

Abortion debate

The abortion debate has raised its head in the media. WHGNE Research worker Deb Parkinson compiled some facts for us. Women's Health Victoria also has a six page summary of the issues and is continually updating information on their website (<http://www.whv.org.au/topical/abortion.htm>)

- ☐ **Abortion is never an easy choice** for a woman. Workers report that women even *contemplating* abortion suffer distressing emotional and sometimes physical trauma regarding how the pregnancy happened (unwanted sex, failure of contraception, under the influence of drugs/alcohol at time of conception) and regarding the issues they currently face such as abandonment by male partner or disowned by family. The issues are exacerbated by living in a rural area or by youth.
- ☐ **Contraception is the responsibility of two people** – a woman cannot become pregnant without a man. Abortion is not a matter of 'convenience' for women – there is a known failure rate with even the most effective contraceptions and not all women have the freedom to say no to unwanted sex.
- ☐ **Access to abortion is difficult for rural women** because:
 - there is a perception of little confidentiality for women when seeking help or advice
 - obtaining a termination usually involves travel to Albury or to Melbourne
 - in most cases theatre and non-medical costs range from around \$200 to \$700 and are not covered by Medicare.
- ☐ **Women** or couples seeking an abortion **are counseled**, at least once, sometimes twice – by the referring agency and the clinic.
- ☐ **Before 1971 abortion was a major cause of maternal deaths in Australia.** The World Health Organisation reports that the risk of maternal death from unsafe abortion is 100 to 500 times greater than the risk under safe conditions.
<http://www.whv.org.au/Articles/Abortion-issues-paper.pdf> Women rarely die from legal abortions. According to the most recent statistics available in Australia there have only been 3 abortion related deaths in the last 15 years. That is 3 in over 1.2 million patients. Abortion has not always been so safe. Before abortion was legalised many women died or had serious medical problems after attempting to induce abortions on themselves or going to untrained practitioners who performed abortions in unsafe and unsanitary conditions.
<http://websites.golden-orb.com/plannedparenthood/100187.php>
- ☐ **Abortion is not an increasing problem.** In the 12 month period to June 2004, there were 18,713 Medicare funded abortive procedures in Victoria and Tasmania. This is 2,719 fewer than the 21,432

procedures reported 10 years ago. (Health Insurance Commission figures)

- ☐ **Tony Abbott's Australian figure of 100,000 is wrong.** The Medicare funded category for abortion includes other conditions such as miscarriage and stillbirth, and in 2004 was 73,000 (HIC).
- ☐ Those calling for a debate on abortion suggest they will look for ways to increase part time work opportunities. **Part time work for single mothers ensures they will live in poverty with their children.**
- ☐ The Governor-General, Michael Jeffery, has called for **better sex education for young people** This is a sound approach supported by evidence in the US, the UK and the Netherlands. In the US, embarrassment and secrecy surround sex education and a focus on 'abstinence training' has led to increased rates of teenage pregnancy. The US has 53 births per 1,000 teenagers. In contrast, the Netherlands have 5 births per 1,000 teenagers. Germany, Norway, Sweden and Denmark have rates from 7 to 11 – all much lower than the US figure of 53. Their abortion rates are also the lowest in the world. The approach of these countries is to give comprehensive contraception information and establish clinics to provide advice and free contraceptives.
www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,3604,1213975,00.html
- ☐ **Making abortion illegal, or removing the medicare rebate for medical costs, will not stop abortion.** It will simply make safe abortion an option only for those who can afford private health insurance. Women who can't afford private health insurance are least able to financially support a child.
- ☐ **Changes to abortion laws are not supported by the Australian people.** The Age poll reported on 16 Feb 2005 indicated 56% believe laws are about right, and a further 16% believe abortion should be more accessible.

Actions you can take:

- **Be alert** about what discussions are happening and what actions the Federal Government is taking.
- Use the above information to **inform others.**
- **Ask** your local Federal Politician where they stand. Members for our area are:
Sophie Panopoulos MP Member for Indi
035721 5377, sophie.panopoulos.mp@aph.gov.au
Hon Fran Bailey MP Member for McEwen
035962 1255, Fran.Bailey.MP@aph.gov.au
Hon Dr Sharman Stone MP Member for Murray
035821 5371, S.Stone.MP@aph.gov.au



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