

6.12.2019

SA Law Reform Institute's recommendations to treat abortion as a health service rather than a crime welcomed by the South Australian Abortion Action Coalition

The South Australian Abortion Action Coalition (Saaac) welcomes the SA Law Reform Institute's (SALRI) recommendations to treat abortion as a health service rather than a crime. SALRI has recognised that "a woman's autonomy and access to best health care should be respected and promoted".

The recommendations will remove barriers to access, particularly for women in rural and regional areas, through enabling early medication abortion, telemedicine services, and access to the Patient Assistance Transport Scheme when rural women do need to travel for care.

SALRI has recognised advances in health care that mean our current law is outdated and no longer fit for purpose. The Report looks to the future in enabling care to be provided by registered health practitioners, such as registered nurses and midwives.

Saaac strongly supports the recommendation for a model where abortion is lawful at any gestational stage with the woman's consent, consistent with general health law and practice. This change will assist women facing complex diagnostic procedures when there is fetal abnormality, enabling them to make better informed decisions. This change will also assist the very small number of women who need access to later abortions because of complex social and health problems.

The overall effect of implementing these SALRI recommendations will be to reduce the stigma associated with abortion, consistent with the community's respect for women's autonomy in their reproductive health decisions and care.

Saaac considers that there are sufficient safeguards against medical procedures being performed by unqualified persons under current laws and therefore the recommendation to create a new criminal offence is unnecessary. Such a law could have unintended consequences (such as criminalising the support provided by a family member).

Saaac welcomes other recommendations for improvements in services and access including:

- The removal of requirements for abortions to take place in hospitals, for two doctors to examine the woman and for prior residency in SA.
- The establishment of safe access zones around abortion clinics
- The removal of any criminal offence to apply to women who seek and undergo abortions.

We urge the South Australian parliament to take up SALRI's recommendations and decriminalise abortion as a matter of urgency to immediately remove the barriers caused by the current law.

Quotes attributable to Saaac spokesperson, Brigid Coombe

Brigid is a co-convenor of Saaac, registered nurse and former Director of the Pregnancy Advisory Clinic.

SALRI has recognised advances in health care that mean our current law is outdated and no longer fit for purpose.

Saaac strongly supports the recommendation for a model where abortion is lawful at any gestational stage with the woman's consent, consistent with general health law and practice.

Having a different law depending on the number of weeks is not helpful for women and their families and can mean no time for further diagnostic testing and pressure on women to make a decision in difficult circumstances.

One in three women in South Australia will have an abortion in their lifetime. It is essential that our politicians get this reform right and bring South Australia's laws into the 21st Century.

We encourage the Attorney General and all South Australian Parliamentarians to listen to the experts and use existing health care regulations, to ensure access to abortions for all South Australia women.

We welcome SALRI's report and recommendations. It is time to reform our laws to support South Australian women's access to abortion care.

There are sufficient safeguards against medical procedures being performed by unqualified persons under current laws and therefore the recommendation to create a new criminal offence is unnecessary.

The recommended Safe Access Zones would apply to any area within 150 metres of the entrance to an abortion service. Safe Access Zones would ensure that patients and staff attending abortion services can arrive and leave free of intimidation and harassment by protestors.