

# Accessing Vaginoplasty Surgery in Ontario



**Vaginoplasty is a gender-affirming procedure** that transgender, gender-diverse or Two Spirit people may access to align their body with their gender-identity. Vaginoplasty and vulvoplasty are similar procedures but with some key differences:

## 1. Vaginoplasty surgery creates a vagina with depth (a vaginal canal)

### Techniques:

<b>Penile Inversion</b>	skin from the shaft of the penis is inverted and combined with scrotal and perineal skin to create a vagina and vulva
<b>Peritoneal Pull Through</b>	abdominal (peritoneal) lining is used to create the deeper part of a vagina, combined with inverted penile skin, scrotal and perineal skin for the vulva and beginning of the vagina <b>NOT AVAILABLE AT WCH OR GRS</b>
<b>Sigmoid Colon</b>	tissue from the colon is used to create a vagina combined with inverted penile skin, scrotal and perineal skin for the vulva <b>NOT AVAILABLE AT WCH OR GRS</b>

### Results:

- Reduce gender dysphoria by aligning anatomy with gender identity
- Create the appearance of “female” genitalia
- Eliminate main source of testosterone production (if orchiectomy was not already done)
- Eliminate or greatly reduce the need for androgen blockers
- To preserve sensitive tissues so that the ability to have an orgasm is maintained
- Allow for receptive penetrative sex if desired (routine dilation of the vaginal canal is required to maintain patency)

## 1. Vulvoplasty surgery creates a vagina with little or no depth (no vaginal canal)

### Techniques:

Penile, scrotal and perineal skin are rearranged to make a vulva

Results:

- Reduce gender dysphoria by aligning anatomy with gender identity
- Create the appearance of “female” genitalia
- Eliminate main source of testosterone production (if orchiectomy was not already done)
- Eliminate or greatly reduce the need for androgen blockers
- To preserve sensitive tissues so that the ability to have an orgasm is maintained

Vaginoplasty and vulvoplasty are funded in Ontario if you have Ontario Health Insurance (OHIP). **OHIP will covered surgeries completed at Women’s College Hospital (WCH) in Ontario or GRS Montreal in Quebec.**

Some people may choose to **pay privately** for vaginoplasty surgery, specifically if they want to **see a surgeon other than those at WCH or GRS Montreal** (ie: in the United States, Thailand etc.) or **want a technique not offered by WCH or GRS** (ie: Peritoneal Pull Through or Sigmoid Colon). Private pay means that the entire cost of the surgery would be billed to you (no OHIP coverage of the procedure). In this case you may contact your surgeon of choice directly.

There are two surgical centers in Canada available to patients seeking OHIP covered vaginoplasty, GRS in Montreal, Quebec and Women’s College Hospital (WCH) in Toronto, Ontario. In order to make a decision about where to have your surgery, you may have questions about which surgical team may be the best fit for you. This resource is meant to provide information about options and limitations related to vaginoplasty/vulvoplasty for people in Ontario, differences you may expect to see between providers and how to choose a surgeon.

## Vaginoplasty/vulvoplasty options and limitations

Surgeons may also have limitations or restrictions on who is a candidate for surgery. Physical and medical conditions may impact someone’s ability to have surgery or for surgery to occur at a certain facility.

### Differences between surgical sites

Surgeon practices, approaches and the facilities they operate out of will differ. This is important to understand as it will impact a number of factors related to your surgery, such as:

<b>Surgery technique(s) available</b>	Surgeons at WCH and GRS Montreal offer <b>penile inversion vaginoplasty only</b> . Other techniques are offered at surgical sites in the United States and overseas--accessible through private pay or through OHIP if you are not a suitable candidate for penile inversion vaginoplasty. There may also be more nuanced differences in technique or
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	approach between surgical sites
<b>Cost</b>	OHIP cannot cover travel costs, so if you are travelling for surgery this cost will be something you pay for. Programs may be available to support the costs of travel by land or air for those who qualify, such as those on ODSP or through <a href="#">Hope Air</a> .
<b>Hair removal</b>	GRS Montreal and WCH do not require hair removal. For patients opting to access pre-surgery hair removal (which can reduce the chances of hair re-growth in the vaginal canal) this would be paid for privately.
<b>Wait-time</b>	Surgical centres have differing wait times. The estimate wait time for surgery at GRS Montreal (once OHIP funding is approved) is approximately 9-15 months*. The estimate wait time for surgery at WCH is approximately 2 years*.
<b>Physical/medical restrictions</b>	Some surgeons may have restrictions based on factors like age, BMI and medical concerns that may require you to be seen in a certain type of facility (ie: hospital with an Intensive Care Unit). WCH and GRS are both ambulatory facilities and do not have non-emergency access to ICU care directly after surgery. Anesthesiologists (the doctors that put you to sleep) are responsible for deciding if a specific surgical location is safe for you.
<b>Accommodations after surgery</b>	GRS Montreal has a recovery unit where you can stay for up to 10 days following surgery. WCH keeps patients in hospital for 3 nights and patients will need to return home with care or make arrangements for someone to be with you for 4 days after surgery until you return to the hospital for vaginal packing and catheter removal. Each surgical facility will have different capacities and recommendations.
<b>Location</b>	It is also important to consider the location of your surgeon in terms of accessibility for future follow up or surgical revisions if needed. A surgical team that is further away may make aftercare more challenging.

\*Please note that wait-time estimates may change quickly, check in with surgical centres at the time of your referral for updated wait-times

## How to choose a surgeon

You may choose a surgeon for a number of reasons such as where they are located, what techniques they offer, their wait-time and their reputation. Often, people find that they may be choosing between a few options, and it may be difficult to make a decision. The following steps may help you search for and identify your surgeon of choice:

1. Make a surgery priority list. This list includes all of the factors that are important to you in selecting a surgeon, such as:
  - a. Surgery close to home
  - b. Surgery technique
  - c. OHIP covered surgery
  - d. Wait-time
  - e. Experience of surgical center
  - f. Facility type
  - g. Surgical center supports available
  - h. Associated out of pocket costs
  
2. Consider **speaking with support groups, friends, and online community platforms** about your surgery decision-making. These supports are not medical and cannot provide medical advice, but it may be helpful to read about or listen to other people's stories and talk through some of your questions with others. **Remember:** no two experiences are the same.
  
3. Speak with your primary care provider about your surgery priority list and your desire to be referred for surgery. Your provider may or may not be knowledgeable about surgery referral pathways, but resources exist that they can refer to for more [support](#).