



Abortion Rights
Coalition of Canada

*Your
Voice for Choice*

Coalition pour le droit à
l'avortement au Canada

Canada's only national political pro-choice advocacy group

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Position Paper #15

How to Get an Abortion in Canada

Abortion has been decriminalized and a legal right for Canadian women 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. Though a large majority of provinces cover the cost of abortion care, there are circumstances where you may have to cover the cost of an abortion yourself. Specifically, private clinic abortions are not covered by Medicare in New Brunswick, several Ontario abortion clinics are not fully funded, and some provinces do not yet fund the abortion drug Mifegymiso or only fund it for some patient groups.

When seeking to terminate a pregnancy in Canada, the ease with which you can access abortion services will depend largely on where you live. Women living in large urban centres like Vancouver, Toronto, or Montreal 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. Next, contact a health 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. If necessary, you can obtain a referral from your family doctor if you are sure they will be supportive; otherwise, seek assistance from a pro-choice women's clinic or hotline in your area. Check the resources at the end of this paper.

At a primary physician appointment, you may be required to complete both an ultrasound (to determine gestation) and a blood test (both procedures should be government funded). Most pro-choice clinics will schedule the ultrasound and abortion procedure for you. Abortions are performed in both clinics and hospitals, depending on your location, and some family doctors and general medical clinics prescribe Mifegymiso. You can check the Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada's up-to-date provincial guide for current locations offering abortion services and support services. (See the *Help is Available* section below.) We also highly recommend that you share your experience with someone you trust. If that's not possible, you can contact any of the below resources. As well, visit the "Shout Your Abortion" website for stories of other women (listed below).

Access is one of the main obstacles women 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 has probably decreased further since then. Also, the requirements for a hospital abortion

differ province to province as does the maximum gestational limit, which can vary from 10 weeks to 22 weeks. It is very important to book an appointment with a clinic or doctor as soon as possible. However, you are also free to travel to another province for abortion services and this is fully covered under reciprocal billing arrangements.

Other obstacles facing women looking for abortion services 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 refer callers to pregnancy counseling centres that oppose abortion. It can be frustrating and time-consuming in a situation that is time-sensitive. There may also be a delay in booking an ultrasound appointment or finding a pro-choice physician.

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. Or check their *Find a Service Provider* page: <http://www.sexualhealthandrights.ca/find-service-provider/>
- 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>. You can also email us at: info@arcc-cdac.ca.
- Call the National Abortion Federation toll-free hotline: 1-877-257-0012, or use their provider search tool: <http://www.nafcanada.org/provider-search.html>.
- Shout your Abortion: A collection of stories from women and families who have experienced an abortion. <https://shoutyourabortion.com/shout/>