

Question on Notice
No. 779
Asked on 11 May 2016

DR ROBINSON asked the Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services (HON C R DICK)—

How many babies aged 20 weeks or more were born alive after a termination procedure in Queensland hospitals each year between 2005 and 2015 (presented annually), and will the Minister confirm whether these viable babies are provided pain relief or any other form of palliative care?

ANSWER:

I thank the Honourable Member for Cleveland for his question.

Within Queensland, it is unlawful to administer a drug or to perform a surgical or other medical procedure intending to terminate a pregnancy unless such conduct is authorised, excused, or justified by law. Section 282 of the Criminal Code provides a defence when the abortion was performed for the ‘preservation of the mother’s life’. This has been interpreted by the courts as applying where the termination is necessary to preserve a woman from serious danger to her life, physical health or mental health, which the continuation of her pregnancy would entail and, in the circumstances, the termination is not out of proportion to the danger to be averted.

There are almost always severe circumstances leading to a small number of women who choose to terminate a pregnancy after 20 weeks gestation. The number of termination procedures where babies are born with signs of life at this stage is a very small proportion of the total live births each year in Queensland.

Calendar year	Termination with livebirth outcome
2005	8
2006	16
2007	20
2008	15
2009	13
2010	17
2011	20
2012	20
2013	23
2014	25
2015	27

I am advised these numbers represent less than 0.05% of the total number of live births each year (including all hospitals in Queensland, both public and private hospitals combined). I am further advised that this percentage has remained relatively stable over time.

The Queensland Maternity and Neonatal Clinical Guideline: *Therapeutic termination of pregnancy* (the guideline) has been developed in consultation with key stakeholders to reflect contemporary evidence based clinical practice in Queensland, and is endorsed for use in all Queensland Health facilities.

Care of a baby following birth is individualised to the specific circumstances, and informed by the choices of the family. In line with clinical guidelines, a range of pre and post terminal cares are provided. These may include physiological support of the baby to relieve potential for suffering, and psychological support for families including bereavement counselling.