

ABORTION FACT SHEET



Our Bodies | Our Choices

Not sure where to start? Here's the data on abortion you need to know.

Abortion is enshrined in human rights law.¹

Abortion remains in the criminal codes of NSW and South Australia (partially decriminalised).

Abortion was only decriminalised in Queensland in October 2018.

Most people don't know abortion is still a crime in NSW.²

Abortion rights are popular - polling and surveys consistently show we support the right to choose in NSW.³

Abortion access in NSW is uneven, concentrated in our cities and expensive.

The vast majority of abortions are performed before 12 weeks.⁴

Abortion is a common and safe medical procedure.

THE LAW IN NSW

Abortion is a crime in NSW, under sections 82, 83, and 84 of the Crimes Act 1900, with penalties of up to 10 years imprisonment for women, doctors and anyone who assists.

Under common law, abortion is legal in NSW when a doctor believes that it is necessary to prevent serious danger to a pregnant woman's physical or mental health, taking into account economic, social or medical reasons. This is known as the Levine ruling of 1971.

The current situation is often referred to as a legal 'grey area', which leaves the possibility of both women and doctors being prosecuted for obtaining or providing an abortion.

A Sydney woman was prosecuted in 2017 for self-inducing an abortion.⁵

**of people in
NSW were
unaware abortion
is a crime**

**over
75%**

**of people in NSW
support abortion
decriminalisation**

**over
70%**

ABORTION IS COMMON AND SAFE

In Australia, where abortions are performed by highly qualified health care professionals in very hygienic conditions, a pregnancy termination is one of the safest medical procedures and complications are rare.⁶

National information on abortions that is reliable and up-to-date is not currently available. Only some states collect data. In South Australia, where the majority of abortions are provided in the public system so data is available, there were 13.5 terminations of pregnancy per 1,000 women aged 15-44 years as of 2014.⁷

A recent Australian survey found that 1 in 5 women who had been pregnant in the last decade had an abortion, and 1 in 3 unintended pregnancies resulted in an abortion.⁸

In the United Kingdom in 2017, the abortion rate was 16.5 per 1,000 women of reproductive age (aged 15-44).⁹ In the United States in 2017, the rate was 14.6 per 1,000 women of reproductive age.¹⁰

1 in 5

**Australian women will
have an abortion**

A LOT OF PREGNANCIES ARE UNPLANNED

Research suggests that between 25% and 50% of Australian women have an unplanned pregnancy every year.¹¹ Almost half of the women who have an unplanned pregnancy were using contraception at the time. The World Health Organisation estimates that even if every couple used contraception perfectly, there would still be six million unplanned pregnancies per year.¹²



almost 1/2
of women who had an unplanned pregnancy were using contraception at the time

If you would like more information on what sort of contraception would work best for you, please consider contacting [Talkline](#) on 1300 658 886.

WHO GETS AN ABORTION

US data shows that most women who have an abortion already have a child (61%) or two or more children (34%).¹³ In Australia, a 2017 study of 2100 patients found 58% had at least one child and 21% had three or more children.¹⁴



over 1/2
of women who had an abortion already had at least one child

South Australian data shows that the abortion rate is highest for women 20-24 years (21.3 per 1,000 women), and women 25-29 years (19.4 per 1,000 women).¹⁵

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND REPRODUCTIVE COERCION

There is a well-established link between domestic violence and poor reproductive health outcomes. Research has found substantial levels of physical violence during pregnancy.¹⁶ Women who are subjected to violence have higher levels of unplanned pregnancy.¹⁷

Reproductive coercion is used to define a range of male partner pregnancy-controlling behaviours. These behaviours can include contraception sabotage (where contraception is tampered with or removed), threats and use of physical violence if a woman insists on condoms or other forms of contraception, emotional blackmail coercing a woman to have sex or to fall pregnant, or to have an abortion as a sign of her love and fidelity, as well as forced sex and rape. It includes forcing someone to become pregnant, forcing someone to continue being pregnant, or forcing them to end a pregnancy.¹⁸

You can reach the NSW Domestic Violence Line on 1800 65 64 63.

TYPES OF ABORTION

In Australia, there are two forms of abortion available: medical (RU486) or surgical.

You can find a fact sheet describing medical abortion [here](#). It is available by prescription from some GPs and up to 9 weeks gestation.

You can find a fact sheet describing surgical abortion [here](#). You will need to be referred to a private practitioner. You can also call Talkline on 1300 658 886 to discuss providers near you.

You can find an online provider of medical abortion [here](#).

of abortions are performed before 14 weeks



WOMEN ARE SURE OF THEIR DECISIONS

Almost all women requesting an abortion are sure of their decision and do not want further counselling.¹⁹ International data shows that the overwhelming majority of women are happy with their decision, with the Turnaway Study showing that 99% reported their abortion was the right decision.²⁰

However, the Turnaway Study also showed that compared with having an abortion, being denied an abortion was associated with greater risk of psychological harm.

UNSAFE ABORTIONS

Around 25 million unsafe abortions are estimated to occur worldwide each year,²¹ accounting for up to 13.2% of maternal deaths,²² mostly in the developing world.

The non-availability of abortion services has been shown to increase maternal morbidity and mortality.²³

Endnotes

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