty causes irreversible changes that force them to live in a body not aligned with their gender identity, leading to severe distress or even suicide ideation.

Young people do not suffer from support. They suffer from a lack of support. A multi-year study published in *Nature Human Behaviour* (2024) found that states which enacted bans on gender-affirming care tragically saw suicide attempt rates among trans youth increase by 7–72% within just 1–2 years of those bans taking effect

<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-024-01979-5>.

MYTH: “Hormones and surgeries are rushed and dangerous.”

Reality: Gender-affirming medical care is a long, deliberate process involving informed consent, mental health support, and ongoing evaluation. Surgeries are only pursued by some trans people and are far from the only or most important part of GAC. Gender-affirming surgeries have a very low regret rate, under 1%, which is lower than the regret rates for many common

procedures such as knee replacements or tonsillectomies

<https://newatlas.com/health-wellbeing/regret-gender-affirming-surgery/> .

MYTH: “Trans women are a threat in bathrooms.”

Reality: There is zero evidence that trans women pose a threat to others in restrooms. In fact, trans people are far more likely to be harassed or attacked when using public facilities. These bathroom panics are driven by fear, not fact, and echo older forms of bigotry that target other marginalized groups using public spaces under the guise of “protection.”

MYTH: “Trans athletes are ruining sports.”

Reality: No one undergoes gender transition just to win at sports. The idea that trans athletes have an unfair advantage is largely based on fear, not science. Trans people have been competing in sports for decades without issue, and many sports organizations have thoughtful policies in place to ensure fairness. Like cisgender athletes, transgender athletes vary widely in ability, talent, and training. The overwhelming majority of trans people simply want the same thing as anyone else: to play, to belong and to be treated with dignity.

MYTH: “Being transgender is a new trend.”

Reality: Trans and gender-diverse people have existed throughout human history and across cultures, such as Two-Spirit people in many Indigenous nations or Hijra in South Asia. The visibility of transgender people is new, the existence of transgender people is not. This new visibility has unfortunately made trans people into a target for ideological attacks.

MYTH: “Trans people are being pushed on society.”

Reality: Again, trans people aren’t new. As long as humans have existed, some of us have been transgender and/or intersex. What's happening now is some politicians are weaponizing

trans identities in public conversations, grabbing power by targeting a small, vulnerable group to distract from real issues. It's easier to be angrier at an individual's expression than the systemic failures to support human welfare we face in every corner of American life.

Section 4:

Understanding the challenges of trans people in Montana and the U.S.

This section provides an overview of key legal, social and political challenges facing transgender people, both at the federal level and within Montana. While there have been some important victories for trans rights, they are being undermined by efforts to roll back protections and enforce rigid, binary norms. The legal landscape in the U.S. is unstable, and for many trans people, basic rights like healthcare, identification, and bodily autonomy are under open attack.

These attacks are not about public safety or fairness. They're about control, fear, and distraction. Understanding these legal developments is essential for building informed advocacy and strong community support.

On the federal level, it's not all bad. The 2020 Supreme Court ruling *Bostock v. Clayton County* determined that transgender people are included under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, affording them protections against employment discrimination on the basis of their gender in the workplace [Bostock v. Clayton County | 590 U.S. ____ \(2020\) | Justia U.S. Supreme Court Center](#).

While workplace protections are a good start, trans people lack a comprehensive set of codified legal protections in the U.S. to guarantee their rights to autonomy and equal participation in all corners of civic life—such as a “suspect classification” status that strengthens the rights of religious and racial minorities in the U.S.. Thus, trans people are vulnerable to having these basic rights stripped away, which is exactly what we are witnessing right now.

The recent decision in the Supreme court case *U.S. v. Skrametti* (2025) determined that states are granted the ability to ban gender affirming healthcare for minors [United States v. Skrametti | 605 U.S. ____ \(2025\)](#) . This decision will have dire repercussions for trans youth across the U.S. who are in need of this form of care. Furthermore, the Trump administration has also made

trans people into a target. On Trump's first day in office, he issued an anti-trans executive order that states that there are only two biological sexes, and people must live as whatever sex they were assigned at birth. This is nothing more than a fear-mongering, ideological appeal that is difficult, if not impossible, to enforce.

Specifically, this order states that all government issued ID's—including visas and passports must be marked according to the sex assigned to a person at birth, meaning that a transgender man who walks, talks, and lives as a man is being forced to be marked 'Female' on their documentation, or vice versa for transgender women [Defending Women From Gender Ideology Extremism And Restoring Biological Truth To The Federal Government – The White House](#). This executive order has worsened an existing challenge for trans people: that they often lack accurate identity documents for their gender and name changes, which significantly impacts their daily lives. Without proper identification, they face barriers to access essential services such as emergency housing, public assistance, travel, and school enrollment, all of which are critical for participation in society.

Montana, already hostile to its trans population, has acted in accordance with the Trump administration. In the past couple of years from 2022-2025, a great number of anti LGBTQ+ bills were introduced in the state legislative session. Most were thrown out, but some were passed. In 2022, SB 437 (Sen. Carl Glimm) banned the changing of sex markers on birth certificates, and since one needs a birth certificate to change one's drivers license, this made it so that trans people are forced to use a driver's license that marks them incorrectly, outing them and putting them at risk in public spaces. Luckily, courts struck down this law as unlawful in 2024 [Lawsuit: DOJ quietly changed policy for changing gender markers on driver's licenses • Daily Montanan](#). Then, in 2023, the Montana state legislature passed a law banning gender affirming care for minors, but the Montana Supreme court likewise struck down this law in violation of the state

constitution in 2024 ["DA 23-0572, IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE STATE OF MONTANA, 2024 MT 303"](#).

Anti-trans state legislation in Montana continued to surge in the 2025 legislative session. SB 121 (sponsored by Rep. Kerri Seekins-Crowe) was a bathroom ban, which was immediately litigated in courts by the ACLU, and now has a preliminary injunction, meaning it will not be enforced. Other bills passed in 2025 such as SB 218 (sponsored by Sen. John Fuller) and HB 682 (sponsored by Rep. Greg Kmetz) criminalizes healthcare providers by allowing patients to sue them for treating gender dysphoria, making providers less likely to want to give care. Bills like HJ 10 (sponsored by Rep. Kerri Seekins-Crowe) and HB 300 (sponsored by Rep. Kerri Seekins-Crowe) attempt to ban transgender athletes from participating in sports. In the education system, HB 471 (sponsored by Rep. Jed Hinkle) restricts education about LGBTQ+ people in schools, while HB 400 (sponsored by Rep. Braxton Mitchell) allows students to be misgendered and deadnamed by students and staff.

The underlying theme with all of these attacks is the attempt to limit transgender life, rights and expression. But time and time again, the transgender community mobilizes and rallies to challenge these bills, fight for their rights and get these attacks repealed. It is also important to note that many anti-trans bills are not passing. The Trans Legislation Tracker estimates that 120 anti-trans bills passed state legislatures in the U.S. in 2025, while 647 anti-trans bills failed to pass—meaning that for every one anti-trans bill that passed, five did not [Trans Legislation Tracker](#).

It is important to remember to celebrate our victories. Montana has elected the first trans woman state senator, Senator Zoey Zephyr, and the first non binary state senator, Senator Howell, who also serves as an executive director at Catalyst! Having trans officials in government and decision making bodies is an excellent tool to get our interests and rights directly represented.

This community is also using strategies of resistance that are more clever and indirect. In Missoula, following the passage of state House Bill 819 (which bans flags representing gender, sexual orientation, or political ideology), the City Council adopted a resolution officially recognizing the Pride flag as the city's official flag. Because the law exempted officially adopted municipal flags, this loophole allowed Missoula to continue flying the Pride flag in schools and government buildings as a gesture of defiance and inclusion

<https://missouladailynews.com/missoula-city-council-adopts-pride-flag-as-official-city-flag-challenging-montana-state-law/>. The transgender community and its allies are as smart as they are resilient.

From Browning to Bozeman, grassroots groups across Montana are organizing powerful, community-driven responses to the political attacks on trans lives. To name a few, organizations like Catalyst Montana have mobilized around legislative sessions, hosting rallies like the 2025 Trans Day of Visibility at the state capitol and creating networks of care and education such as The Montana Trans Quilt Project. Forward Montana, a youth-led civic engagement group, has supported queer youth through voter registration drives, education campaigns, and cultural organizing like zines and rallies, ensuring LGBTQ+ Montanans are represented and protected. TransVisible Montana focuses on community leadership and support for trans and Two-Spirit people, while peer-run mutual aid channels continue to distribute resources, offer legal referrals, and provide care across the state.

Section 6:

Types of gender affirming care:

There are many ways to support and affirm a person's gender, and care can look different for everyone. While this isn't an exhaustive list, this section describes three major types of gender-affirming care that are commonly needed for trans people: social care, psychological care and medical care.

1.) Social care

For peers of trans people:

Social care for trans people looks like creating an affirming social environment around transgender people, which is also just what we call "allyship." The easiest thing anyone can start with in order to be a good ally to the trans community from afar is simply respecting people's pronouns and names. Early into your community member's transition, or if you are new to having contact with trans people, it is normal to stumble and accidentally misgender or use the wrong name for someone. When it happens, just give a quick 'sorry,' and use the correct name and pronouns after. There's no need to feel guilty or give a long apology speech. Guilt prevents us from becoming better allies and community members.

You can even correct the name and pronouns of a trans person on their behalf, if they are out within a given social circle— lots of trans people are out at work and school but not with their family, for example. Once you are aware that your community member is trans, don't be afraid to be the one in your classroom, in your workplace, in your friend group, or in your family who corrects their name and pronouns for your trans peers. It gets exhausting for trans people to constantly have to be their own advocate. Taking on some of that burden is a great way to be kind and considerate towards them.

Another thing that often happens to trans people is being reduced to their transness. Trans people are just regular people. It's part of who they are, but not all of it. Trans people don't owe

you education or performances. Their medical decisions are private, so it's important to respect their privacy. They also might not want to talk about being trans at all, which is fine!

If you really want to go the extra mile, consider how you can more actively contribute to a safer and more affirming world for them. That might look like protesting anti-trans laws, speaking up at school board meetings, supporting trans businesses, donating to trans causes or simply pushing back when harmful rhetoric arises in your community. Learn about past and present trans struggles, so you can show up informed and prepared. GLAAD has a great overview to look into — [Transgender Resources | GLAAD](#) .

Practicing social accommodations is more than just respecting pronouns. We need to create more spaces where trans people feel like they are welcome. This includes every sphere in public and private life. Trans people deserve to be able to go to the bank or donate blood or go to the airport without being interrogated about how their sex markers on their documentation don't match their appearance. This is a common experience for transgender people. But with more comprehensive and empathetic recognition of trans people, this can change. Make your classroom, workplace, grocery store, doctors office, knitting club, and so on and so forth, into a place where trans people don't have to feel fearful, or to constantly defend or explain themselves. Montana has particularly rigid and unforgiving gender norms, so allyship is all the more impactful under such a context.

For friends of trans people:

Similar principles apply for a general peer in further proximity to a trans person as for someone who is closer to a trans person, like a friend. It is important to many trans people to have other trans friends, as they can more easily and immediately understand the challenges trans people face. It's difficult to explain the constant and far-reaching pains that spill into every corner of trans lives. Some trans people can lose a majority of their community when they come out, like their family and friends, which may be a difficult experience for cis people to relate to. And the

same goes for sharing in trans joys, such as the first time getting correctly gendered by a stranger, or finally getting your documentation changed, or starting HRT you've been waiting on for over a year.

You can be a good friend to a trans person by being a good friend, period. That means showing up with openness and care. If your trans friend chooses to share something vulnerable about their experience, listen without interrupting or shifting the conversation back to yourself. Don't treat their pain as a political talking point. And just as importantly, don't pressure them to educate you or to talk about their transness at all. Some trans people are open and want to share; others prefer privacy. The best thing you can do is to follow their lead, be respectful, and create space where they feel safe being their full selves, whatever that looks like.

For families of trans people:

It may be particularly challenging to accept a transgender family member because of how close familial relationships are. It's not uncommon for a person to act with acceptance towards a transgender person, even someone who is openly or visibly trans, who is not as close to them, such as a coworker or acquaintance. But this very same person may reject or even kick out a transgender family member when they come out or are outed.

The most radical act of love a parent or family member of a trans person can do for their trans child or family member is to simply accept them and love them for who they are. Sadly, it is a common experience in the trans community to be alienated by one's own family for being trans. These familial estrangements have tragic consequences. A 2016 landmark study of over 3,400 trans and gender-nonconforming adults found that 42% had attempted suicide, and 26% reported substance misuse. Those who experienced family rejection had much higher odds of attempting suicide or turning to self-harm or substance abuse [Family Rejection as a Predictor of Suicide Attempts and Substance Misuse Among Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Adults - PubMed](#). Another study of trans youth in Ontario found that 57% of trans youth

without supportive parents had attempted suicide, compared to only 4% of trans youth with supportive parents [Impacts of Strong Parental Support for Trans Youth](#).

It is absolutely normal in the beginning of your family member's transition to feel sad or grieve for the person you thought they were going to be. But if in the end, you are only capable of loving the person that you want them to be, the one you can control, the one that is more socially acceptable, the one that is safer, easier, and more digestible to love, then your love is not unconditional. And that hurts more than anything.

It may be mostly the world around you which makes you fear for your trans family member, and less-so your family member's transness itself. But what you fail to realize is that by loving and accepting your trans family member for who they are, you are changing their world. Those problems will only multiply when familial rejection or even estrangement is added to the equation. And if they have a loving and accepting family to support them through these issues, it makes a world of difference. Being hateful or invalidating, through misgendering, deadnaming, or insisting someone isn't really trans, won't stop trans people from being trans. It is a complete waste of energy and time to try to control someone else's life or tell them who they are.

2.) Mental health care

Many transgender people benefit from psychological care as a vital part of their transition and overall well-being. Trans-affirming mental health services, such as gender counseling, support groups, or trans-specific therapy, can help individuals explore their identity, cope with dysphoria, manage stress, and build confidence.

There are many barriers to access to this kind of care. Some trans people, like many other Americans, are uninsured: 22% of trans people and 32% of trans people of color had no health insurance coverage in 2019 [the economic impact of covid-19 intensifies for - transgender and lgbtq communities of color](#). But luckily, gender-affirming care is covered by Medicare in Montana ([A Win for Transgender Rights in Montana](#)). Though not all private insurance plans cover gender

affirming care, or even mental health care, or it may only partially cover them. This can make it a bit tricky to get various types of gender affirming care covered and often works on a case-by-case basis, depending on your type of insurance, and the care needed. This is another reason why it is important to get in touch with your local trans community, as they have experience and can help you navigate through these bureaucratic nightmares. A list of local trans organisations throughout Montana is listed at the end of this section.

Plus, mental health providers who specialize in transgender mental health care are few and far between in Montana. Luckily, resources like The Queer Doc guide to Transgender & Gender Affirming Resources Montana: [Montana - Transgender & Gender Affirming Resources - QueerDoc • Trans Online Doctors Office - Curing LGBTQ+ Healthcare Discrimination](#) : lists out several health care providers who specialize in mental health care in Montana. Trans people living in these regions can reach out to these mental healthcare providers and see if their insurance covers this care. And for those near Missoula, the Blue Mountain Clinic in Missoula offers counseling, among other medical and mental health services: [Gender Affirming Care | Blue Mountain Clinic \(BMC\)](#) .

Because transgender people in Montana often face unique challenges, such as discrimination, isolation, and limited access to affirming care, it can be incredibly important to find and build community. Being part of a community helps trans people create opportunities for healing and empowerment. For those early in their transition or just looking to connect with others who understand your experiences, support groups, local organizations, and affirming services can make a huge difference. Below is a list of resources across Montana where you can connect with your local transgender community and find local support groups:

Billings:

<https://www.billingstransgenderalliance.com/> The Billings Transgender Alliance offers transgender support groups and meetings: “We are having MEETINGS again! The NEW times are 1st SATURDAYS monthly and 3rd WEDNESDAYS monthly from 6-8PM! Hope to see ya'll there! 406-334-8482, billingstransgenderalliance@gmail.com.”

Bozeman:

<https://www.montana.edu/women/resources/LGBTQ.html> The MSU LGBTQ+ section of the Women's Center hosts a list of LGBTQ+ and trans resources, including some support groups and resources for support of local trans needs

Helena: <https://www.montanaqueeralliance.org/> The Montana Queer Alliance is based out of Helena and provides support groups and therapy: “Currently we offer two support groups:

- LGBTQIA2s+ Youth and their Families (*Currently meeting every other thursday*)

- LGBTQIA2s+ Adults (*New Adults Group Starting July 10th; every 2nd and 4th Thursday of every month.*)

Click the "Group Sign Up" link to show interest! <https://form.jotform.com/251527215208047> “

Great Falls: <https://www.gfpride.org/support-groups> The Great Falls LGBTQ+ Center has a Trans/NB support group:

“Led by Ryan Rominger, PhD LCPC, 3rd Tuesday of the Month, 5-6 PM. This is a closed support group, sign-ups required prior to group. Contact 406-781-8260 or email

ryan@romingercounseling.com. \$10 fee per session, scholarships available through The Center.”

Missoula: <https://www.lgbtmontana.org/tin>

The Western Montana LGBTQ+ Community Center has a support group; “Groups held on the 2nd and 4th (and 5th) Thursday of each month are social groups guided by a Center staff member with a focus on gathering and conversation. These groups are a hybrid of Zoom and in-person at the Center depending on each individual's preference for joining. Certain meetings may include fun outings in the community. Both versions of the group generally consist of a mix of new and returning members with diverse backgrounds, ages, and identities. Members do not have to live in Missoula. ” Click on the link to sign up!

Whitefish/Kalispell: The Glacier Queer Alliance hosts two meetups for LGBTQ+ families and youth, <https://www.glacierqueeralliance.org/youth> , and hosts lots of events to mingle. <https://www.glacierqueeralliance.org/events> . The facebook group for one of the youth groups is in the following link:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/181941579095249/about>

3.) Medical gender affirming care:

Some, but not all, trans people choose to receive various forms of medical care in order to feel more comfortable moving through the world in their gender identity. Many transgender people experience something called “dysphoria,” a term you may recall from the second section of this toolkit, and this condition causes great distress. Treatments such as hormone replacement therapy, laser hair removal, or various types of surgeries can help to alleviate this pain and align their physical presentation with their true gender identity. This is clinically proven. Research shows that access to gender-affirming medical care lowers rates of depression and suicidality and enhances the overall well-being of many trans people [Gender-Affirming Hormone Therapy Linked to Better MH in Trans Youth | Psychiatric News](#).

Some trans people don't want medical forms of gender affirming care, which is also valid. The bottom line is that people who want to medically transition should be able to do so peacefully and with lots of social and medical support. Here's some helpful terms and information below:

First, what is HRT?

HRT involves using hormones such as estrogen or testosterone to develop physical traits that match one's gender identity. This can include changes like deeper voice, facial hair, softer skin, or breast development, depending on the type of hormones used and how the body responds <https://www.verywellhealth.com/testosterone-for-transgender-men-4688488> . HRT can be taken as gels, nasal sprays, pills or shots, depending on what works best and most safely on a case-by-case basis. Depending on one's genetics, everyone's body reacts differently to HRT, and a wide array of effects are possible.

While HRT is medically necessary for many, it comes with possible health effects, just like any medical treatment. For transgender women, certain forms of estrogen may increase risk of blood clotting, especially early in treatment [WikipediaMayo Clinic](#). Transgender men should monitor blood pressure and cholesterol as testosterone can affect those levels [American Heart AssociationVerywell Health](#). These risks are regularly managed through lab tests and medical oversight, making supervised HRT much safer overall [WikipediaVerywell Health](#).

Some trans people in Montana may have to drive several hours to fill their HRT prescriptions, and even getting a doctor to prescribe and get insurance coverage can be a huge hurdle.

Montana has its own unique challenges as a more rural state, but there are still lots of different HRT options available. Below is a list of possibilities:

Accessing HRT in Montana

In-Person Clinics

Blue Mountain Clinic (Missoula): Offers hormone therapy (injectable, gel, patch, tablet forms), support for surgery referrals, counseling, and financial aid options for trans patients. [Blue Mountain Clinic](#)

Bridgercare (Bozeman): Provides hormone therapy via in-person or telehealth visits, integrated into broader sexual health and wellness services. [Montana State UniversityBridgercare](#)

Virtual Care Options

True U Clinic: Offers informed-consent hormone therapy virtually for Montana residents—no waiting for referrals or insurance hassles. Estrogen and testosterone support available with transparent pricing. [True U Clinic](#)

Plume: Telehealth service offering hormone therapy, mental health support, and community programming throughout Montana—accessible via smartphone with both self-pay and some insurance coverage. [Plume Clinic](#)

FOLX Health: LGBTQIA+ focused telehealth care covering hormone therapy, primary and mental health services—for patients across Montana. folxhealth.com

Medical interventions as a component to gender affirming care can save lives. But like all healthcare decisions, it's best pursued with accurate information, trusted medical input, and awareness of one's bodily responses. Those who wish to pursue this path should reach out to local clinics, ask about telehealth options, learn what insurance covers, and shop around (with the limited options available) until a trusted provider is found.

And surgeries?

The exact details and procedures of various types of gender affirming surgeries are too vast for the scope of this toolkit, but here's what you should know: some trans people choose to get top

surgery (either chest masculinization or feminization), bottom surgery (various genital surgeries), facial feminization surgery (FFS), or other procedures like tracheal shaves or body contouring. Like HRT, not everyone wants or needs surgeries, and that's totally valid too. Some people want only one type of surgery and not others, depending on what types of dysphoria they experience and what they feel is right for their body.

If you're trans in Montana and think surgery might be right for you, the clinics listed above for the HRT are good places to start the conversation. They can help you understand your options, navigate insurance, and provide referrals to qualified surgeons. Many procedures can be done in state, but not all. This also poses a financial barrier, which is why many trans people crowdfund and rally support through their communities to receive life saving care.

Online resources are invaluable

YouTube and Reddit are honestly some of the most valuable resources for trans people considering surgery. One can find real experiences, recovery processes, before/after photos, and get honest takes from people who've actually been through these processes. Subreddits like r/TopSurgery, r/ftm, r/MtF, and surgery-specific communities are goldmines of practical info that aren't easily available in medical pamphlets, especially because information about trans health is limited and under-researched.

Helpful websites for surgery info:

WPATH (World Professional Association for Transgender Health): Professional standards of care and guidelines - <https://wpath.org/>

TransLine: Surgery database with surgeon reviews and experiences - transline.zendesk.com

Top Surgery: Comprehensive resource specifically for chest surgeries - topsurgery.net

Gender Confirmation Center: Educational resources about various procedures -

genderconfirmation.com

Point of Pride: Offers some financial assistance programs for surgery - pointofpride.org

The Transgender Surgery Wiki: Crowdsourced information and surgeon databases -

reddit.com/r/TransSurgeriesWiki

Conclusion:

Simple acts of decency and kindness go a long way for trans lives. To trans folks reading this: life is a life-long journey. There's no timeline you need to follow, no age by which you need to have it all figured out. You are constantly becoming who you're meant to be, and you're already doing that by being here.

Being trans can be really hard. The world isn't always kind, systems are stacked against you and some days just suck. That's why it's important to form a community that can understand your struggle and support you. To allies: you can save trans lives, both for yourself and others, by choosing to be a kind and open-hearted person.

Of all places, Montana might feel like a tough place to be trans sometimes, but you're not alone. We are few but we are mighty. There are resources, there are people who care, and there's a community out there waiting to support you. Your journey is yours to define.