Abortion in Victoria

Summary

- Abortion is a safe and legal medical procedure in Victoria.
- Contacting a service earlier in a pregnancy will minimise procedure costs and maximise your options.
- Women can undergo an abortion by taking a medication (up to nine weeks gestation) or having a surgical procedure.
- Abortion services are available in both metropolitan and some regional areas. Your GP or 1800 My Options (Tel. 1800 696 784) can provide you with information about your local services.
- When there are fees, costs vary between different providers.

Please note this information is intended as a guide only. Always contact providers directly for specific information relating to your own circumstances.

Abortion (or ‘termination of pregnancy’) is when a pregnancy is intentionally ended. Abortion is a safe and legal medical procedure in Victoria. Depending on how long you have been pregnant, and service availability, you may have the option of either a medication or surgical abortion.

Abortion law in Victoria

The Abortion Law Reform Act 2008 decriminalised abortion and set out guidelines for when abortion can take place.

A woman can access abortion up to a gestational limit of 24 weeks. Beyond the 24 weeks, a medical practitioner can provide an abortion if another medical practitioner agrees that an abortion is appropriate in all the circumstances.

A GP who has a conscientious objection to abortion must refer any woman seeking this information to another medical practitioner who doesn’t object. If you feel your GP has not done this, you can make a complaint via the Victorian Health Complaints Commissioner or the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA).

In May 2016, the Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 was amended to provide for the establishment of legally protected safe access zones within a radius of 150 metres around abortion providers. This ensures that women and staff entering or leaving premises providing abortions can do so safely and privately, without fear, harassment or obstruction.

Abortion services in Victoria

Abortion service providers are located in both Melbourne and regional Victoria in a range of health services and private practices. The costs, procedures and time required can vary from service to service. Having an abortion earlier in a pregnancy can minimise procedure costs and maximise your options.

To find abortion services in Victoria:

- contact your GP
- contact your local community health service
- call the 1800 My Options phone line (Tel. 1800 696 784) or visit the 1800 My Options website. 1800 My Options is Victoria’s sexual and reproductive health information phone line, complemented by a website. It is a women-centred service, established to provide information to meet individual sexual and reproductive health needs.
- 1800 My Options provides information on:
contraception, pregnancy options and sexual health
sexual and reproductive health and abortion services across Victoria
clinical, support and counselling services based on each woman’s needs and location.
- contact a women’s health organisation.

Decision-making about abortion
You may feel you need more information or support to help make a decision. Professional, impartial counselling is available from qualified health professionals. Medicare-rebated pregnancy support and counselling services are provided by some doctors, social workers, mental health nurses and psychologists. 1800 My Options provides information about where to find counsellors.

The process of having an abortion
The health professionals at the service you attend will need to ensure you are fully informed about:
- the procedure
- the risks
- pain relief for medication abortion
- anaesthesia options for surgical abortion
- pre- and post-abortion support.

The process of having an abortion depends on:
- how many weeks pregnant you are (also known as your ‘gestation’ – this is counted from the first day of your last period)
- whether you have a medication abortion or a surgical abortion
- which service provider you attend. The abortion provider will give you more detailed information on what you can expect.

Medication abortion:
- is provided up to nine weeks of pregnancy
- involves taking a medication to end the pregnancy
- is available at some private general practitioner practices, community health services and private clinics.

Some health professionals use telecommunication technologies ('telehealth') to discuss the medication abortion and provide the necessary referrals for an ultrasound scan and the pharmacy script.

Surgical abortion:
- is a surgical procedure which can be provided up to 24 weeks and in certain circumstances beyond that
- is available in some hospitals and private clinics, mostly in metropolitan Melbourne but also in some regional areas.

Costs of abortion in Victoria
Costs vary, depending on:
- whether it is provided by a public hospital, a community health service, a private clinic or private hospital or a GP
- whether the provider charges fees or offers bulk billing
- the gestation of your pregnancy
- the type of abortion procedure you will be having
- the type of health cover you have such as Medicare card, Health Care Card or private health insurance and what it covers.

Abortion and contraception
Visiting a health professional about abortion can also be a good opportunity to discuss contraceptive options.
Some services may be able to provide long-acting reversible contraception such as an **intrauterine device (IUD)**, or a **contraceptive implant or injection**, at the time of the abortion or at your follow-up appointment.

**Follow-up care and emotional support after an abortion**

How you feel after an abortion is related to your unique situation and circumstances.

After having the procedure, most women feel:

- relief
- that they made the right decision for them at the time.

If you would like information about additional support, let your abortion provider know. They will either provide follow-up support or refer you to an appropriate support service for professional counselling.

**Abortion facts and myths**

There are some myths and misconceptions about abortion, and you might have encountered websites with conflicting information. Refer to Better Health Channel's 'Myths and facts about abortion' page for up-to-date and factual information.

**Where to get help**

- **1800 My Options** or Tel. **1800 696 784** is Victoria's sexual and reproductive health information and phoneline service, complemented by a website. It is a women-centred service, established to provide information to meet individual sexual and reproductive health needs.

  **1800 My Options** provides information on:

- contraception, pregnancy options and sexual health
- sexual and reproductive health and abortion services across Victoria
- clinical, support and counselling services based on each woman’s needs and location.

  **1800 My Options** does not provide clinical, medical, legal or financial advice or counselling. Tel. **1800 696 784** or phone **13 14 50** first if you need an interpreter

- **Family Planning Victoria** Tel. **1800 013 952**
- **Your GP** (or another GP)
- Your local community health centre
- **Women’s health organisation** for your region.

If you need an interpreter, please advise your health service provider.
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