

REGIONAL, RURAL AND REMOTE ABORTION ACCESS PROGRAM

MAPPING ACCESS PATHWAYS PROJECT REPORT OCTOBER 2021

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Mapping Access Pathways Project (MAPP) was a key project outcome of the Regional, Rural and Remote Abortion Access Program, managed by Children by Choice, aiming to increase access to abortion and contraception services for all Queenslanders.

Children by Choice (CbyC) received consistent feedback from clients, referring organisations and the wider sector that the services needed to enable access to abortion in Queensland are hard to find. Addressing barriers to abortion provision, and minimising social and practical barriers for abortion seekers, are both vital to improving equitable sexual and reproductive health (SRH) outcomes.

The MAPP has established a publicly accessible interactive online map of abortion and contraception providers, pharmacies that dispense MS-2 Step and ultrasound clinics across the state. It is searchable by postcode, provider type and fee information, and is based on a similar map funded by the Department of Health in Victoria as part of the 1800 My Options service. More detailed search criteria is also available for services, including gestation, availability of a female doctor, LGBTIQ+ sensitivity and wheelchair accessibility.

Prior to this project, there was no publicly available comprehensive list of abortion or contraception providers in Queensland.

PROJECT OUTCOMES

Normalising abortion and addressing barriers to provision and access are vital to reducing the financial, personal and health burden associated with inequitable abortion access in Australia. The online abortion provider map is proving a creative and effective way to improve abortion access, likely also reducing women’s exposure to stigma and judgement as they seek appropriate services, and contributing to more equitable SRH outcomes for women and pregnant people in Queensland.

The map launched in October 2021 with 105 providers listed across Queensland, the majority being providers of abortion care, as well as some pharmacies and ultrasound providers. Abortion provision sites currently listed are a mix of public hospital, general practice, sexual health clinics and private clinics.



RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

Evaluation of the map is ongoing, and will include research on any impacts of the map on listing providers and their practice, motivating factors for providers listing a service publicly or privately, how the map facilitates access to abortion in Queensland (both for consumers, health professionals, and referrers – including those with conscientious objection), and if or how the map is addressing access inequities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The MAPP is an innovative project, building on CbyC's existing relationships and unique knowledge of abortion access pathways in Queensland. In preliminary meetings with Clinical Excellence Queensland, it was agreed that CbyC was the most appropriate place to hold and share this information, further embedding the organisation as playing a crucial role in sexual and reproductive health and rights in Queensland.
 - Ongoing funding should be sought from Queensland Health and/or other funders to cover the annual hosting costs and further expansion of the online interactive map of abortion and contraception providers
 - Funding could also cover the development of promotional materials, and direct contact methods with GPs, pharmacists and sonographers to recruit them to register their services on the map
 - Funding for the map could be included in other grant applications, for example, an application to deliver a series of 'Medical Termination of Pregnancy in General Practice' workshops delivered with Iris Education
 - Bayer have been approached in October 2021 for financial support and a proposal has been submitted for a grant to cover the annual hosting fee, plus some other promotional costs. See proposal [here](#).
2. Ensuring the map is a sustainable resource will require organizational commitment:
 - If no external funding is sourced, it is recommended that CbyC commit to covering the annual hosting fee, and hours of the Communications Officer to monitor registrations coming through via the CbyC website, and to continue to liaise with the map developers (Spatial Vision) to ensure the map is up to date at all times
 - To promote the map externally to clients, health professionals, and stakeholders through direct client work, newsletters, social media, and training delivery
3. The map is a powerful advocacy tool to promote awareness of gaps in access to abortion care across the state or by Hospital and Health Service (HHS) area. It is recommended that the map evaluation be published and the findings widely shared to further promote the map, and consider its impacts on health professionals and consumers.

CONCLUSION

The Children by Choice map empowers its users. It provides clear pathway information and options, it will facilitate higher levels of health literacy for individuals and it will support healthcare workers to confidently refer clients to appropriate services. Pathways must be transparent and accessible to ensure timely access to healthcare and better health outcomes for all.