



Position Paper #15

How to Get an Abortion in Canada

Abortion has been decriminalized and a legal right for Canadians since 1988 when the Supreme Court of Canada struck down the restrictive laws that required abortions be performed solely in hospital settings. Under the *Canada Health Act*, all abortions must be available and fully funded whether performed in a hospital or an abortion clinic.

There are three types of abortion:

- Medication – done via abortion pills up to 9 weeks
- Aspiration – done up to about 14 weeks via a gentle suction method
- Surgical – done after about 14 weeks

Though a large majority of provinces cover the cost of abortion care, there are circumstances where you may have to cover all or part of the cost of an abortion yourself. Specifically, aspiration and surgical abortions are not covered at private clinics in New Brunswick,¹ several Ontario abortion clinics are not fully funded for aspiration/surgical abortion,² and some residents of Nunavut may need to pay for the abortion drug Mifegymiso.³

When seeking to terminate a pregnancy in Canada, the ease with which you can access abortion services will depend largely on where you live. If you are in a large urban centre like Vancouver, Toronto, or Montreal, you will find it much easier than someone living in smaller communities or rural areas.

When you suspect pregnancy, buy a pregnancy test from a drugstore and follow the instructions, or obtain a free test from your doctor or pro-choice clinic. Next, contact a health

¹ <https://nbmediacoop.org/2022/11/02/letter-clinic-554-doctor-demands-new-brunswick-government-fund-abortion-outside-hospitals/>

² See page 6: <https://www.arcc-cdac.ca/media/2020/07/statistics-abortion-in-canada.pdf>

³ In Nunavut, the abortion pill is covered for Indigenous peoples, those in the military, and refugees. <https://nunatsiaq.com/stories/article/women-in-nunavut-still-face-barriers-to-abortion-access/>

care provider to discuss your options. You can call abortion clinics directly to make an appointment and sometimes hospitals as well, but some hospitals require a referral. You may be able to obtain a referral from a supportive family doctor; otherwise, seek assistance from a pro-choice clinic or helpline in your area. Check the resources at the end of this paper.

Prior to receiving an aspiration or surgical abortion, you may be required to complete both an ultrasound (to determine gestation) and a blood test. Both procedures should be government funded. Most clinics will schedule the ultrasound and abortion procedure for you.

All types of abortions are provided in both clinics and hospitals, depending on your location. You may also obtain the abortion pill via a doctor's prescription. Many family doctors and sexual health centres prescribe Mifegymiso and some may do so via telemedicine, allowing you to pick up the prescription at a local pharmacy and avoid the need to travel.

Check the *Help is Available* section below for current locations offering abortion services and support services. We also recommend that you share your experience with someone you trust and who can support you. If that's not possible, you can contact any of the below resources. If it helps, visit the "Shout Your Abortion" website for stories of others who have had abortions.

Access is one of the main obstacles people face today when looking for abortion services. A 2006 study showed that less than one in five Canadian hospitals provides abortion services, and that proportion is believed to have decreased further since then. Also, the requirements for an aspiration or surgical abortion differ from province to province, as does the maximum gestational limit, which can vary from 10 weeks to 24 weeks.⁴ It is very important to book an appointment with a clinic or doctor as soon as possible, as there may be a delay in finding a pro-choice physician or booking an ultrasound appointment. However, you are also free to travel to another province for abortion services and this should be fully covered under reciprocal billing arrangements, at least if your abortion takes place at a hospital.

Other obstacles facing abortion seekers include anti-choice doctors who will not make referrals for abortion, or other gatekeepers (e.g., receptionists, nursing staff) who may refuse to provide information or who may refer callers to pregnancy counseling centres that oppose abortion. Many pregnancy centres can appear to be pro-choice when they are not – before contacting one, ensure it is not on ARCC's list of anti-choice "crisis pregnancy centres."⁵ Otherwise, you may be faced with misinformation and delays, as most of these centres refuse to refer for abortion and may mislead you. This can be emotionally damaging as well as waste valuable time in a situation that is time-sensitive.

⁴ Hospital gestational limits may be set by the provincial College of Physicians and Surgeons, or by the hospital or clinic itself depending on capacity and resources. <https://www.arcc-cdac.ca/media/position-papers/61-Canadian-abortion-regulation.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.arcc-cdac.ca/media/2021/09/list-anti-choice-groups-CPCs-only.pdf>

Help is available....

The following information will help you find out what services are available in your area:

- Call the 24-hour Options Hotline run by Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights: 1-888-642-2725. You can also text them at 613-800-6757. To find sexual health services near you: <https://www.actioncanadashr.org/resources/services>
- Call the National Abortion Federation toll-free Referral line: 1-877-257-0012 or their Morgentaler Patient Assistance Fund at 1-800-772-9100. Find a Provider search tool: https://prochoice.org/patients/find-a-provider/?fwp_country_search=canada
- Use the online tool Choice Connect to find a provider near you: <https://choiceconnect.ca/>
- Check the Abortion Right Coalition of Canada's list of resources and contacts for abortion clinics across Canada: <http://www.arcc-cdac.ca/list-abortion-clinics-canada.pdf>
- Read stories from people who have experienced an abortion at Shout your Abortion: <https://shoutyourabortion.com/abortion-stories/>