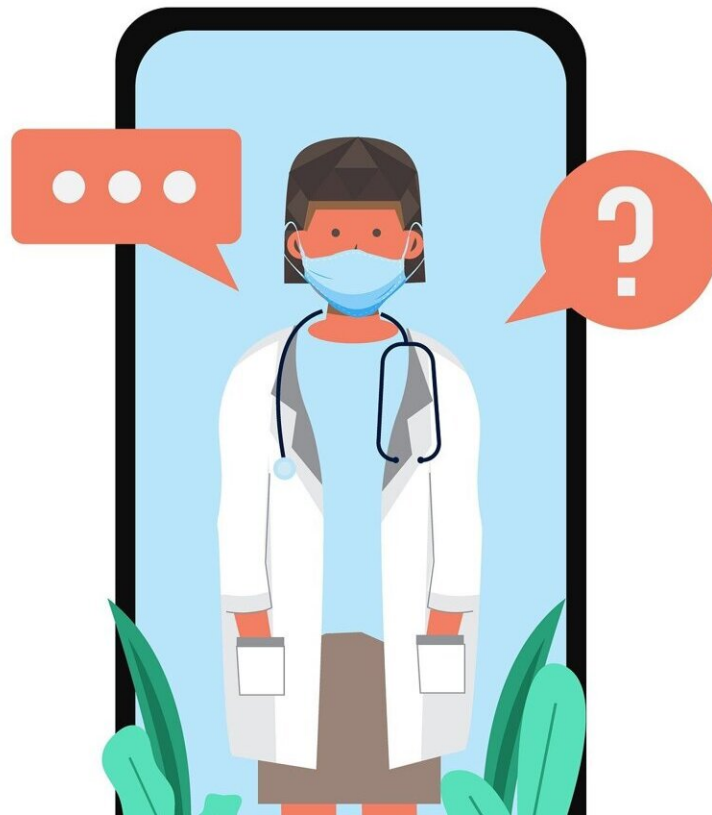


Australian abortion service access limited despite legal status, study finds

December 16 2022, by Cheryl Critchley



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Abortion services and advice in Australia are limited despite being legal, a new study has found.

Published in the *Australian Journal of Primary Health*, the Monash University Department of General Practice-led study found that even where [public hospitals](#) did provide abortion services, access was extremely limited.

It found there is currently inadequate information to support GPs in referring women to abortion services when they need them. Most public services in this study had messaging to direct referrers away from their services and toward private providers.

Clear referral pathways for abortion services are particularly crucial in rural and regional areas of Australia for women to be able to access [abortion care](#) in a timely way. However, the study found little transparency as to whether abortion services will be provided by a health service and under what circumstances they will be accessible to women who request them.

Researchers investigated abortion referral pathways for HealthPathways, an online health information system used by GPs that outlines recommended management of common conditions and local referral options, usually to hospital services.

The review from January–June 2022 extracted abortion service referral data from the 17 of 34 HealthPathways portals that consented to be included across all states and territories except Tasmania and South Australia.

Almost half (47%) had no public services listed for surgical abortion, and 35% had no public services for medical abortion. Most (63% for surgical abortion, 66% for medical abortion) emphasized that public services should be a last resort.

"Despite few remaining [legal restrictions](#) to abortion in Australia, many

regions either do not have public [abortion services](#) or do not provide information about them," first author and Monash University Academic GP Registrar Dr. Sonia Srinivasan said.

"There was variation in information regarding gestation-specific options, the time-critical nature of referrals, and the importance of women's own preference when deciding between medical or surgical abortion.

"There is an urgent need for transparency around public abortion service availability, clear guidelines to support referral pathways, and commitment from State and Federal governments to expand the availability of accessible, no-cost abortion in Australia."

More information: Sonia Srinivasan et al, Utilising HealthPathways to understand the availability of public abortion in Australia, *Australian Journal of Primary Health* (2022). [DOI: 10.1071/PY22194](https://doi.org/10.1071/PY22194)

Provided by Monash University

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