

# THE ADVENT OF TELEMEDICINE ABORTION HAS HAD A BROAD IMPACT ON AUSTRALIAN ABORTION SERVICES

Dr Ea Mulligan

Dept O&G, School of Medicine, Flinders University

Australia's population is highly concentrated into urban centers, leaving women living in vast rural and remote areas far from their nearest abortion service. Some of the most disadvantaged communities are remote and wherever local health services are unwilling to provide abortions, Australian women must travel considerable distances to access care.

In 2015 Australia's first telephone abortion service was launched. The service was heavily subscribed immediately and its existence reverberated across the Australian healthcare landscape.

In the process of implementation, the service was required to reassure health care complaints officials of the safety of telehealth and weather a campaign of vexatious complaints to the national Minister of Health. It also had to tread a fine line in making women aware of the service without offending national regulations prohibiting direct advertising of medications.

Australia's largest professional indemnity insurer has accepted that telephone consultation for abortion represents low risk health care and need not attract any additional premium from medical practitioners who provide the service.

Competition from this low(er) cost service has prompted established clinics to reduce the price of medical abortion and has encouraged the largest network to initiate a video-conferencing abortion service.

While making arrangements for local "bulk billed" (100% government rebate) blood group and ultrasound investigations, one jurisdiction was identified in which there were no providers of fully subsidized services. Successful negotiations with local pathology and radiology providers led to reduced surcharges for these diagnostic tests in the Australian Capital Territory.

Women living in two jurisdictions with legislation requiring abortion to be provided in a hospital are excluded from the new service. This relative disadvantage has reinvigorated efforts to modernize the law in South Australia and the Northern Territory.

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