



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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New Brunswick Gambles with Women's Lives

FREDERICTON — The closure of New Brunswick's only abortion clinic will have devastating and potentially tragic consequences for women in that province, warns Canada's national pro-choice group. The Morgentaler Clinic in Fredericton announced yesterday at a press conference that the clinic will close by the end of July because it can no longer survive financially.

"This clinic has been providing around 60% of all abortions in the province for many years, which means that about half of women needing abortions may no longer be able to access them," said Joyce Arthur, Executive Director of the Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada (ARCC). "Only women who can afford it will be able to travel to Montreal, Ontario, or Maine for services, leaving young and disadvantaged women in actual physical danger."

"We know what happens when women are deprived of abortion access, because we've already seen it in Prince Edward Island," said Arthur. "Women don't stop having abortions. Instead, they turn to dangerous self-abortion methods. Or, they have delayed abortions while trying to raise money and travel elsewhere." A delayed abortion increases the psychological and medical risks to women, which is one of the main reasons Canada's Supreme Court threw out the abortion law in 1988 – it violated women's constitutional right to bodily security by imposing arbitrary delays that put women's health and lives at risk.

"Denying access to abortion also violates women's constitutional rights to life, liberty, conscience, and privacy," said Patrice Powers, another ARCC spokesperson from Montreal. "But New Brunswick has been getting away with this for 25 years, causing harm and trauma to tens of thousands of women." The Province enforces a payment regulation that requires women to obtain the signatures of two doctors that the abortion is "medically necessary" before they can have a funded abortion at a hospital, but hospitals will only do them up to 12 weeks of pregnancy.

"It's not up to doctors to decide, since Canadian women have the right to an abortion upon request and don't need to state a reason – just like they don't have to justify why they want to have a baby before they're allowed to obtain funded childbirth services," said Arthur. Abortion is a medically necessary service without exception and all abortions must be funded whether

performed at hospitals or clinics. In 1995, Health Canada instructed every province and territory to fully fund treatments provided by private clinics, if that service was also normally provided by hospitals. Health Canada has confirmed that private abortion clinics like the Morgentaler Clinic are defined as “hospitals” under the *Canada Health Act*, and must be fully funded by the Province.

The regulation is more than about money, however. Many women are unable to meet the regulation’s requirements because they don’t have family doctors, or have anti-choice family doctors who refuse to help them. Further, there are often long waiting lists at the hospitals, forcing many women past the 12-week limit and leaving them without any access to abortion services in New Brunswick.

“It’s time to finally repeal this unconstitutional and illegal payment regulation,” said Powers. “The only reason the Province passed it in the first place was to cripple the clinic’s ability to operate. It’s the Province that created this mess, so it must act quickly now to safeguard women’s health and lives. They must immediately repeal the regulation and implement services at more hospitals including in Fredericton.”

The ARCC also criticized the statement yesterday from the New Brunswick Department of Health, in which it claimed it couldn’t comment further because “the matter is still before the courts.” Arthur clarified that “There is no case before the courts. Dr. Morgentaler’s lawsuit against the province has been dormant for five years, and he passed away in 2013. It is reprehensible for the Department of Health to use a phony excuse to hide from reality – which is, they are harming the health of New Brunswick women and gambling with their lives.”

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