



November 2004

Abortion in Australia

It is difficult to estimate accurately the number of abortions performed in Australia. Reliable data is only available from South Australia and Western Australia where terminations are notifiable by law and reported annually¹.

Statistics from South Australia indicate that 5214 abortions were carried out in 2003. This was a reduction from the 2002 figure of 5463 and 2001 figure of 5572². In Victoria there were 18514 abortions carried out during 2002 and 2003³.

The Health Insurance Commission (HIC) collects information on the number of Medicare claims for procedures done under the benefits schedule item referring to *evacuation of the contents of the gravid uterus by curettage or suction curettage (first trimester)* (item number 35643)⁴. This service includes curettes that are part of a pregnancy termination, as well as curettes for miscarriages. HIC figures showed the number of Medicare funded abortions fell from 76846 in 1997 to 73191 in 2004⁵.

Abortion rates are highest among women in the 25-34 year age group however all socio-economic backgrounds, religions, races, levels of education and employment are represented⁶.

Evidence from Victoria suggests that the proportion of mid-late term abortions is very small. Late Term Abortion refers to pregnancy beyond 20 weeks gestation⁷. In recent years the most common reason for late termination is the diagnosis of fetal abnormality. In 2002 and 2003 approximately 5% of abortions took place between 14 and 19 weeks into pregnancy⁸.

Using statistics acquired using the Medicare benefits schedule item referring to management of second-trimester labour it is not possible to differentiate between induced and miscarriage. A 1990 study using Medicare figures for NSW indicated that there were 240 second trimester terminations (induced and spontaneous) in that year. About 29% of these were for women aged 35 plus, suggesting some second trimester termination could be undertaken due to suspected congenital abnormalities⁹.

(Footnotes)

- ¹ Ford, Jane, Nassar, Natasha et al 2003 *Reproductive Health Indicators, Australia, 2002*, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare National Perinatal Statistics Unit, AIHW cat. No. PER 20, Canberra
- ² *No Reliable Abortion Figures: Abbott Daily Telegraph Online Edition*, 10 November
- ³ Moncrief, Marc, Dunn, Amanda, Alcorn Gay 2004 *Minister Denies Abortion Rate is Soaring The Age*, 10 November
- ⁴ Adelson, Pamela, Frommer, Michael, Weisberg, Edith 1996 *Termination of Pregnancy in New South Wales 1990* Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health v20(1) pp64-68
- ⁵ *No Reliable Abortion Figures: Abbott Daily Telegraph Online Edition*, 10 November 2004
- ⁶ Dixon, Nicolee 2003 *Abortion Law Reform: An Overview of Current Issues Queensland Parliamentary Library, Brisbane* <http://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/parlib/publications/publications.htm>
- ⁷ Medical Practitioners Board of Victoria Report on Late *Termination of Pregnancy* April 1998
- ⁸ Moncrief, Marc, Dunn, Amanda, Alcorn Gay 2004 *Minister Denies Abortion Rate is Soaring The Age*, 10 November
- ⁹ Adelson, Pamela, Frommer, Michael, Weisberg, Edith 1996 *Termination of Pregnancy in New South Wales 1990* Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health v20(1) pp64-68



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