

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

WESTERN TRUST TO SUSPEND EARLY MEDICAL ABORTION SERVICE

- The Western Trust are to cease accepting referrals for early medical abortion services from 5pm;
- The service has been maintained over the past year by a single doctor working without any support and is no longer sustainable;
- Other health trusts do not have the capacity to accept referrals from women living in this area;
- The Secretary of State must urgently intervene to direct that abortion services are commissioned and put an end to this stop-start provision of healthcare.

“It is simply unacceptable that over one year on from the abortion regulations taking effect that the Department of Health and the Northern Ireland Executive have not acted to commission these services and ensure that all women across Northern Ireland have equal access to healthcare.” – Ruairi Rowan.

Informing Choices NI (ICNI) have been informed that the Western Trust will cease accepting referrals for early medical abortion (EMA) services from 5pm today (Friday 23 April).

The trust began receiving referrals from the central access point provided by ICNI on 15 April 2020. Since this time the service has been maintained by a single doctor working with no support. This is no longer sustainable and as such the service is due to be withdrawn until additional medical support can be found. This will be the third suspension of an EMA service across Northern Ireland in the last six months.

As no other trust has the capacity to provide EMA services for women living within the Western Trust their options will be limited to traveling to England during a global health pandemic; travelling to the south of Ireland and paying privately; or accessing medication outside of NHS/HSE provision through independent online telemedicine providers.

ICNI continue to engage closely with the Western Trust regarding the situation and hope that it can be resolved as soon as possible.

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

“Yet again women in Northern Ireland are faced with a postcode lottery in accessing vital reproductive healthcare. It is simply unacceptable that over one year on from the abortion regulations taking effect that the Department of Health and the Northern Ireland Executive have not acted to commission these services and ensure that all women across Northern Ireland have equal access to healthcare.



“Continuing to rely on ICNI, and a small group of committed conscientious providers, is not a reasonable or sustainable solution and we are now witnessing the results of a lack of funding and poor workforce planning.

“While women from the Western Trust who are referred into the service up until 5pm today will still be able to access abortion locally, this will not be the case for those who ICNI speak with next week. The Secretary of State must now urgently intervene to direct that abortion services are commissioned and put an end to this stop-start provision of healthcare.”

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.