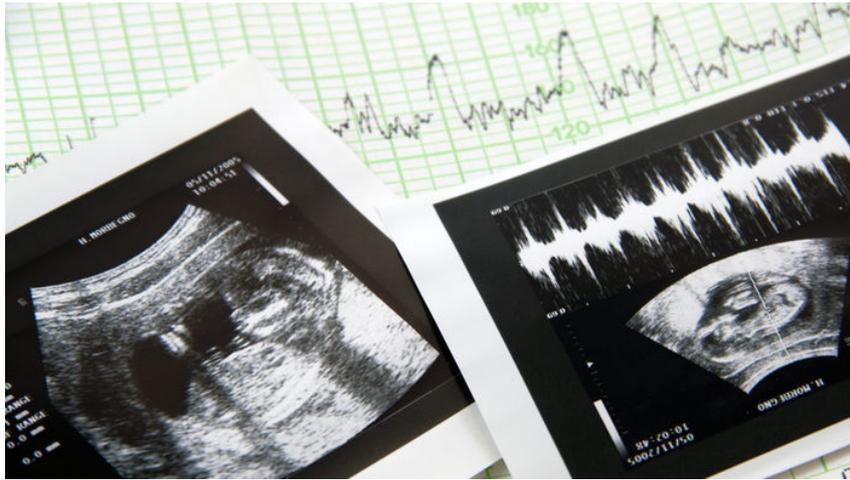


Women Deserve Better than the Proposed Abortion Law Reform

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Women are already able lawfully to access abortion in both Queensland and NSW. The proposed reform is simply an excuse to gain wider acceptance of an extreme ideology held by a vocal minority

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Concerted efforts are currently underway to remove limits on abortion in both Queensland and New South Wales. Apparently both states' abortion laws are "archaic" and "regressive."

But on the contrary: surely, in the twenty-first century, we can do better for women than more abortion.

In May, Independent MP Rob Pyne introduced the *Abortion Law Reform (Women's Right to Choose) Amendment Bill 2016*.

The Bill seeks to remove abortion from the Queensland Criminal Code with the intention that abortion be available on demand, for *any* reason, at *any* stage of pregnancy.

In response to justifiable public outcry against this ill-conceived Bill - and in advance of this week's Parliamentary report - Pyne went into damage control and last week introduced a second bill: the *Health (Abortion Law Reform) Amendment Bill 2016*.

The second Bill limits abortion on demand to before 24 weeks unless two doctors agree that an abortion after 24 weeks would preserve the

physical and mental health of the woman, in which case it would, as in the first bill, be available through all nine months of pregnancy. It also includes a tenuous conscientious objection provision, and 50m safe zones around abortion clinics.

The second bill displays the same shallow ideology and lack of consideration for the real needs of women that were the hallmarks of the first bill. And despite the fact that this is an entirely new bill, in an extraordinary attempt to bypass due process, [Pyne is claiming](#) that there has already been enough discussion and consultation on his *other* bill and that both bills should now be voted on together. This is both inappropriate and unacceptable.

Earlier this month, Green's MP Mehreen Faruqi introduced the [Abortion Law Reform \(Miscellaneous Acts Amendment\) Bill 2016](#). Like Pyne's first Bill, Faruqi's Bill seeks to remove abortion from the NSW Crimes Act and includes no gestational limit. Like his second Bill, it includes provisions for (150m) safe zones.

However, in requiring medical practitioners with a conscientious objection to abortion to refer, Faruqi's Bill is unambiguous in its clamp down on freedom of conscience. Practitioners who don't want to perform an abortion themselves for ethical reasons will be forced to refer the patient to another practitioner who will perform the very same procedure against which they are ethically opposed.

Most disturbingly, all three bills have been put forward as promoting women's health and rights. In reality, they are counter-productive to both.

First, all three bills treat abortion as simply another medical procedure and fail to recognise the physical and psychological harms posed to women who abort. Even women who abort in the first trimester can suffer physical and [psychological](#) harm. The introduction of a gestational limit in Pyne's second Bill does nothing to address the potential harm caused to women by abortion *at any stage of pregnancy*.

Second, neither Pyne's nor Faruqi's bills include safeguards to ensure that women are giving fully informed consent. Safeguards such as the provision of counselling independent of abortion providers; information about the risks of abortion, the stages of foetal development and the alternatives to abortion; the opportunity to view ultrasounds; and mandatory waiting periods - these are all critical to ensure that women can make a real "choice" when it comes to abortion.

Third, none of the bills make any attempt to understand and address the societal issues, which might make women view abortion as their only choice. Women who abort often cite reasons such as [fear of intimate partner violence](#), coercion from their partner or others, psychological pressures due to the pregnancy or otherwise, [study and career pressures](#),

and/or a lack of financial and emotional support. Abortion under these circumstances is not choice - it's desperation.

Instead of simply providing women with the so-called "choice" of abortion on demand, in an attempt to address the symptoms of their situation, we need to do far more as a society to address the underlying causes and provide them with positive alternatives that are not going to expose them to further harm. This includes progressing real alternatives for women facing unplanned pregnancies (including much needed adoption law reform), and addressing issues of domestic violence, access and affordability of child care, flexible workplace and study arrangements and access to pregnancy and counselling support.

Finally, the bills provide no regulatory framework for the mandatory collection and reporting of data on abortions, including how many abortions are taking place, what reasons are cited, and how many women suffer physical and psychological harm post-abortion. In the absence of such data, there is a woeful lack of evidence to support these proposed changes.

The reality is that women are already able lawfully to access abortion in both Queensland and New South Wales. To say otherwise is simply an excuse to gain wider acceptance of an extreme ideology held by a vocal minority, which sees abortion as a right to be exercised at will. No other medical procedure is afforded such a status.

These bills are a backward, harmful step for women and should consequently be rejected by the Queensland and New South Wales Parliaments. We need to provide our women with more information and more support, not more abortion. Women deserve better.

Rachael Wong is a barrister and the Director of Research, Policy and Advocacy at Women's Forum Australia. For further information on this issue, see Women's Forum Australia's submission to the Queensland Parliamentary Committee.