

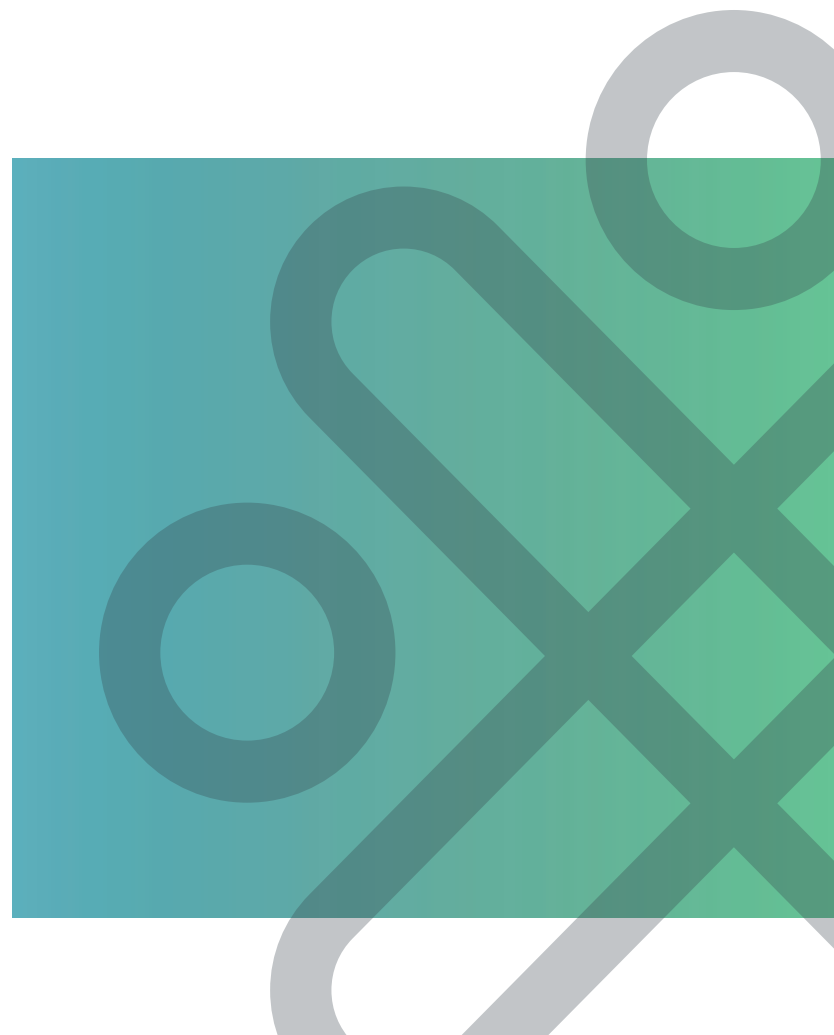
POLICY BRIEF

INCREASING ABORTION ACCESS IN
CANADA THROUGH MIDWIFE-LED CARE

MARCH 2023



**Action Canada
for Sexual Health & Rights**



Action Canada is a national organization working to advance sexual and reproductive health and rights in Canada and globally. Part of Action Canada's work is advocating for better access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services, which includes access to safe abortion services for all people in their local communities.



Systemic Barriers to Abortion Care in Canada

In Canada and around the world, abortion is a basic reproductive health care need and is a common outcome of pregnancy. Every year in Canada, [close to half of all confirmed pregnancies are unintended](#) and of all the people who can get pregnant, [one in three will have an abortion in their lifetime](#). The need for abortion is common, it is a safe and routine medical procedure, and Canadians have a right to access it; and yet, easy access to abortion services is far from guaranteed for all people in this country.

Many people in Canada have experienced significant and persistent barriers when seeking abortion care. Access to abortion is difficult for many because of obstacles that include, but are not limited to:

- Services being far away from one's community;
- Costs and logistics associated with traveling sometimes up to hundreds of kilometers and across provincial or national borders to access services, especially for those in rural, remote, or northern communities;
- Procedure costs for those who are uninsured;
- Language barriers and;
- Lack of access to paid sick leave, childcare, or other supports to attend appointments.

Those who already face the most obstacles to health care services because of systemic barriers—Black and Indigenous people, people of colour, those of low socioeconomic status, disabled, young and (2S)LGBTQIA+ people, those in situations of intimate partner violence, incarcerated people, undocumented people or those in precarious immigration situations, and those living outside of urban centres—are also the ones most likely to face significant and persistent barriers when needing to access abortion services.

Despite the [numerous documented difficulties in accessing abortion services](#), many regions and communities have been persistently left underserved. One of the barriers in the way of change has been abortion stigma.

Abortion stigma undermines efforts to address access issues and has great [public health impacts](#). It can delay or prevent people from seeking care, can isolate people from personal and community support networks, and can discourage organizations, institutions, elected officials, and community leaders from taking necessary steps to ensure better access to abortion.

Considering [the known consequences of being denied an abortion or being unable to access one](#), increasing access to abortion care across the country is an urgent priority.



Action Canada supports increased access to medical abortion and all abortion care in Canada



Medical abortion is [widely understood](#) as safe, effective, and an essential aspect of primary care provision. When the combination of Mifepristone and Misoprostol was approved by Health Canada in 2015, it was understood that direct primary care provision of first-trimester medical abortion could potentially address inequitable abortion access in Canada. In recent years, [studies have shown](#) that this is indeed the case.

As such, the use of medical abortion in primary care settings must be supported as an evidenced-based intervention to improve access.

Midwives are ready to provide abortion care as a way to increase access in Canada

As primary care providers, midwives are a valuable resource in increasing access to abortion. As of 2022, midwives in Quebec have been legally enabled to provide medication abortion care and within other parts of Canada, midwives are supporting medical abortion care in collaboration with physicians. [Midwife-led abortion care is also common practice in many other parts of the world.](#)

Midwife-led abortion care has the potential to greatly improve access to abortion. **We encourage all jurisdictions to promptly follow Quebec's lead** and ensure that midwifery prescribing scope includes Mifegymiso as an evidence-based intervention to increase access to abortion in Canada.

Action Canada strongly supports a variety of health care providers incorporating abortion care into their practice and urges the involvement of midwives as skilled providers already well-poised to provide abortion care. Midwives are experts in

uncomplicated, evidence-based pregnancy care and frequently work with communities facing marginalization. Indeed, midwifery [has shown improved reproductive health outcomes for clients experiencing low socioeconomic position.](#)

Midwife-led abortion care could also increase access to abortion for patients:

- who may need more support to access health care or face barriers within the health care system and would therefore benefit from a person-[centred](#) approach and flexible care settings within the community;
- patients who live in rural and remote communities served by midwives and;
- patients who experience culturally safer care via their relationship with midwives.



Midwives are established experts in caring for those experiencing normal pregnancy and are exceptionally well-positioned to provide medical abortion for a number of reasons:

- They are primary care providers who have the necessary skills and experience to prescribe and manage medical abortion;
- They currently manage uncomplicated pregnancy loss, a process that is clinically similar to medical abortion;
- They frequently collaborate with health care providers from other sectors when additional care is needed, supporting collaborative approaches to person-centred care;
- They have the skills and ability to offer quality pre- and post-abortion counselling; and
- Abortion care is a natural extension of existing midwifery philosophies, which include continuity of care, person-centred care, and informed choice decision-making.

Practising midwives may also have existing infrastructure within their work to support their clients with valuable and necessary aspects of abortion care:

- They provide urgent care in case of complications (24/7);
- They offer follow-up care, including contraceptive counselling;
- They offer care in multiple settings: clinics, hospital and in the community; and
- They provide person-centred education and health promotion on sexual and reproductive health.



Countering abortion stigma as an important step toward better abortion access

Midwife-led abortion care will also improve access, and therefore outcomes, by helping to address abortion stigma. Midwives focus their work in the management of normal and uncomplicated pregnancy. In contrast to requiring patients to seek specialist care, which is therefore perceived as isolated or uncommon care, the integration of midwives into the abortion care provider landscape serves as a strong reminder about the normalcy of abortion. Countering abortion stigma by communicating that abortion is a normal outcome of pregnancy will have direct implications in improving access to care and better health for those for whom abortion stigma affects.



Action Canada strongly supports midwife-led abortion care

In this spirit, Action Canada celebrates the work being done to ensure access to midwife-led abortion care.

- Action Canada joins the Canadian Association of Midwives in calling on midwives and all reproductive health care providers to work to ensure access to comprehensive abortion care in Canada. We publicly endorse their statement on [Midwives' Provision of Abortion](#).
- Action Canada supports the FIGO (International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics) [statement from global health care providers](#), calling on all governments to defend access to safe abortion. This statement has been endorsed by over 250 health organizations from around the world, including the [International Confederation of Midwives](#).
- Action Canada supports the [WHO updated guidelines on safe abortion](#), which include midwives as providers for safe and comprehensive abortion care.
- Action Canada congratulates the Ordre des sages-femmes du Québec (OSFQ) in providing its members with a frame of reference for providing medical abortion care to their clients.



Action Canada urges governments, midwifery regulatory bodies and midwives in effectively working together to formalize abortion as part of routine midwifery care.



What needs to happen?

- ➔ Midwifery prescribing scope must include medical abortion in all jurisdictions;
- ➔ Midwives in all Canadian jurisdictions should be supported to incorporate abortion into their routine practices; and
- ➔ All health system partners must collaborate to create pathways for person-centred, comprehensive abortion access that are relevant to each community.

