



National milestone: patients can no longer be criminalised for abortion care access as of today

27 March 2024

Today marks the official commencement of Western Australia's *Abortion Legislation Reform Bill 2024* - which officially removes offences related to abortion access from the state's criminal code. With WA standing as the last remaining state to remove patient access to abortion from its criminal laws, it marks a historic national milestone that's well overdue.

Pro-choice advocates, the Australian Women's Health Alliance and Fair Agenda, have celebrated the milestone - noting today marks the first day since Federation that a patient's need to access abortion care is actually recognised as the healthcare need it is, nationally.

"As reproductive rights come under threat globally, it's promising to see Australia has modernised abortion law; and recognised abortion care as healthcare. This is the first time in history that we've had so many women in parliament, as health ministers and in other health leadership positions. People of all genders continue to mobilise to voice concern for protecting reproductive rights - there's still much more to be done." said Bonney Corbin, Chair of the Australian Women's Health Alliance.

"It's hard to believe that we're celebrating the official nationwide decriminalisation of abortion care access for patients in 2024. But unfortunately we can never take our reproductive rights for granted. This milestone has only been possible as the result of decades of advocacy by women, healthcare professionals, community members and advocates around the country, who have bravely and relentlessly spoken out on this issue." said Renee Carr, Executive Director of Fair Agenda.

"Today we're one step closer to a future where someone who needs abortion care can access it when and where they need it. But legal barriers were only part of the problem. There are still major service access barriers that get in the way of someone being able to access this time-critical healthcare." said Ms Carr.

"Still, too many patients can't rely on their public hospital for care; can't easily find a healthcare service they can turn to in their area; or have to find \$500 on short-notice in order to cover the out-of-pocket costs." Ms Carr added.

“Governments should be supporting and training health practitioners who want to provide abortion care. Nurses, midwives, and Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander health workers are highly skilled practitioners; who have untapped potential to provide a wide variety of health services in our communities - including medical abortion care. We saw them supported to fill critical healthcare gaps throughout the covid pandemic. Governments should also be supporting them to provide abortion care throughout Australia.” Bonney Corbin said.

“Abortion access in Australia is a postcode lottery. Legislative modernisation is one significant step towards improving health access in regional, rural and remote areas. But it is unrealistic to think that our current health system has the capacity to address Australia’s reproductive healthcare needs. Health products and health tech are evolving faster than our workforce. We need further legislative and regulatory reforms that enable nurse, midwifery and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health worker leadership models.” they added.