



Abortion Rights
Coalition of Canada

Coalition pour le droit à
l'avortement au Canada

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Position Paper # 7

Access to Abortion in Rural/Remote Areas

Women in rural or remote areas face increased difficulty when they wish to terminate a pregnancy. The lack of services forces many women to become parents against their will.

A 2003 CARAL study showed that nationally, fewer than one in five Canadian hospitals provide abortion services. As abortion clinics are located only in larger communities, women living in remote and rural areas are forced to travel outside their community for an abortion. It is an obstacle thousands of Canadian women face every year.

The Emotional and Financial Impact of Limited Access

The lack of universal access to Medicare-funded abortion is a serious problem for women and their families living in rural areas. Finding out where services are available is especially difficult for women with no doctor, or an anti-choice doctor. When contacting hospitals and/or doctor's offices, women sometimes encounter anti-choice "gatekeepers" who restrict information or refer women to pregnancy crisis centres opposed to abortion. The lack of information and the need for confidentiality is acute for women in rural and small communities.

Finding child care, negotiating time away from work, explaining the need to be away from home (often on short notice), and finding the funds to cover the cost of travel, accommodation and, in many cases, the cost of the abortion, is extremely stressful. For teenagers, women living in an abusive relationship or who are victims of incest, the risks are much greater. According to Dr. Henry Morgentaler, every week of delay increases the medical risks by 20 percent.

The Impact of Provincial Regulations

How abortions are funded differs from province to province, as do the requirements for obtaining an abortion. While abortion services in another province may be closer to the woman, there is no guarantee the costs will be included in that province's reciprocal billing agreement. Clinic abortions may be only partially covered or, as in New Brunswick, receive no provincial funding. No abortion services, hospital or clinic, are available in PEI. To further complicate things, hospitals may require a physician's referral. This presents additional difficulties to women with no doctor, or who have an anti-choice doctor. Their only hope is to find the nearest clinic and the resources to get there before their options run out.

Improving Access

For women living in rural and remote areas to have safe and timely access to abortion, all provinces and territories must increase the number of hospitals providing abortion services, and, comply with the *Canada Health Act* to ensure Medicare-funded abortions, whether performed in a hospital or a clinic.