



## MEDIA RELEASE

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# Abortion Rights are Human Rights – access to abortion is essential to gender equity

MELBOURNE – Monday 27 June 2022

Victorian health services have provided a united front in support of abortion access in response to the overturning of landmark Roe v Wade abortion legislation in America with hospitals, women's health services and community health organisations signing on to a [state-wide statement](#) of support for abortion provision.

The statement, signed by over 20 leading healthcare providers, academic and research institutions, calls for governments and MPs to invest in and stand up for accessible abortion care in Victoria. Whilst abortion is safe and legal in Victoria, access to this vital service is not guaranteed: "Many public hospitals remain without abortion provision, and abortion seekers often have to travel several hours for services" said Dianne Hill, CEO of Women's Health Victoria. "Threats to abortion provision overseas increase stigma in Australia, which discourages people from seeking abortions, and encourages anti-choice activists to spread misinformation".

With one in four Australian women seeking an abortion in their lifetime, Government support is vital in ensuring that this essential health service is accessible to all abortion seekers, "we've enjoyed bipartisan support for abortion access in Victoria for many years now" continues Hill, "and we need to see both state and federal governments make public commitments to ensuring that they will protect and uphold abortion rights. We won't let the trend in US and elsewhere of denying reproductive autonomy take root in Victoria, and we want all levels of Government in Australia to support us in this."

Across Victoria abortion access is inequitable, recently released data from the [Victorian Women's Health Atlas](#) indicates no medical abortion prescribers in 12 Victorian LGAs, "we know that in 42 of 79 Victorian LGAs, fewer than half of all medical abortion services received by patients were prescribed from within the local area" continues Hill. Rural women and women experiencing other forms of disadvantage are most severely affected by access issues, "for women in rural towns, travelling 4 hours for an abortion service might just make it inaccessible, even if the abortion itself is affordable – that person might need to pay for overnight accommodation, travel, and childcare. Women who aren't confident communicating in English, those with little understanding of the health system, and young people are all severely affected by inaccessibility" Hill adds.

Abortion has been decriminalised in Victoria since 2008, and the State Government has increasingly supported access through a variety of initiatives including establishment of eight sexual and reproductive health hubs, the 1800 My Options contraception, abortion and

sexual health phonenumber, and the Clinical Champions Project. Yet, there is more work to do, “ongoing leadership is vital to ensuring we maintain these fundamental reproductive rights across Australia, to ensure that all women and people with uteruses can choose when and if they become pregnant and give birth” says Hill, “We welcome the new Victorian Health Minister Mary-Anne Thomas’ recent comments about ensuring equity of access to healthcare services, and look forward to working with the state government to ensure that all Victorian women can exercise their reproductive rights”.

### Quotes attributable to Dianne Hill, CEO, Women’s Health Victoria

“We’ve enjoyed bipartisan support for abortion access in Victoria for many years now, and we need to see both state and federal governments make public commitments to ensuring that they will protect and uphold abortion rights. We won’t let the trend in US and Europe of denying reproductive autonomy continue in Victoria, and we want all levels of Government in Australia to support us in this.”

“Stigma is one of the greatest barriers to abortion access in Victoria. A strong statement from all levels of Government, with associated funding, would provide abortion seekers and abortion providers with the confidence that this service will be protected and maintained, despite overseas trends.”

-ENDS-

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#### About Women’s Health Victoria

Women’s Health Victoria (WHV) is a not-for-profit, state-wide women’s health promotion, information and advocacy service, focused on improving the lives of Victorian women. WHV works collaboratively with women, health professionals, policy makers and community organisations to influence and inform health policy and service delivery for women. The work of WHV is underpinned by a social model of health and a commitment to reducing inequities in health which arise from social, economic and environmental determinants. **For more information, visit [whv.org.au](http://whv.org.au)**