

## **Equity and Access to Abortion in Western Victoria – The Planets are Aligning.**

### **Authors:**

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### **Background/Purpose:**

The Grampians Public Health Unit (GPHU) funded a project incorporating an inquiry into abortion access. The aim was to investigate factors impacting service availability and access, and to create real change across the region.

### **Approach:**

The project nurses conducted interviews with key informants across the region, using the client journey as a framework to identify issues that affect the choices women with an unplanned pregnancy face. The picture that emerged showed many complex barriers across the journey. These findings, along with health data, underpinned the proposed plan for the region which was developed by the GPHU team.

### **Outcomes/Impact:**

Using a public health lens to interrogate the issues affecting reproductive health, specifically access to abortion, revealed a complex journey. Multiple points along the journey provide opportunities for interventions that go beyond the provision of a service. However, an accessible service is an essential endpoint and existing private service models cannot address inequity in our region. Likewise, telehealth provides an essential part of the solution, but will not work for everyone.

GPHU's auspicing body – the newly amalgamated Grampians Health – was supportive of implementing publicly funded abortion services and other supports identified as needed.

### **Innovation and Significance:**

Multiple co-occurring loci of interest and support gave rise to motivation for change, evidence-based problem solving, and funding for services.

The use of a public health lens to evaluate equity and access is not new. However, a public health unit working under the auspices of a large regional health service in Victoria is new. Additionally, the merger at Grampians Health created the opportunity to progress a systematic approach to the prevention and management of unplanned pregnancy in the region.

Some factors driving momentum were random, and the final project might not have occurred if certain conversations hadn't happened.

Opportunities to change conditions that promote equity must be seized whenever they arise.