

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

NORTHERN TRUST RESUMES EARLY MEDICAL ABORTION SERVICE

- **The Northern Trust have today resumed their early medical abortion service;**
- **The service was forced to close in October due to a lack of resources;**
- **Almost 100 people from the Northern Trust area contacted the Central Access Point during the suspension of the service with an unplanned or crisis pregnancy;**
- **Nine months since the introduction of the new abortion regulations people are still being forced to travel during a global pandemic to access healthcare services.**

“It is now imperative that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland intervene to begin the commissioning process, including the use of telemedicine, to ensure that the legislation is enacted and the rights of women and pregnant people are realised.” – Ruairi Rowan.

Early medical abortion (EMA) services have today (4 January 2021) resumed within the Northern Trust. The service had been forced to close on 5 October 2020 due to a lack of resources.

During the period that the service was suspended 96 people living within an area covered by the Northern Trust contacted the Central Access Point provided by Informing Choices NI (ICNI) seeking information about pregnancy choices and options on available abortion care.

As other health trusts in Northern Ireland did not have the capacity to accommodate those living within the area this resulted in a postcode lottery to access this essential healthcare.

With a local EMA service unavailable people living within the Northern Trust had their options limited to traveling to England through the UK Government funded central booking system; travelling to the south of Ireland and paying privately to access abortion care at a cost of around €450; or accessing medication outside of NHS/HSE provision through an online telemedicine provider such as Women Help Women.

Ruairi Rowan, Director of Advocacy and Policy at ICNI, said:

“ICNI welcome the resumption of EMA services within the Northern Trust and we know that the recommencement of this essential local service will be a vital avenue of care for many. However, it comes too late for almost 100 people who were denied local access to abortion services.

“While people were being told to stay at home to prevent the spread of coronavirus, pregnant people in Northern Ireland faced lonely journeys to England to access healthcare which is now legal and should have been provided locally.



“The majority of people who contacted ICNI during this period stated that travel was not an option for them and indicated that they would seek support from an online telemedicine provider. By accessing abortion pills from these sources, they will not have been offered a form of contraception, including a long-acting reversible method, which could prevent future unintended pregnancies.

“Women’s healthcare should not be dependent on their location or ability to board a plane. Travel carries stigma. It adds to secrecy and it can take away privacy. With the continued inaction from the Northern Ireland Executive, it is now imperative that the Secretary of State intervene to begin the commissioning process, including the use of telemedicine, to ensure that the legislation is enacted and the rights of women and pregnant people are realised.”

ENDS

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ICNI provides the Central Access Point into EMA services in Northern Ireland. This enables people to contact a single telephone number – 028 9031 6100 - where they can access non-directive information, pregnancy choices counselling if requested, and referral into an EMA service within their local Health and Social Care Trust.

ICNI also provide post pregnancy counselling for those who have experienced pregnancy loss – either through abortion, miscarriage or stillbirth – have experienced a traumatic birth or suffer from postnatal depression or anxiety.