

# Abortion in Aotearoa New Zealand

Abortion

Law

Reform

Association

OF NEW ZEALAND

**WEB**

[www.alranz.org](http://www.alranz.org)

**PHONE**

+64 21-082-76474

**EMAIL**

[info@alranz.org](mailto:info@alranz.org)

*‘When arriving people where outside with signs, it made me scared to come in and was physically shaking.’*

*‘The moment I saw them outside I was panic and shy. They are intruding my personal decision one way or the other. I have to cover my face when next am coming here cos I don’t feel safe or secure.’*

Written comments by abortion patients, 2015 UK Study.

## The Thames Service...

provides abortion care for women from Waikato and Bay of Plenty District Health Boards. (BOP DHB does not have its own surgical abortion service.) In 2015, 180 abortions were performed in Thames, out of a total across the country of 13,155. (Other regional services are in Hamilton and Tokoroa, with an early medication-only abortion service in Tauranga.) Some women have to travel long distances to Thames for care.

## Harassment:

The Abortion Supervisory Committee, which oversees abortion law and service in Aotearoa New Zealand, has raised this matter with Parliament, stating in its 2013 annual report that “Harassment of those seeking or providing abortion services remains a significant concern to the Committee, especially as disturbing reports of violence at overseas abortion clinics continue to surface”.

## Waikato DHB: What Action Are They Taking?

ALRANZ asked Waikato DHB what complaints they have received about protesters in Thames and what action they had taken. Here’s what they said: *“The local hospital staff have received informal, verbal complaints that the protests are distressing to those attending the hospital and their whanua [sic]. The DHB has confirmed with the Thames Anglican Parish that the church grounds adjacent to the hospital are not available for the protests and has informed those involved that the hospital grounds are similarly unavailable.”*

## Harassment is Harmful:

Anti-abortion protests outside clinics, even peaceful ones, cause distress. A 2015 UK study reinforced anecdotal reports from around Aotearoa NZ in reporting that women feel intimidated, fearful, uncomfortable and distressed by the presence of protesters.



## One in four...

women in Aotearoa New Zealand has an abortion in her lifetime. • Last year, 18% of known pregnancies ended in abortion. • 57% of women having abortions are already mothers. • Nearly 2/3 of abortions were a woman's first. • 54% of women having an abortion in 2015 were aged between 20-19. • 32 girls aged 11-14 had an abortion, or 0.2% of the total. • The abortion rate in Aotearoa NZ has been falling since 2007. • 90% of abortions are carried out in the first trimester (through week 12) and 55% at less than 10 weeks.

## The Law

Abortion is regulated as a crime, not a health matter, in Aotearoa New Zealand.

According to the Crimes Act 1961, until the 20th week of pregnancy, abortion is only legal if two specially appointed doctors (called certifying consultants) agree that one of the following is the case: (i) that continuing the pregnancy risks serious danger to the life or physical or mental health of the woman; (ii) that there's a substantial risk the child "would be so physically or mentally abnormal as to be seriously handicapped"; (iii) where the pregnancy is the result of incest or sex with a guardian; (iv) where the pregnant "woman or girl is severely subnormal".

Rape (called "sexual violation" under the law) and extreme ages of the girl or woman may be taken into account, but are not grounds for abortion. After the 20th week of pregnancy abortion is only legal to save the life of the woman, or to prevent serious permanent injury to her physical or mental health.

## Danger to Mental Health...

was the legal ground (i) used to approve for more than 97% of all abortions in 2014.

## \$4 million...

was paid in the year to June 2015 to certifying consultants, two of whom must approve every abortion performed according to the grounds in the Crimes Act.

## ALRANZ believes...

Abortion should be treated as a health matter not a criminal one, and should be removed from the Crimes Act.

Access to reproductive health care, including the ability to choose contraception or abortion or to become a parent, are human rights, and a vocal minority should not be allowed to impose its view on others.

There is no need to have specified grounds for abortion. It is hypocritical and demeaning to women that more than 97% are carried out on the grounds of mental health.

## Sources:

- Abortion Supervisory Committee annual reports
- Statistics New Zealand, abortion statistics 2016
- "A Hard Enough Decision to Make": Anti-abortion activism outside clinics in the eyes of clinic users," by Dr. Graeme Hayes and Dr. Pam Lowe. Ashton University. 2015.
- "Ladies in Waiting: The timeliness of first trimester pregnancy termination services in New Zealand," by Martha Silva, Rob McNeil & Toni Ashton. *Reproductive Health*, 2010.