

Position Statement

10 April 2019

Support for a National Sexual and Reproductive Health Strategy

Access to sexual and reproductive health services is a fundamental right for every woman in Australia, however it is not a reality. A woman cannot go to the doctor or hospital with confidence that they will be able to access the service they require. This is amplified in regional and rural areas due to lack of services and distances resulting in increased disadvantages in the form of cost, time and discrimination.

Supporting women's reproductive choice is essential for women's health and gender equality.

National Tele Abortion service closes

In March 2019 after providing women across Australia for almost four years an affordable, supported access to a medical abortion in the privacy of their own home, the Tabbot Foundation has closed. This is significant for women in regional and rural areas because they are already disadvantaged by the distance they have to travel to access medical services and many of the GP's and hospitals in the towns close to them do not offer the full suite of sexual and reproductive health services – including abortion services.

Gippsland Women's Health's research provides evidence of how difficult it is for women in Gippsland to access medical abortion services. <https://www.gwhealth.asn.au/srh-research/>

Only 44% of GP clinics surveyed offer medical termination of pregnancy

40% of the GP clinics surveyed that did not provide medical terminations referred to Melbourne (75 Clinics were contacted – 36 clinics responded giving a 48% response rate)

41% of Pharmacies supplied medical termination of pregnancy medication (mifepristone and misoprostol or RU486) although half of these did not keep it in stock (ordering in took 1-3days) (68 Pharmacies were contacted – 48 responded giving a 70.5% response rate)

Victorian Services:

Marie Stopes Australia

Medical Abortion by phone - \$290 + medication (\$38.80/\$6.40 depending on Health Care Card status)

Medical Abortion in clinic - from \$440

More information <https://www.mariestopes.org.au/abortion/home-abortion/>

1800 My Options

For information about contraception, pregnancy options and sexual health : 1800 My Options (1800 696 784) www.1800myoptions.org.au

News articles references:

Postal medical abortion service shuts down

<https://www.communitynews.com.au/mandurah-coastal-times/news/postal-medical-abortion-service-shuts-down/>

A postal abortion service that sent RU486 to thousands of women is shutting down

<https://www.buzzfeed.com/ginarushton/tabbot-foundation-abortion-ru486>

Supporting documents:

Time for a National Sexual and Reproductive Health Strategy for Australia Call to action

<https://bit.ly/2UOnnkD>

Scenario

A young woman in a remote Gippsland town has had unprotected sex, even though she knows she could take the emergency contraceptive pill within 72hours to prevent a pregnancy there is no pharmacy in the town and the nearest hospital is a 2 hours' drive away.

When she manages to organise a lift to the hospital it is a week later. The hospital confirms she is pregnant. They tell her they don't offer medical termination of pregnancy. The woman phones the 1800myoptions Victorian state help line and is told there is a GP that can provide MToP in a town that is 3hours away. When she manages to get to the clinic that particular GP is on leave and the GP she sees is a conscientious objector. He tells her he can't help her and refers her to Melbourne.

The expense and the complications to travel to Melbourne for the procedure is more than the young woman can afford. She drops out of school, disengages with community and is isolated.