



Data report – Survey on access to abortion in  
the ACT and surrounding regions

2022

## Contents

About Women’s Health Matters.....	3
About this data report .....	3
Qualifying questions .....	4
Able or unable to have an abortion in ACT/region?.....	4
Those who were able to have an abortion in ACT/region .....	4
When had abortion.....	4
Temporary visa.....	4
Type of abortion.....	5
Type of abortion by time since abortion .....	5
Gestation.....	5
Satisfaction with ability to access abortion .....	6
Services used to seek an abortion .....	6
Professionals/services consulted with to have an abortion .....	7
Challenges experienced with accessing services needed to have abortion .....	8
Rating safety around abortion facilities.....	9
How safe around abortion facility by time since abortion .....	9
Rating amount of time professionals spent.....	9
Rating whether treated with compassion, dignity & respect.....	10
Rating whether services respected culture, identity, beliefs & choices.....	10
Rating how comfortable speaking with professionals about options .....	10
Rating how adequate information given about choices was.....	11
Rating how well services checked in following procedure .....	11
How well services checked in, by time since abortion .....	11
What worked well with support received .....	12
What did not work well with support received .....	12
Preferred a different type of abortion.....	12
Those who tried but were unable to have an abortion.....	14
When attempted to have abortion.....	14
Temporary visa.....	14
Main reasons unable to have abortion in ACT/region.....	15
Travelled outside ACT/region to have abortion .....	16
What would make it easier to access abortion in ACT .....	17
Demographics .....	18
Gender .....	18
Gender assigned at birth.....	18

Intersex status.....	18
Age .....	18
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people .....	19
Disability.....	20
Sexual orientation.....	20
Preferred language .....	21
Migrant background/asylum-seeking or refugee background/temporary visa holding .....	21
Employment/student status .....	22

## About Women's Health Matters

Women's Health Matters (WHM) is an independent, non-partisan think tank that works to improve the health and wellbeing of all women in the ACT and surrounding region. We seek to improve access to health information and enhance knowledge and understanding about the causes of health and illness among anyone who identifies as a woman.

We advocate on behalf of all ACT women, especially those experiencing disadvantage and vulnerability. We want women to feel in control of and understand the determinants of their own health and wellbeing.

We do this through health promotion and by providing evidence-based social research, policy development and advocacy services to governments, the corporate sector, policy makers, service providers and peak bodies.

## About this data report

In 2022, Women's Health Matters conducted a community survey to help inform our submission to the Inquiry into abortion and reproductive choice in the ACT. The online survey was open from the 25th of July to the 10th of August 2022 and collected 102 responses from women and people with uteruses who had accessed or tried to access an abortion in the ACT or surrounding region.

This document presents data from the survey. It should be read in conjunction with the submission, which is available here: <https://www.womenshealthmatters.org.au/resources/submissions/> Discussion and analysis of the survey data is included in the submission, rather than in this document.

To aid interpretation of the data, in this report some notes are provided about the logic of the survey, e.g. where a respondent might skip questions or be directed to complete particular sections based on their previous answers.

## Qualifying questions

Qualifying questions asked 1) 'Are you aged 18 years or older?' and 2) 'Have you ever tried to access an abortion for yourself in the ACT or surrounding region?'

102 respondents met the qualification criteria and went on to complete the survey.

## Able or unable to have an abortion in ACT/region?

Q3

Have you been able to have an abortion in the ACT or surrounding regions?

	Percentage	Number
Yes	88%	90
No	12%	12

Logic: If No, skip to Q18

## Those who were able to have an abortion in ACT/region

### When had abortion

Q4

Thinking about your most recent or only abortion, when did you have the abortion?

In the last 3 years	26%	23
More than 3 years but less than 10 years	37%	33
More than 10 years but less than 20 years	23%	21
More than 20 years ago	14%	13
TOTAL		90

### Temporary visa

Q5

At the time of this abortion, were you on a temporary visa?

None of the respondents answered yes to this question.

## Type of abortion

Q6

What kind of abortion did you have?

	Percentage	Number
Surgical abortion (in a clinic or hospital)	74%	67
Medical abortion (taking medication at/after a face-to-face consultation with a doctor/health professional)	24%	22
Medical abortion by phone (taking medication after only a phone or tele-consultation with a doctor/health professional)	1%	1
Other (please specify)	0%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>90</b>

## Type of abortion by time since abortion

	Surgical		Medical (appt)		Medical (ph)		Total	
Last 3 years	11	48%	11	48%	1	4%	23	26%
4-10 years	24	73%	9	27%	0	0%	33	37%
11-20 years	20	95%	1	5%	0	0%	21	23%
20+ years	12	92%	1	8%	0	0%	13	14%
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>74%</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Gestation

Q7

To the best of your knowledge how many weeks pregnant were you at the time of your abortion?

	Percentage	Number
0-9 weeks	78%	70
10-16 weeks	22%	20
16+ weeks	0%	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>90</b>

### Satisfaction with ability to access abortion

Q8

How satisfied were you with your ability to access an abortion?

	Percentage	Number
Very dissatisfied	1%	1
Dissatisfied	13%	11
Quite satisfied	33%	30
Very satisfied	16%	14
Extremely satisfied	38%	34
Total	101%*	90

\*Does not add to 100% due to rounding

### Services used to seek an abortion

Q9

Did you use any of the following services to seek an abortion? (Select all that apply)

	Percentage	Number
An abortion clinic	50%	45
A sexual health and/or family planning clinic	27%	24
A women's health service	13%	12
Pathology (e.g. blood tests)	9%	8
A public hospital	78%	7
A pharmacy	6%	5
Radiology (e.g. ultrasound)	6%	5
Telehealth	4%	4
A private hospital	2%	2
A youth health clinic	1%	1
Other (please specify)	11%	10

Other services mentioned were: Aboriginal Medical Service, Marie Stopes, Obstetrician, Psychologist and GP/GP Clinic.

## Professionals/services consulted with to have an abortion

Q10

Did you consult any of the following services to have an abortion? (Select all that apply)

	Percentage	Number
Your regular general practitioner (GP)	46%	41
Another GP	14%	13
A gynaecologist or obstetrician	11%	10
A community nurse, practice nurse or nurse practitioner	8%	7
A psychologist, counsellor or other mental health worker	6%	5
An emergency doctor	1%	1
A pharmacist	0%	0
A midwife	0%	0
Other (please specify)	31%	28

Other responses recorded included: Marie Stopes, Radiologist, Doctor at abortion clinic, General surgeon, Sexual health clinic.

## Why used those services

Q11

Please tell us why these services were the ones you used?

This was an optional open text question. Please refer to our [submission](#) for summary and analysis of free text answers in the survey.



## Challenges experienced with accessing services needed to have abortion

Q12

Did you experience any challenges with accessing the services you needed to have an abortion?  
(Select all that apply)

	Percentage	Number
I did not experience any challenges	16%	14
Medications/tests/appointments/procedures were expensive	41%	37
I had trouble finding appointments	18%	16
I was worried about my privacy	17%	15
I had trouble taking time off work or study	14%	13
I experienced judgement or stigma from my healthcare providers	13%	12
I had trouble taking time away from caring responsibilities	12%	11
It was difficult to find information about services I needed	12%	11
Appointments were far away or took a long time to get to	9%	8
Health providers refused or chose not to help me	6%	5
It was expensive to travel to appointments	6%	5
I was in a violent relationship	4%	4
The COVID-19 pandemic made it harder to get services	3%	3
The gestation of my pregnancy made it difficult to access services	2%	2
A partner or family member was making it hard for me to use services	1%	1
Service providers were not culturally appropriate	0%	0
Service providers were not LGBTIQ+ inclusive	0%	0
Service providers were disability inclusive/accessible	0%	0
Other challenges (please describe)	40%	36

Other challenges mentioned included: concerns about protestors harassing people outside the abortion clinic; difficulty finding a pharmacy that stocked the medication, support person not being able to stay, rudeness and insensitivity from medical staff, discrimination based on weight, being a single parent on a low income, lack of appointments (including over public holidays) delaying procedure and limiting options, expensiveness, difficult accessing private options, COVID-19 creating worry about appointment delays, difficulty estimating gestation, religious beliefs of the private hospital, time-consuming, difficulty finding information online, lack of impartial counselling about options.

Q13

How would you rate your experiences with the services you accessed to have an abortion?

### Rating safety around abortion facilities

How safe you felt around abortion facilities

	Percentage	Number
Very poor	0%	0
Poor	3%	3
Fair	19%	17
Good	24%	22
Excellent	50%	45
N/A	3%	3
Total	99%*	90

\* Total does not add to 100% due to rounding

### How safe around abortion facility by time since abortion

	Very poor		Poor		Poor + v. poor		Fair		Good		Excellent		Good +Exc		N/A		Total
Last 3 years	0	0%	1	4%	1	4%	4	17%	4	17%	12	52%	16	70%	2	%	23
4-10 years	0	0%	2	6%	2	6%	6	18%	6	18%	18	55%	24	73%	1		33
11-20 years	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	5	24%	7	33%	9	43%	16	76%	0	0%	21
20+ years	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	2	15%	5	38%	6	46%	11	85%	0	0%	13

### Rating amount of time professionals spent

The amount of time health professionals spent with you

	Percentage	Number
Very poor	3%	3
Poor	9%	8
Fair	14%	13
Good	40%	36
Excellent	33%	30
N/A	0%	0
Total	99%*	90

\* Total does not add to 100% due to rounding

### Rating whether treated with compassion, dignity & respect

Whether the health services treated you with compassion, dignity and respect

	Percentage	Number
Very poor	6%	5
Poor	4%	4
Fair	18%	16
Good	22%	20
Excellent	49%	44
N/A	1%	1
Total	100%	90

### Rating whether services respected culture, identity, beliefs & choices

Whether the health services respected your culture, identity, beliefs and choices

	Percentage	Number
Very poor	4%	4
Poor	3%	3
Fair	9%	8
Good	21%	19
Excellent	46%	41
N/A	17%	15
Total	100%	90

### Rating how comfortable speaking with professionals about options

How comfortable you were speaking with professionals about options available to you

	Percentage	Number
Very poor	4%	4
Poor	7%	6
Fair	16%	14
Good	36%	32
Excellent	38%	34
N/A	0%	0
Total	101%*	90

\* Total does not sum to 100% due to rounding

### Rating how adequate information given about choices was

How adequate the information given to you about your reproductive choices was

	Percentage	Number
Very poor	3%	3
Poor	7%	6
Fair	19%	17
Good	28%	25
Excellent	40%	36
N/A or no response	3%	3
Total	100%	90

### Rating how well services checked in following procedure

How well the services checked in on you following the procedure

	Percentage	Number
Very poor	18%	16
Poor	13%	12
Fair	28%	25
Good	18%	16
Excellent	15%	13
N/A or no response	9%	8
Total	101%*	90

\* Total does not add to 100% due to rounding

### How well services checked in, by time since abortion

	Very poor		Poor		Poor + v poor		Fair		Good		Excellent		Good +Exc		N/A or no answer		Total
	3	14%	3	14%	6	27%	5	23%	7	32%	3	14%	10	45%	1	5%	
Last 3 years	3	14%	3	14%	6	27%	5	23%	7	32%	3	14%	10	45%	1	5%	22
4-10 years	7	22%	2	6%	9	28%	9	28%	4	13%	7	22%	11	34%	3	9%	32
11-20 years	1	5%	5	26%	6	32%	7	37%	4	21%	2	11%	8	42%	0	0%	19
20+ years	2	15%	1	8%	3	23%	4	31%	1	8%	1	8%	2	15%	4	31%	13

## What worked well with support received

Q14

Please tell us what worked well for you with the support you received? (optional free text answer)

When we asked people who had an abortion what worked well with the support they received, the most widely cited factor was kind, compassionate, non-judgemental and competent care by medical professionals.

Further discussion and analysis of free text answers is available in our [submission](#).

## What did not work well with support received

Q15

Please tell us what did not work well for you with the support you received? (optional free text answer)

When we asked people what did not work well with the support they received when having an abortion, the issue most commonly mentioned was the lack of follow-up and checking in on wellbeing, together with experiences of practitioners and systems being cold, impersonal and uncompassionate.

Further discussion and analysis of free text answers is available in our [submission](#).

## Preferred a different type of abortion

Q16

Thinking about the different types of abortion (surgical, medical, medical by phone) would you have preferred to have a different type if it was accessible to you?

	Percentage	Number
No	71%	64
Yes	29%	26
Total	100%	90

If yes, please tell us more (optional free text answers):

The majority (n=16) of people who said they would have preferred another type of abortion were people who had a surgical abortion but said they would have preferred a medical abortion. People who expanded on why they would have preferred a medical abortion noted factors such as convenience and the procedure being “less intrusive”. Most of the respondents who said they would have preferred a medical abortion had their surgical abortion more than 10 years ago, and many of these noted that a medical abortion was not an option at the time.

Five people who had medical abortions said they would have preferred a surgical abortion (four of these took medication at/after a face-to-face consultation with a doctor/health professional, while one had medical abortion after telehealth consultation). Several indicated that they had adverse outcomes and/or negative experiences with the process.

Three of the four people who had negative experiences with medical abortions said that they were not provided enough information about the process and possible effects of medical abortion.

Further discussion and analysis of free text answers is available in our [submission](#).

## Those who tried but were unable to have an abortion

Q18

Twelve (12) people who responded to the survey had tried but been unable to have an abortion in the ACT or surrounding regions.

### When attempted to have abortion

Thinking about your most recent or only attempt to have an abortion, when was this?

	Percentage	Number
In the last 3 years	38%	4
More than 3 years but less than 10 years	38%	4
More than 10 years but less than 20 years	13%	1
More than 20 years ago	13%	3
Total	101%*	12

\* Total does not add to 100% due to rounding

### Temporary visa

Q19

At the time when you attempted to have an abortion, were you on a temporary visa?

No respondents answered yes to this question.

## Main reasons unable to have abortion in ACT/region

Q20

What were the main reasons why you were unable to have an abortion in the ACT/region? (Select all that apply)

	Percentage	Number
Health providers refused or chose not to help me	42%	5
Medication/tests/procedure/appointments were too expensive	33%	4
The gestation of my pregnancy limited the services I could access	33%	4
I experienced judgement or stigma from my healthcare providers	25%	3
Appointments were too far away or took a long time to get to	25%	3
I was in a violent relationship	25%	3
I had too much trouble finding appointments	25%	3
A partner or family member made it hard for me to use services	8%	1
I was worried about my privacy	8%	1
I couldn't take time away from caring responsibilities	8%	1
It was too difficult to find information about services I needed	8%	1
Service providers were not culturally appropriate	0%	0
Service providers were not LGBTQ+ inclusive	0%	0
Service providers were not disability inclusive/accessible	0%	0
I couldn't take time off work or study	0%	0
It was too expensive to travel to appointments	0%	0
The COVID-19 pandemic made it too hard to get services	0%	0
Other challenges (please describe)	42%	5

Other challenges/reasons described included: the lack of available services and medications in the ACT, miscarriage, cost, need to wait for ultrasound.



## Travelled outside ACT/region to have abortion

Q21

In the last 3 years, have you travelled outside of the ACT/region to have an abortion?

	Percentage	Number
No	92%	11
Yes	8%	1
Total	100%	12

If yes, please tell us why: Unable to get appointment.

## What would make it easier to access abortion in ACT

Q22

Both those who had and those who were unable to have an abortion in the ACT were asked what would improve access to abortion in the ACT (optional free text answer).

The most commonly recommended measures were:

- Those to address the cost of abortion,
- Followed by measures to improve information about options, community education and help with navigating services.
- Many respondents also mentioned the need for dedicated services to be provided at different locations, with greater availability of appointments in a timely way.
- Many also mentioned the need for professionals to be more non-judgmental and supportive.

## Demographics

All 102 respondents answered the demographic questions.

### Gender

Q23

How do you describe your gender?

	Percentage	Number
Woman or female	99%	101
Man or male	0%	0
Non-binary	1%	1
Prefer not to answer	0%	0
I use a different term (please specify)	0%	0
Total	100%	102

### Gender assigned at birth

Q24

At birth were you recorded as? Options were: Female, Male, Prefer not to answer, Another term (please specify)

All respondents answered that they were recorded as female.

### Intersex status

Q25

Were you born with a variation of sex characteristics (sometimes called 'intersex')?

	Percentage	Number
Yes	1%	1
No	99%	101
Don't know	0%	0
Prefer not to answer	0%	0
Total	100%	102

### Age

Q26

What is your age?

	Percentage	Number
--	------------	--------

18 - 24 years of age	9%	9
25 - 34 years of age	26%	27
35 -44 years of age	40%	41
45 - 54 years of age	14%	14
55 - 64 years of age	7%	7
65 years or over	3%	3
Prefer not to answer	1%	1
Total	100%	102

### Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people

Q27

Are you an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person?

Aboriginal	9%	9
Torres Strait Islander	0%	0
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	0%	0
Neither	90%	92
Prefer not to answer	1%	1
Total	100%	102

## Disability

Q28

Are you a person with disability or disabilities?

Yes	11%	11
No	87%	89
Prefer not to answer	2%	2
Total	100%	102

## Sexual orientation

Q29

How do you describe your sexual orientation?

Straight (heterosexual)	79%	81
Gay or lesbian	0.00%	0
Bisexual	15%	15
Don't know	2%	2
Prefer not to answer	1%	1
I use a different term (please specify)	3%	3
Total	100%	102

Different terms specified were: Queer, Pansexual

## Preferred language

Q30

What is your preferred language?

	Percentage	Number
English	99%	101
Mandarin	1%	1
Nepali	0%	0
Vietnamese	0%	0
Punjabi	0%	0
An Aboriginal language (please specify)	0%	0
A Torres Strait language (please specify)	0%	0
Total	100%	102

## Migrant background/asylum-seeking or refugee background/temporary visa holding

Q31

Do you identify as being from one or more of these backgrounds? (Select all that apply) Options listed were: Migrant background, Refugee or asylum seeker background, Temporary visa holder

Fourteen (14, 14%) respondents indicated that they were of migrant background. None indicated that they were of refugee or asylum seeker backgrounds or were temporary visa holders.

## Employment/student status

Q32

Thinking about the last time you had or tried to have an abortion, what was your employment status?

	Percentage	Number
Employed full-time	53%	54
Employed part-time	15%	15
Employed casually	10%	10
Student	6%	6
Unemployed and looking for work	3%	3
Unemployed and not looking for work	3%	3
Self-employed	2%	2
Unable to work	2%	2
Retired	0%	0
Other (please specify)	7%	7
Total	101%*	102

\*Does not add to 100% due to rounding

Other employment statuses specified included: on maternity leave, not working due to caring responsibilities, employed and a student, disability pensioner.

### How difficult to manage on income

Q33

Thinking about the last time you had or tried to have an abortion, how difficult was it to manage on your income?

	Percentage	Number
Very easy	24%	25
Not bad	25%	26
Difficult sometimes	36%	37
Difficult always/impossible	14%	14
Total	99%*	102

\*Does not add to 100% due to rounding