

# Accessing Abortion

## *Titbits...on women's health*

Having access to abortion gives us more control over our lives: we won't be forced into motherhood, we won't be forced to give up our work/education/dreams, and we can worry less about sex and having to deal with an unwanted pregnancy. This is why we, as women, are pro-choice. Even though anti-abortion law in Canada was struck down in 1988, anti-abortion doctors, politicians, and organizations continue to stand in our way by spreading misinformation and protesting outside of clinics.

### **Fighting for our rights**

Fighting for access to abortion means we break the silence. Having access to abortion gives us more control over our bodies. Access to abortion and violence against women are not separate issues. It is much more difficult for a woman to leave an abusive man if she is pregnant and can't get an abortion, especially if she depends on him for money, food, and shelter. Men also rape women to assert their power and control. We want men to stop raping and beating us, but until they do we want to limit the damage it does to our lives so we can keep fighting back.

### **Challenges to accessing abortion**

Although abortion is legal in Canada, many women still have difficulty accessing it. Because of the stigma associated with abortion, some women are uncomfortable seeing their doctor about the procedure or talking about it with their partner, family and friends. Hospitals and clinics may have different policies regarding at what point in a pregnancy they will perform an abortion. This further complicates things for women seeking access to the procedure.

Anti-abortionists judge women guilty of a moral crime. If we choose to have an abortion, they say we are "going against nature" and not fulfilling our "duty" as women to become mothers. This is also how women's worth is portrayed in the media. However, we are more than the sum of our reproductive parts. We do not need to be made guilty and ashamed because of having or considering an abortion, on top of all the obstacles we already face in trying to get one.

Women in rural areas face challenges because most abortion clinics are in major cities, so women must travel to have an abortion. Accessing abortion at a hospital can be difficult because some doctors, nurses, and even hospital administrations are anti-choice. Many clinics are still targets for demonstrations and threats by anti-choice activists, but at least with these services women can be sure that the staff will be supportive of their decision.

Some provincial governments refuse to provide adequate abortion services for women, despite the fact that abortion is a medically necessary procedure and should be available to all women. The Maritime provinces are particularly lacking in services. The government of PEI provides no abortion services whatsoever.

*Please copy and distribute freely to women you know and work with.*



The VWHC's *Titbits* are not intended to endorse or recommend particular treatments, explanations or products but rather to facilitate your own search for health resources. Please see your health practitioner for more information.

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## **Accessing abortion in BC**

There are several clinics and many hospitals in BC that will provide abortions. The cost of a surgical abortion is covered by Medical Services Plan for BC residents. Abortions for non-residents can cost \$400-450. If you are unable to pay, there are other funding options available (see resources on the last page). Abortion clinics do not require a referral, however if you are unable to go to an abortion clinic you will need a referral for a hospital abortion. Minors do not require parental consent to access an abortion. In BC, the maximum time at which an abortion will be performed is between the 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> week of pregnancy (unless the health of the woman or the fetus is at risk). Most abortions take place before the 12<sup>th</sup> week.

## **Types of abortions**

There are two types of abortions performed in BC – surgical and medical. Surgical abortions are the most common, and are usually performed under local anaesthetic. The procedure involves the insertion of a tube through the cervix that suctions the inside of the uterus. Women may experience cramping and bleeding for several days after a surgical abortion. An alternative to this is a medical abortion, in which the woman is given medication to induce miscarriage. She then miscarries in her own home. As with the surgical procedure, cramping and bleeding can continue for a few days, and will likely be heavier than those experienced after a surgical abortion. She may experience nausea, dizziness, and fatigue as a result of the medication. After the induced miscarriage, the woman will usually be examined to ensure that the abortion was successful and that nothing was left behind in her uterus. Medical abortions are usually performed only up until the 5<sup>th</sup> week of pregnancy (7 weeks after your last period).

## **How to decide if abortion is the right choice for you**

If you are concerned that you may be pregnant, you can take action immediately after sexual intercourse. The “morning after” pill is now available over the counter from pharmacists in BC. It can be used effectively up to 72 hours after sex. There are also herbal treatments that can prevent unwanted pregnancy or bring on your period when it is due (see last page).

Most clinics provide pre- and post-abortion counselling, and can help you decide if abortion is the right choice for you. The services listed on the next page can also aid you in your decision. Be aware that some groups that advertise abortion counselling are actually anti-choice. They will discourage you from having an abortion and may try to make you feel guilty and ashamed. Any group or counsellor that does not support you in making the decision that is right for you should be avoided – there are many other, positive services available to you.

If possible, it's a good idea to share your feelings with your partner, friends and/or family when considering an abortion. Talking it through with someone who knows you well can help you make a decision. If your partner is not supportive of your right to choose, be aware that they cannot prevent you from having an abortion.

## ***Vancouver Women's Health Collective***

#225-119 W. Pender Street

Vancouver, BC V6B 1S5

Health Information Line: 604-736-5262

E-mail: [vwhc@vcn.bc.ca](mailto:vwhc@vcn.bc.ca) Website: [www.womenshealthcollective.bc.ca](http://www.womenshealthcollective.bc.ca)



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## Abortion clinics in BC

### *Vancouver:*

Elizabeth Bagshaw Women's Clinic – 604-736-7878

Everywoman's Health Centre – 604-322-6692

CARE at BC Women's Hospital – 604-875-2022

Wiebe Medical Abortion Clinic – 604-874-9897

### *Victoria:*

Vancouver Island Abortion Services – 250-480-7333

### *Kelowna:*

Women's Services Clinic at Kelowna General Hospital – 250-979-0251

## Check out these resources at the VWHC

The Vancouver Women's Health Collective maintains extensive information on a variety of health issues including abortion in our Health Files. We can provide you with more information on abortion clinics, hospitals, and counselling. If you need a new doctor or counsellor, we can help you find one who will meet your needs. Our resource library includes a number of books on abortion, choice, and reproductive health. Check out these titles:

*A Woman's Book of Choices* by Rebecca Chalker and Carol Downer

*The Politics of Abortion* by Janine Brodie et al.

*Hot Pants: Do It Yourself Gynecology* by the Blood Sisters Collective

*This is Me Using My Choice*, An Anthology of Women's Abortion Stories

## Resources in your community

- Options for Sexual Health – the Facts of Life Line provides information on reproductive health and pre-abortion counselling - 604-731-7803
- Pregnancy Options – provides abortion referrals for women who can't get one from a doctor. Can assist with funding for women who can't afford it - 604-875-3163, 1-888-875-3163
- Your local women's centre can provide you with more information on obtaining abortion support in your community - search for it at [www.womennet.ca](http://www.womennet.ca).

## Web sites worth visiting

- Vancouver Women's Health Collective – [www.womenshealthcollective.ca](http://www.womenshealthcollective.ca)
- Pro-Choice Action Network – Vancouver-based organization with extensive information on accessing abortion and the history of abortion in Canada - [www.prochoiceactionnetwork-canada.org](http://www.prochoiceactionnetwork-canada.org)
- Canadians for Choice - Ottawa-based group working to make abortion accessible throughout Canada - [www.canadiansforchoice.ca](http://www.canadiansforchoice.ca)
- Options for Sexual Health - [www.optionsforsexualhealth.org](http://www.optionsforsexualhealth.org)
- Pro-Choice Connection - Vancouver group that hosts a support group and shares women's stories - [www.prochoiceconnection.com](http://www.prochoiceconnection.com)

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