

Submission to the Parliamentary Committee for Health, Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention to assist in their Inquiry into Abortion Law Reform in Qld

The Committee of Inquiry into Abortion Law Reform Health,
Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and
Family Violence Prevention Committee

Vivienne O'Connor

29th June 2016

Dear Committee Members,

My submission is in favour of the repeal of the current laws existing around abortion in Queensland (codes 224, 225 and 226), and to subsequently decriminalise abortion in Queensland, in line with similar law reform in other Australian states and territories.

I am an Obstetrician and Gynaecologist and my current work includes Medical Director of True Relationships and Reproductive Health; Director of the Intimate Clinical Examination Master-class for the University of Queensland Medical Program, and a specialist in clinical practice.

I have been involved in women's health and medical education for over 40 years. In all my roles past and current I have promoted that the prevention of unintended pregnancy should be a priority. This includes a thorough integration of education on relationships, safe sex and contraception into the educational system at all levels. In addition, women need to be able to access quality services that include reliable, safe and affordable contraception with education on the benefits and effectiveness of long acting reversible contraception (LARC).

It is estimated that 50% of pregnancies are unintended – although this does not imply unwanted. However, there will be circumstances when a woman has the difficult choice of not continuing with a pregnancy. In this situation – not taken lightly by any woman - she should be able to access legal and safe abortion services.

It has been suggested that access to a legal abortion will increase the number of abortions and cause serious physical and mental problems for the woman. This is not supported by evidence from overseas nor within Australia.

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RANZCOG) states that serious complications after abortions are rare, and mortality and serious morbidity occur less commonly with abortions than with pregnancies carried to term. Studies from overseas shows that making abortion illegal will not stop women seeking an abortion – indeed it could increase the morbidity and mortality from so-called 'back-yard' abortions.

In 2005, The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RANZCOG) reviewed the evidence on the psychological impact of abortion and concluded that 'abortion rarely causes immediate or lasting negative psychological consequences in healthy women'.

The current legal situation in Queensland that is reliant on an antiquated abortion law must be rectified to meet the societal needs of the 21st century. The law should maximise a women's reproductive rights and freedoms, provide the legal certainty necessary for doctors to provide best patient care and reflect community attitudes. The provision of appropriate education and access to a legal and safe and abortion should form part of reproductive and sexual health services to women to improve their health outcomes.

Yours Sincerely

Vivienne O'Connor

References:

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2. The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, *Termination of Pregnancy: A resource for health professionals* November 2005. Available online at: http://www.ranzcog.edu.au/editions/doc_view/480-termination-of-pregnancy-a-resource-for-health-professionals.html
3. Guttmacher Institute Induced Abortions Worldwide. May 2016. Available at: <https://www.guttmacher.org/fact-sheet/facts-induced-abortion-worldwide>
4. Preventing unintended pregnancy: the contraceptive choice project in review. Birgisson E et al, *J Women's Health* 349-353, 24:5;2015