ABORTION POLICY

The Public Health Association of Australia recognises that:

1. The Australian community is increasingly supportive of women's access to termination of pregnancy, however it is becoming less affordable and accessible in Australia. We also note that Australian women undergoing termination of pregnancy are more likely to be socio-economically disadvantaged and victims of partner violence.

2. Access to abortion services is an important women's health issue and there is a wide range of ethical and religious beliefs regarding abortion in the Australian community.

The Public Health Association of Australia notes that:

3. The health status of women and their children is enhanced when safe, reliable methods of fertility control are available.

4. Before significant common law amendments making safe abortion more accessible in the late 1960s and early 1970s, abortion was a major cause of pregnancy-related deaths in Australia. Since then, abortion deaths have been very rare, and have usually occurred in women with multiple pre-existing health problems.[1]

5. Complication rates associated with abortion are reduced when abortion services are readily available and abortions are performed early in pregnancy.

6. A significant proportion of all Australian women undergo an abortion at some stage during their reproductive lives. Therapeutic abortion is one of the most commonly performed gynaecological procedures.

7. The Australian legal framework rarely allows the decision to abort a pregnancy as a matter for individual conscience and medical advice. The law pertaining to abortion is located in the criminal statutes and codes (with the exceptions now of ACT and WA). The criminal law is an inappropriate vehicle - both in principle and practice - for regulating the provision of abortion.

The Public Health Association of Australia believes that:

8. The primary public health goal in the area of unplanned pregnancy must be prevention. Educational, social and health service programs are required to improve information on and access to planned parenting choices.

9. All reference to abortion should be removed from the criminal laws and codes of the States and Territories of Australia. Abortion should be regulated, as are all other medical services, under the health care legislation. There is no case for singling out the abortion procedure in any area of legislation.

10. Abortion services should be made affordable, available, safe, accessible and equitable. Australian women currently have limited options for non-surgical termination of pregnancy, e.g., mifepristone.

11. Medicare rebates for abortion should provide adequate recompense and not be dependent on mandated counselling. Non-judgmental, woman-focussed professional and optional pre and post-abortion counselling should always be offered, encompassing a wide range of issues including her relationship, any violence or abuse, her work situation, finances, access to childcare or readiness to parent.

The Public Health Association of Australia resolves that:

12. The Board, Women's Health Special Interest Group and State Branches of the Association should take all appropriate steps to keep federal and state members of parliament aware of the views of the Association and the health consequences of any restriction of access to safe, affordable and accessible abortion services; and further to lobby for the removal of abortion from all state and territory criminal codes.

13. The Association continue to provide evidence-based information about abortion in Australia in an accessible format through regular revision of the booklet: *Abortion in Australia: Public Health Perspectives*.[3]

14. The Board, Women's Health Special Interest Group and State Branches actively advocate for a comprehensive national approach to sexual and reproductive health (see http://www.phaa.net.au//documents/SRH_call_to_action.pdf and http://www.phaa.net.au//documents/SRH_background_paper.pdf) including the removal of abortion from the criminal codes of all states and territories.

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2. Chen A, Sagilc (2005) Estimating Australia's abortion rates 1985-2003 Medical Journal of Australia May 2;182(9): 447-52.

3. Abortion in Australia: Public Health Perspectives (2005). Canberra: PHAA. Available at http://www.phaa.net.au/documents/phaa_abortion_kit.pdf

4. Bells K (2004) Attitudes to Abortion in Australia 1972 to 2003 People & Place 12(4) 22-28.

5. Kelly J & Evans MDR (2003) Trends in Australian attitudes to abortion 1984-2002. Australian social Monitor 6 (3) 45-53.

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