

Myths and realities

MYTH: Abortion wouldn't be necessary if contraceptives were more widely available.

No form of contraception is 100% effective. The World Health Organisation estimates that even if all contraceptive users utilised contraception perfectly in every sexual encounter, there would still be six million unintended pregnancies every year.¹ Recent research suggests that more than three quarters of women's reproductive lives are characterised by efforts to avoid unintended pregnancy.^{2, 3} Most women who are trying to avoid becoming pregnant are using at least one form of contraception, and more than half of the women presenting to abortion services in Australia each year were using contraception at the time they became pregnant.⁴

MYTH: There are too many abortions.

When it comes to this aspect of women's health, only one number matters—the one showing that all women who need an abortion are able to have one. Currently, only a very small number of women wanting an abortion are unable to access one in South Australia. Like all other health services, abortion is regulated under the Health Care Act 2008 (SA). Unlike other medical services, however, abortion also remains in SA's criminal law—its presence there creates barriers to access and care. These barriers do not prevent women from seeking abortions, but they do place unnecessary limits on the ability and willingness of their doctors to provide them. The removal of abortion from the criminal law will support health practitioners in fulfilling their promise to provide all women with the best care—first time, every time.

MYTH: Abortion is an issue that affects only a few women.

One in three Australian women will have an abortion in their lifetime.⁵

MYTH: Abortion harms women.

According to the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, serious complications after abortions are rare; in fact, safe and legal abortion is less hazardous to a woman's health than childbirth.⁶ Contrary to popular misconceptions, adverse effects on a woman's psychological and emotional health are also rare.⁷ Multiple studies confirm that for the majority of women, psychological wellbeing improves following an abortion. This should not be surprising, as many women report their abortion experiences to be characterised by feelings of relief.⁸

Abortion is a healthy choice for women and families. Despite the myths, abortion has no link to long-term mental health problems, no link to infertility, and no link to breast cancer.⁹

MYTH: Providing abortions is undesirable, or 'dirty', work.

Even though abortion providers experience stigma and opposition, providing abortion services is satisfying and rewarding work that these practitioners freely elect and train to perform.^{10, 11}

MYTH: Only women need access to abortion services.

People who may need access to safe abortion are not only women. Trans-men, gender queer and others of diverse gender identities who do not necessarily identify as women, can and do get pregnant. Such individuals, however, face wide-ranging challenges in accessing safe abortion information and services, a result not only of the stigma surrounding abortion itself, but additional barriers they face in realising their sexual and reproductive health rights.^{12, 13}

MYTH: Only certain types of women have abortions.

All kinds of women have abortions for all kinds of reasons. Women are just as likely to have an abortion if they already have children than if they don't have any children. More women over 35 have abortions than women under 20.¹⁴ Women are just as likely to have abortions if they earn high levels of income as those who have a low income.

MYTH: All religious people oppose abortion.

The majority of Australians who identify with a religious faith support women's access to abortion in any circumstances.¹⁵

MYTH: Women who seek abortions need counselling.

Multiple studies of women's decision-making in pregnancy confirm that the overwhelming majority of women requesting abortion services are confident and firm in their decision.¹⁶ These studies also assert that pregnancy counselling is better able to provide support when the woman makes the choice to access the counselling, rather than when it is necessitated by law.

MYTH: Abortion is a controversial issue.

The controversy that often accompanies discussion about abortion belies the fact that the vast majority of Australians actually support women's access to safe and legal abortion services.^{17 18} The time is overdue for the law to reflect this reality.

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 - 14 Abigail W, Power C and Belan I, 2008 op cit
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 - 16 Victorian Law Reform Commission, *Law of Abortion: Final Report*, VLRC, Melbourne, 2008.
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