



18 September 2019

S19.20

Submission to the Abortion Legislation Committee on the Abortion Legislation Bill 164-1

Introduction

- 0.1. The National Council of Women of New Zealand, Te Kaunihera Wahine o Aotearoa (NCWNZ) is an umbrella group representing over 200 organisations affiliated at either national level or to one of our 15 branches. In addition, we have about 450 people are individual members. Collectively our reach is over 450,000 with many of our membership organisations representing all genders. NCWNZ's vision is a gender equal New Zealand and research shows we will be better off socially and economically if we are gender equal. Through research, discussion and action, NCWNZ in partnership with others, seeks to realize its vision of gender equality because it is a basic human right.
- 0.2. This submission was prepared by the NCWNZ Family Issues Standing Committee and the Parliamentary Watch Committee and based on relevant NCWNZ Resolutions and submissions, as well as consultation with NCWNZ branches, individual members and member organisations. The number of responses from our members indicates the high level of interest in this Abortion Legislation Bill.

1. NCWNZ Policy

- 1.1. From as early as 1932, NCWNZ has had Resolutions on abortion. More recently, in 2014 NCWNZ was seeking a review of abortion law and practice with a view to simplifying it and ensuring a woman's right to choose. The latest 2018 Resolution stated That abortion should be part of health care – safe, legal and accessible.
- 1.2. In 2018 NCWNZ contributed a submission to the Law Commission on their consultation Abortion Law Reform¹ and supported abortion being treated as a health issue.
- 1.3. The 2016 Non-Governmental Report to the UN CEDAW Monitoring Committee² recommends that the government:

Abortion

12.1 Review abortion law, with a view to removing abortion from the Crimes Act 1961 and integrating it into reproductive and sexual healthcare. This would include shifting governmental

¹ <https://www.ncwnz.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/S18.19-Abortion-Law-Reform.pdf>

² Women experiencing Discrimination – 2016 Aotearoa New Zealand Non-Governmental Organisations Report

oversight for abortion from the Ministry of Justice to the Ministry of Health.

12.2 Fund research on abortion care, funding and stigma, with a view to improving health outcomes.

12.3 Publicly respond to ongoing abortion stigma by including abortion in the comprehensive reproductive and sexual health and rights action plan being developed, and launching an anti-stigma campaign.

2. Clauses 10 – 21

- 2.1. The Abortion Legislation Bill provides a tangible opportunity to contribute to and leverage from the Gender Equal NZ vision by including an explicit commitment to promote gender equality in all healthcare provision.
- 2.2. NCWNZ believes that the health of women and non-binary individuals is paramount. While not all members support abortion, overall NCWNZ strongly supports the Government’s intention to treat abortion as a health issue in legislation. This reflects the 2018 submission where it was noted that the then criminal nature of abortion was not appropriate.
- 2.3. Our membership largely believes that this legislation empowers women and non-binary individuals by allowing them to make their own choices about their bodies and make these decisions within the healthcare system. NCWNZ members strongly support the Right to Choose noting women own their own bodies and having the right to make informed choices.
- 2.4. Many of our members felt that self-referral was a key way to empower and reduce potential inequities of access.
- 2.5. Barriers to access noted in the feedback included costs, location, hours of operation, cultural appropriateness and ready availability.
- 2.6. Members also noted that investment in reproductive education would increase the empowerment of women and non-binary individuals to exercise choices about their bodies, and could reduce the need for abortion.
- 2.7. Our membership was divided on whether health practitioners should be able to conscientiously object so long as they onward refer, or whether conscientious objection further impacts those with inequitable access to services such as those in rural communities.
- 2.8. NCWNZ Members feedback that this legislation signals Aotearoa New Zealand’s intent to prioritise the health, care and wellbeing of women which our membership endorses.

3. Recommendation

- 3.1. We therefore recommend that the Government note the following key points which were raised by members:
 - Determine legislative criteria which ensures equity of access and timeliness of service provision

- Ensure counselling and support services are a funded component of all abortion healthcare
- Provision for increased reproductive education be included

4. Conclusion

4.1. NCWNZ welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Abortion Legislation Committee and overall supports the Abortion Legislation Bill and its intention to treat abortion as a health issue in legislation.



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