

# Exploring healthcare providers' experiences of delivering abortion care at 20 weeks and over in Victoria

## Authors:

Malek M<sup>1,2</sup>, Homer C<sup>2</sup>, McDonald C<sup>3</sup>, Hannon C<sup>3</sup>, Moore P<sup>3</sup>, Wilson A<sup>2,4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Monash University, Melbourne VIC, Australia, <sup>2</sup> Burnet Institute, Melbourne VIC, Australia, <sup>3</sup> Royal Women's Hospital, Melbourne VIC, Australia, <sup>4</sup> Victorian Department of Health, Melbourne VIC, Australia

## Background:

Abortions at 20 weeks and over sought for psychosocial reasons are associated with significant access difficulties due to legal restrictions and limited availability of services. The Abortion and Contraception Service (ACS) at the Royal Women's Hospital in Victoria, Australia is the only service in the state that provides these abortions. The views and experiences of abortion providers can give important insight into quality of care and access issues. The aim of our study was to explore the care experiences of abortion providers at 20 weeks and over for psychosocial reasons in one hospital in Victoria, Australia.

## Methods:

An exploratory qualitative study was conducted at the ACS at the Royal Women's Hospital. Participants were recruited by convenience and purposive sampling. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted one-on-one with participants either online or in-person. A reflexive thematic analysis was performed.

## Results:

Seventeen healthcare providers from medicine, nursing, midwifery, social work and Aboriginal clinical health backgrounds participated in the study. Three themes were identified: 'Being committed to quality care: taking a holistic approach', 'Surmounting challenges: being an abortion provider is difficult', and 'Meeting external roadblocks: deficiencies in the wider healthcare system'. Participants felt well-supported by their team to provide person-centered and holistic care and face the emotional and ethical challenges of their role. The limited abortion workforce capacity in the wider healthcare system was perceived to compromise equitable access to care.

## Conclusion:

Abortion providers at 20 weeks and over for psychosocial reasons encounter enablers and barriers to delivering care at the personal, service and healthcare system levels. Further research exploring the care experiences of service users is required to support these findings. There is an urgent need for supportive policies and frameworks to strengthen the abortion workforce and expand provision of affordable, acceptable and accessible abortions at 20 weeks and over in Victoria.

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