**Filename: HWSHOW TRT: 3:59.000 SOC**

From the KBIA Health & Wealth Desk, I’m Katelynn McIlwain.

Missouri has had a ban of medical gender-affirming care for youth, as well as adults on Medicaid or who are incarcerated, since 2023.

But, as KBIA’s Rebecca Smith reports, there’s still plenty of other forms of gender-affirming care happening in the state and advocates say it’s saving lives.

**~ 10 seconds of nats at beginning, before narration begins**

**Filename: 0708GENDER\_V2 TRT: 3:32 OC: “state lawmakers.”
*Nats: Salon chatter, people talking over the sound of trimmers and a blow dryer. “I don’t want it to look super masculine. I want it to look soft.”***

The sign for  Columbia’s Soul Collective salon is a giant, mirrored disco ball. It complements the salon’s aesthetic –  bright artwork featuring unicorns, rainbows and the salon’s motto, posted on the wall, which reads: “You are safe, you are seen, and you are celebrated.”

Co-owners Colissa Nole and Megan Fudge are hosting a “pay-what-you-can” event where patrons can get gender-affirming haircuts or facial waxing.

(:XX) *Hair can shape what that person presents as or shows up as, and as long as it is the most authentic to them – that's why we do this. It's all about showing up as your truest form.*

In 2023, the Missouri legislature passed a law banning medical gender-affirming care, such as hormone therapy, surgeries and puberty blockers for minors, as well as for adults using Medicaid or who are incarcerated.

Dr. Jenna Brownfield is a psychologist who serves Minnesota’s queer community, and she says that makes non-medical forms of gender affirmation all the more important.

*(:XX) It allows someone to still find choice, especially when their choices are being restricted. So, in the face of oppression – where do you still have agency? Where do you still get to be empowered to make choices for yourself?*

She says this care includes anything that makes people feel more comfortable in their own skin.

And research backs this up. According to the 2024 National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ+ Young People from the Trevor Project, transgender and non-binary youth who had access to gender-affirming clothing had lower rates of suicide attempts than those that didn’t.

Dr. Brownfield says it’s also important to remember that each transgender and non-binary person’s experience is unique and not everyone wants to undergo medical transition or surgeries.

But, she adds, some do and there are many barriers.

*(:XX) You know, the coverage on their insurance is very burdensome financially to them still, the access to a healthcare provider is a very, very lengthy wait  or just not close enough geographically to where they are in the state.*

Merrique Jenson is the president and founder of Transformations KC, an organization run by and for trans women of color that serves Missouri, Kansas and northwest Arkansas.

*(:XX) Trans women of color, specifically, are the pioneers of gender-affirming care. Gender-affirming care existed long before, you know, a cis white man or a doctor decided that they were going to start caring about us.*

Jenson says it also helps make trans women of color – who are much more likely to be victims of violence – safer.

This year, Transformations KC has awarded a series of microgrants to trans women throughout the region.

The money can be used for everything from groceries and plastic surgery to makeup and hygiene products. And Jenson says the money is a complement to another important form of gender-affirming care: mentorship and connection.

*(:XX) I think the best thing that young people can do is find an older trans mentor because who better to learn from than your aunties and your sisters and your godmothers in the movement, who also look amazing.*

Missouri’s ban on puberty blockers and hormone therapies for youth is set to expire in August 2027 unless reauthorized by state lawmakers.

I’m Rebecca Smith. KBIA News.