



Safe, Accessible, Affordable Abortion

Securing a woman's right to choose

Legal. Accessible. Affordable.

Access to affordable sexual and reproductive healthcare, including abortion and contraception, is part of every woman's right to control her own body. Rural and low-income women can face long distances and high costs. We must expand access via the public hospital system, and decriminalise abortion.

The Greens see affordable, universal health care as an investment, not a cost. Equal access to sexual and reproductive health services, including access to abortion, is part of every woman's right to make decisions about her own body.

Right now, access to sexual and reproductive health services including abortion can be expensive, are not always provided via public hospitals, and for rural women or low income women it can be very difficult.

When faced with an unplanned pregnancy it can be extremely difficult for some women to decide what is best for themselves and those around them. For other women the circumstances of their lives and the pregnancy make the decision more straight forward. We need prevention strategies to avoid unwanted pregnancies, but we also must make sure abortion is legal, accessible and affordable.

> Key points

The Greens will invest **\$15 million over 4 years** to improve access. We will:

- **Support decriminalisation of abortion** under State law in NSW and Queensland, and the removal of criminal provisions in SA and WA where they still exist.
- **Increase access via public hospitals** by establishing the Task Force on Abortion and Contraception funded at \$2 million p.a. for 4 years who would work to clear the roadblocks to providing terminations through public hospitals.
- **Cut out-of-pocket costs** for abortions. The first step would be a review to ensure Medicare and Pharmaceutical Benefit Scheme (PBS) rebates are adequate to cover the true cost or terminations and examine better ways to offer contraception. Funding for the review would be \$500,000.
- **Get accurate data** on terminations provided in Australia. Funding would be \$5 million to develop a nation-wide system of data collection in order to meet demand.
- **Supporting "truth in advertising" laws** for pregnancy counselling services to support women to make a free choice without judgement, deception or anti-choice biases.

One quarter to one third of all Australian women will have an abortion at some point in their life,ⁱ but access to abortion can be extremely difficult, and women may face high out of pocket costs ranging from \$400 up to \$3885.ⁱⁱ Women in remote, rural and regional areas are often forced to travel long distances to urban clinics, and victims of domestic violence and financial control also face incredible difficulties.

The Greens agree with the Public Health Association of Australia, which states in its Abortion Policy that:

"Abortion should be regulated in the same way as other health procedures, without additional barriers or conditions. Regulation of abortion should be removed from Australian criminal law.

States and territories should actively work toward equitable access (including geographic and financial access) to abortion services, with a mix of public and private services available."ⁱⁱⁱ

> Abortion should not be a crime

The Greens support decriminalisation of abortion by removing it from the criminal law in every State and Territory. In Queensland and NSW, abortion is still a crime, although it can occur lawfully in certain circumstances. Some criminal sanctions remain in SA and WA.

In New South Wales, Greens MLC Mehreen Faruqi has drafted a private members' bill to update that state's arcane laws.^{iv} In Queensland, the Greens support the private member's bill from independent MP, Rob Pyne, to decriminalise abortion.

> Boosting access in public hospitals

The Greens believe in free, universal health care. Data from around the country is poor, but currently in Queensland, just 1% of terminations are delivered in the public hospital system. That leaves the other 99% of women facing potentially very high out-of-pocket costs at private clinics. The situation is similar in NSW and other states.

Abortion should be provided by public hospitals in every State and Territory and should be included as part of ordinary service planning. A range of factors are currently preventing this, but crucially there is no leadership or pressure from the Federal government.

The Greens will establish a Task Force on Abortion and Contraception with funding of \$2 million per year for 4 years to act as an advocate for a woman's right to choose. The Task Force would work to clear the roadblocks to States and Territories providing termination services via their public hospital systems.

> Cutting out-of-pocket costs

Access to abortion can be very expensive. Unless termination services are delivered via the public hospital system, women must cover the "gap" between the Medicare or PBS rebates and the total cost of a procedure or drug. Data is difficult to obtain, but women in private clinics face out-of-pocket costs ranging from \$400 to \$4500.^v

Costs for performing a termination often increase as the term of pregnancy progresses, while Medicare and PBS rebates do not, leaving women facing higher costs.

The Greens would institute a review to ensure Medicare and PBS rebates for sexual health, contraception, pregnancy and termination related services are adequate to cover their true cost. Funding would be \$500,000 to conduct the review, with a commitment to implement its findings.

This review would also examine offering longer GP consultations for sexual and reproductive health to allow easier access to contraceptive such as Long Acting Reversible Contraceptives.

> Getting accurate data

Australia does not even collect consistent data on terminations, and some states like Queensland don't systematically collect data on this topic at all. In order to ensure universal access and properly meet demand, we need accurate information.

The South Australian *Pregnancy Outcomes Statistics Unit* offers a good model for data collection, and the Greens would provide \$5 million to federal the Department of Health to develop a nation-wide system of data collection on abortions, with ongoing funding of \$500,000 per year.

> Truth in advertising for counselling

Women deserve to exercise their reproductive rights free from misleading anti-choice influence. Shamefully, some anti-choice organisations offering counselling and online information services have provided women with discredited, false information about what will happen to them if they have an abortion.^{vi}

It's important that if a woman experiencing unplanned pregnancy seeks out counselling, that these services are advertised transparently. Women need to know whether they are receiving unbiased information about all of their options, free judgement.

The Greens would introduce a *Truth in Advertising (Pregnancy Counselling) Act* to prohibit misleading and deceptive conduct and make sure all counselling services are upfront about whether they support a woman's right to choose and whether they provide referrals to abortion providers.

> Helping rural and low-income women

Women from regional areas must often spend vast amounts of time and money travelling to the urban centres to access termination, far from their homes. More provision through the public hospital system will ease this problem.

In Queensland, there are only three private abortion clinics north of the Sunshine Coast – in Rockhampton, Townsville and Cairns. That means women in Mt Isa or Longreach must travel for 7 or 8 hours to access these essential health services, and must often stay overnight.

The poorest and most vulnerable women often struggle the most to access reproductive health services.

For women facing domestic violence, financially controlling behaviour and coercion, access to affordable and high quality health services like contraception and abortion is critical.

Eliminating out-of-pocket costs and expanding equal access through the public hospital system is the best way to make sure all women are able to exercise their fundamental right to control their own bodies and their own health.

> Investing in public health

The Greens have already announced a plan to [boost spending on public health by \\$10 billion over the next four years](#) and provide funding certainty by phasing out the wasteful private health insurance rebate. Instead of a two-tier health system, we should aim for one that is universal and provides good care to all.

ⁱ Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, 2005, [Termination of Pregnancy A Resource for Health Professionals](#), p.5

ⁱⁱ For more information, visit the Children by Choice [website](#) on abortion facts and figures.

ⁱⁱⁱ Public Health Association of Australia, 2014, [Abortion Policy](#)

^{iv} Sydney Morning Herald, 18 June 2015, [Greens launch push to decriminalise abortion in NSW](#)

^v Children by Choice [website](#) on abortion law and practice.

^{vi} Children by Choice [website](#) on pregnancy counselling.