

COVID-19 AND ACCESS TO ABORTION IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Why is it important to consider how COVID-19 affects women's reproductive health?

As with other disasters or social crisis, gender makes a big difference to peoples' experience. This includes the increased vulnerability to sexual and gendered violence.

- Social isolation can increase sexual activity and the incidence of sexual coercion.
- It makes access to contraception, including emergency contraception more difficult.
- This leads to an increase in unplanned pregnancies, some of which will be unwanted, particularly in these uncertain and economically difficult times.
- The effect of SARS CoV2 on a developing pregnancy is still unknown.
- Early research is indicating that pregnancy is a risk factor for infection and possible consequences including pre-term delivery.
- Women with difficulties accessing abortion may take longer to find a service and miss out on the opportunity to have Early Medical Abortion (EMA), available only to 9 weeks pregnancy.
- Women in violent and controlling relationships and /or those in economic stress or with mental health concerns are particularly at risk of not seeking timely information and support.

Is COVID 1- 19 impacting on access to abortion services in South Australia?

- Public services, such as those delivered through the Pregnancy Advisory Centre (PAC), are available.
- The law in SA currently requires that two doctors must personally examine the patient, and that the abortion must be performed in a hospital
- These legal requirements **significantly** obstruct women's access to early medication abortion (EMA), and surgical abortion, and weigh most heavily on women from rural and remote areas.
- Not only does this mean that socially and geographically isolated women may not access a timely abortion service it also means that **additional COVID-19 infection risks** are created by requiring women to personally attend a hospital.
- Valuable Personal Protection Equipment resources can be reserved when personal attendance is not required

Telehealth services for Early Medical Abortion are urgently required in South Australia.

- In all other Australian jurisdictions women can access Early Medical Abortion through telehealth with a General Practitioner.
- The law needs changing to give women in SA the same access.
- **Decriminalisation of abortion** is the optimal measure to address this issue.
- If this can't be achieved quickly, **alternative legal options** should be explored to enable telehealth for EMA to be available in SA.

We ask that the Marshall government take action to give women access to the abortion care they need in this time of crisis.