



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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Does your Provincial Health Hotline Refer for Abortion Services Appropriately?

By Joyce Arthur, Executive Director

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When a retired nurse in New Brunswick learned that the Morgentaler Clinic in Fredericton would be closing, she called the health hotline in New Brunswick, Telecare, to see what kind of abortion services remained in the province. She told the person who answered the phone that her daughter wanted an abortion. The hotline gave her the phone number of Birthright, an anti-abortion organization.

The story was first reported in June by [Radio-Canada](#) (en français). Telecare is a health information and advice line within the Ministry of Health of New Brunswick. Health ministries in other provinces run similar health hotlines, generally staffed by nurses. Following the alarming revelation out of New Brunswick, activists became curious about the situation in other provinces.

Jaden Fitzherbert, a former patient escort who volunteered for the NB clinic but who now lives in Nova Scotia, also [called Telecare in New Brunswick](#) for help with an unwanted pregnancy and got the numbers of *three* anti-choice organizations – the Birthright, and two CPCs (“crisis pregnancy centres”) in St. John and Moncton.

In addition, another activist in Halifax called the Telecare line in **Nova Scotia** and was given numbers for the Sexual Health Centre in Halifax (correct) and Birthright (wrong), but was told that Birthright should be her first option (double wrong). This [pro-choice blog](#) has further details and commentary.

It should go without saying that it is highly inappropriate for government-run health hotlines to refer callers to unaccredited, unregulated, “fake clinics” that have a biased religious and anti-choice agenda and will generally refuse to refer for abortion services. Such centres also frequently provide misinformation on abortion or exaggerate the risks and side effects.

The Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada recruited volunteers who made calls to health hotlines in several other provinces, including Ontario, Manitoba, Alberta, and BC. (We did not find volunteers in the other provinces*.) The volunteers stated that they had an unwanted pregnancy and were looking for information on their options, and/or for abortion services in particular.

Fortunately, the volunteers were given appropriate referrals in all cases, with the exception of Manitoba where the caller was referred to a CPC after telling the nurse she was undecided, but was also referred to available abortion services. The results of the calls are detailed below.

Page 4 lists some referral information for those looking for accurate information on abortion.

Informal Survey Results

Telehealth Ontario (Volunteer 1):

- Call made on June 30.
- Caller explained she was pregnant and did not want to proceed with the pregnancy, and needed some counselling regarding her options.
- Nurse asked where she was located and caller said old City of Toronto.
- Nurse then immediately provided her the contact info for the Cabbagetown Women's Clinic for abortion and post-abortion counselling, as well as for the Bloor West Women's Clinic.
- Nurse also provided caller with the gestational range for eligibility for abortion services.

Telehealth Ontario (Volunteer 2):

- Call made on July 1, 2014.
- Caller told nurse that her period was late, she took a pregnancy test that was positive, but it was not a good time and she needed a referral for an abortion.
- Told nurse she lived in Burlington so she could search for nearby options.
- Closest was Mississauga Women's Clinic – nurse provided phone number and confirmed that they provide abortions without parental permission.
- Nurse also said that Morgentaler Clinic in Toronto “clearly” provides abortions and provided their number.
- Nurse suggested caller could see her GP who might be able to refer her to a specialist, but that those two clinics only provide abortions and are quick.
- Nurse was very friendly and entirely non-judgmental – did not question caller's decision to have an abortion.
- Volunteer noted that there is a Birthright Pregnancy Centre in Hamilton, 15 minutes from Burlington, but nurse did not provide their info.

Telehealth Ontario (Volunteer 3):

- Call made on July 2.
- Nurse asked if caller had made a decision or needed help making one; caller said her first reaction was to get it over with as soon as possible but that the nurse was the first person she had spoken to.
- Nurse immediately referred caller to the Morgentaler Clinic and gave her the contact info.

Manitoba Health Links:

- Call made on July 2.
- Caller told nurse she was 4 weeks pregnant, and born in 1980 (so not a teenager).
- Caller said she wanted options for an unwanted pregnancy.

- Nurse asked if she meant she wanted an abortion. Caller asked what options are there, and nurse asked if she had made a decision.
- Caller said she hadn't made a decision, and nurse asked if she had received any counselling or advice.
- Nurse suggested calling the Pregnancy Crisis Centre of Winnipeg (a CPC) first about all the options so caller wouldn't make a decision she might regret later. Nurse said I had time to think about things.
- Then without prompting, nurse gave caller three numbers for clinics in Winnipeg that conduct abortions.
- Nurse asked if caller had friends that she could talk to or a church to go to and was quite kind.
- Volunteer noted that nurse "was obviously on the side of 'other options' but not preachy ... not terribly judgemental and fair in providing info."
- Volunteer also noted that she believed if she had said outright that she wanted an abortion, that the nurse would have given her the correct referral immediately.

Health Link Alberta:

- Call made on June 30.
- Caller said she wanted an abortion and was located in Calgary.
- Nurse gave her the name and contact info for the Peter Lougheed Centre where she could receive pre- and post-abortion counselling.
- Nurse provided the gestational range and a description of the services.
- Nurse also suggested caller could check out the website "myhealth.alberta.ca" for more options and info.

Healthlink British Columbia:

- Call made on July 7.
- Caller said she just got a positive pregnancy test but was "not ready for this".
- Nurse asked if caller wanted information on pregnancy options and caller said yes.
- Nurse provided number of the Pregnancy Options Line at BC Women's Hospital (a pro-choice hotline and referral service), along with the hotline's hours of operation (9-9).
- Nurse said the hotline would provide caller with information, resources, and counselling to discuss all of her pregnancy options, including adoption.
- Volunteer said the nurse's tone was cordial and helpful, and that she expressed no obvious opinion except for the suggestion of adoption and a hesitation to say the word abortion.

** Note: If you live in one of the four provinces that have not yet been called – Saskatchewan, Quebec, PEI, Newfoundland, or one of the three territories, please let us know if you would like to volunteer to make a call (info@arcc-cdac.ca) to your provincial or territorial health hotline. We would be happy to continue adding information to this survey. (Please note calls must be made from within the province.)*

Where to Go for Accurate Information and Help

Canadians for Choice, Ottawa:

- Information hotline: 1-888-642-2725
- www.canadiansforchoice.ca - If you are pregnant (scroll down and click on the map for listings of sexual and reproductive health services in each province and territory).
- info@canadiansforchoice.ca
- Canadians for Choice also has a patient assistance fund.

National Abortion Federation:

- Referrals to Canadian clinics: 1-877-257-0012
- canada@prochoice.org
- NAF also has a patient assistance fund.

Canadian Federation for Sexual Health, Ottawa:

- List of family planning clinics across Canada: www.cfsh.ca/Members/
- 613-241-4474
- www.cfsh.ca
- admin@cfsh.ca

Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada:

- List of abortion clinics across Canada (and some hospitals that perform abortions): <http://www.arcc-cdac.ca/list-abortion-clinics-canada.pdf>
- www.arcc-cdac.ca
- info@arcc-cdac.ca

Quebec : Fédération du Québec pour le planning des naissances, Montréal :

- 514-866-3721
- www.fqpn.qc.ca
- info@fqpn.qc.ca

BC: Pregnancy Options Line:

- 1-888-875-3163
- Within Lower Mainland: 604-875-3163