



Australian College of Nursing

SOUTH AUSTRALIAN LAW REFORM INSTITUTE (SALRI) – CONSULTATION ON ABORTION LAW AND PRACTICE

The Australian College of Nursing submission to SALRI on
abortion law reform

South Australian Law Reform Institute (SALRI)

Email: salri.new.ref@adelaide.edu.au

RE: A Review of South Australian Law and Practice

Dear SALRI

The Australian College of Nursing (ACN) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the South Australian Law Reform Institute (SALRI) consultation on the review of South Australian termination of pregnancy law and practice. ACN believes this is an important public health issue affecting the health and well-being of individual women, with additional flow on effects to the wider community.

ACN acknowledges that the topic of termination of pregnancy is contentious and divisive amongst the general population and the health professional community. ACN strongly advocates for the right to choice, equitable access to services and support for all women who are considering their options around termination of pregnancy before, during and after the procedure. ACN does not support abortion being categorised as a criminal offence. Poor access to termination services have demonstrated higher rates of maternal morbidity and mortality.¹ ACN has aligned its position on termination of pregnancy with recommendations outlined by the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists. Specifically, ACN is supportive of the below recommendations:

- 'Recommendation 1: Access to termination of pregnancy should be on the basis of health care need and should not be limited by age, socioeconomic disadvantage, or geographic isolation.'
- 'Recommendation 2: A woman's physical, social, emotional and psychological needs should be taken into account in the course of decision-making, and pre- and post-termination counselling by appropriately qualified professionals be made available.'
- 'Recommendation 3: Health practitioners should be aware of the legislation regarding termination of pregnancy that applies in the jurisdiction in which they practice.'²

ACN believes that prevention of unintentional pregnancy and improved health literacy, particularly around contraception and safe sex education, should be made a priority. More so, in the event of unintentional pregnancy, individuals considering termination should be provided with accurate information to make informed decisions. Women should be aware that termination of pregnancy is generally safe and ACN strongly supports safe access zones around the premises where women should be able to access services without fear of harassment or intimidation. Counselling by appropriately trained health professionals is essential prior to and following a termination.

¹ World Health Organization (2012). 'Unsafe abortion: global and regional estimates of incidence of unsafe abortion and associated mortality in 2000'. Accessed from: <http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2004/9241591803.pdf>.

² The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (2016). 'Termination of Pregnancy'. Accessed from: [https://www.ranzcog.edu.au/RANZCOG_SITE/media/RANZCOG-MEDIA/Women%27s%20Health/Statement%20and%20guidelines/Clinical%20-%20Gynaecology/Termination-of-pregnancy-\(C-Gyn-17\)-Review-July-2016.pdf?ext=.pdf](https://www.ranzcog.edu.au/RANZCOG_SITE/media/RANZCOG-MEDIA/Women%27s%20Health/Statement%20and%20guidelines/Clinical%20-%20Gynaecology/Termination-of-pregnancy-(C-Gyn-17)-Review-July-2016.pdf?ext=.pdf)

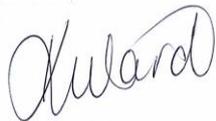
ACN is aware that there will be health professionals strongly opposed to termination of pregnancy and they should not be expected to provide services against their personal beliefs (except in emergencies). However, ACN believes all health professionals have a moral and ethical obligation/duty to inform women seeking termination of where and how services can be accessed without fear of judgement. More so, ACN strongly recommends uniformity and clarity of legislation across jurisdictions to benefit individuals and health professionals seeking and providing termination of pregnancy services, respectively.

ACN consulted with a targeted group of our South Australian members. The majority of respondents agreed that terminations should be lawful on request up to 22 weeks, but it depends on the specific case of each woman and foetus including the woman's physical, social, emotional and psychological wellbeing and the health of the foetus. In addition, a majority of responders agreed that medical practitioners should not be required to consult with one or more medical practitioners or health practitioners before performing a termination of pregnancy. In regional, rural and remote areas for example there might only be one medical practitioner available in certain circumstances. Responders believe that women should be permitted to use telehealth or other electronic services to consult with medical and/or health practitioners.

ACN believes only a medical practitioner should be able to perform an abortion. As it is a health procedure that entails risks it should not be performed by an unqualified person. Registered nurses and midwives should be authorised to assist in performing lawful terminations of pregnancy in South Australia provided they are working within their scope of practice. Registered nurses may also be involved in pre and post-surgical care by providing education and advice to women.

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact Dr Carolyn Stapleton FACN, Policy and Advocacy Manager at carolyn.stapleton@acn.edu.au.

Yours sincerely



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