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Abortion statistics



HOW MANY ABORTIONS IN AUSTRALIA?

In 2005 The Department of Health and Ageing estimated that there are approximately 83,000 abortions in Australia each year (see Table 1 below) [1]. This number equates to almost one abortion for every 2.8 births [2]. However, the exact numbers of abortions are extremely difficult to obtain [3]. What are the reasons for this?

 To start with:

- There is no routinely collected national abortion statistics.
- Only South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory collect abortion statistics. But there are reports of discrepancies existing within the various Health Departments management, and amongst abortionists/doctors and clinic staff, regarding the documenting of abortion related information. Under reporting, or even failure to report, appears a frequent occurrence.
- They reflect only abortions from which a Medicare rebate has been claimed.
- They do not report on abortions in which no rebate is claimed nor do they capture women who have abortions as public patients in a public hospital. For example, approximately only one quarter of all abortions in Victoria are performed in the public health system. [4]
- Abortions performed after 24 weeks are not included in the data, as there is no rebate through the Medicare Benefits Schedule. [5]

(For more information on this, see *Additional note* on abortion statistics; bottom of article)

Table 1: Estimated number of induced abortions in Australia in 2004

Age group	<15	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45+	Total
Estimated induced abortions	296	13,262	21,504	17,072	15,258	10,432	4,888	497	83,210

HOW MANY ABORTION PROVIDERS?

In 2005 there were 811 abortion providers, with 205 public hospitals providing abortions. [6]
It is recognised that there are "career" abortionists taking advantage of Medicare rebates. For example, in 2005 there were 11 doctors who each did more than 2,000 Medicare funded abortions for the year; that's an average 38.5 doctors a week or nearly 8 per day (if a 5 day working week) [7].

HOW MANY ABORTED BABIES ARE 'BORN ALIVE'?

Quite often babies are delivered alive as a result of a failed abortion. What happens to the babies? Because these babies are deemed so unwanted they are then left to die, and in some cases even deliberately killed (for more information see site's *Born alive and left to die*).

*** If statistics were unavailable for a particular state or territory, the explanation, title of spokesperson and date is given.

- **Australian Capital Territory (ACT)** – Aig Director, Office of the Chief Health Officer Population Health Division: "The ACT does not gather data on termination of pregnancy ..." 15th October 2008

- **New South Wales (NSW)** – Health Ethics Branch NSW A/Senior Policy Officer: "Data on terminations for NSW is problematic." 9th October 2008

Note – In NSW, in 2000, a coroner investigated the death of a baby found alive in a bin after an abortion in Sydney's Westmead Hospital and also learned there had been more such cases, but none had been officially reported. [8]

- **Queensland (Qld)** – No response from Health Department after several attempts. Contacted the Health Department during late 2008 and early 2009.

- **South Australia (SA)** – The number of aborted babies delivered alive and left to die were as follows: in 2000 – 7 babies; 2001 – 14; 2002 – 7; 2003 – 3; 2004 – 13; 2005 – 5; 2006 – 3; 2007 – 5. [9]

- **Tasmania (Tas)** – No response from Health Department after several attempts. Contacted the Health Department during late 2008 and early 2009.

- **Victoria (Vic)** – In 2007, 54 babies were delivered alive and left to die. [10]

- **Western Australia (WA)** – Department of Health, Information Division Program Manager: "A data item related to whether aborted babies are born alive is not part of the Abortions Collection and therefore this information is not available within Information Management and Reporting." 16th December 2008

- **Northern Territory (NT)** – A/Executive Director, Acute care: Anecdotally, advised that there were no instances. 20th October 2008

Note – The Executive advisors failed to mention at least one officially reported case:

A coroner's hearing in Darwin reported how 'Jessica Jane', was born alive and left to die in a Darwin hospital in 1998 after a botched abortion. Northern Territory coroner, Greg Cavanagh, was told of how Jessica's a tiny but perfect little body, was slipped into a stainless steel dish and left alone in a room where she cried until she died, 80 minutes later.

At the inquest Cavanagh called, he was also told that other late-term babies had been born alive after abortions in the NT, only to be left to die. And none of those deaths had been officially reported or publicised. [11]

The following statistics are from South Australia

WHY ARE ABORTIONS PERFORMED?

Table 2: Reasons given for abortions, South Australia, 2006:

Reason given for abortion	Number	Percentage
Specified medical condition	16	0.3
Serious handicap of foetus	141	2.9
Mental health of woman	4,726	96.7
Pre-existing psychiatric disorder	4	0.1
Assault on person (eg rape or incest)	1	0.0
Total	4,888	100%

HOW MANY ABORTIONS BY GESTATION AGE?

Table 3: Number of abortions by gestation in weeks, South Australia, 2006:

Gestation (weeks)	Number of Abortions	Percentage
5	32	0.7
6	293	5.8
7	733	15
8	1,298	26.5
9	861	17.6
10	536	11
11	336	6.9
12	240	4.9
13	133	2.7
14	131	2.7
15	58	1.2
16	35	0.7
17	51	1
18	38	0.8
19	46	0.9
20	33	0.7
21	24	0.5
22	17	0.3
23-25	4	0.1
Total	4,889*	100

HOW ARE ABORTIONS PERFORMED?

Table 4: Method of abortion, South Australia, 2006

Method	Number	Per cent
Dilatation and curettage	45	0.9
Hysterotomy-abdominal	1	0.0
Vacuum aspiration	4,346	88.9
Intrauterine injection	0	0
Vaginal prostaglandin	70	1.4
Dilatation and evacuation	288	7.9
Oral or vaginal misoprostol	38	0.8
Total	4888	100.0

WHAT ARE THE AGES OF WOMEN HAVING ABORTIONS?

Table 5: Abortion of pregnancy by age. South Australia, 2006

Age (years)	Number	%
13	3	0.1
14	13	0.3
15	49	1.0
16	131	2.7
17	200	4.1
18	287	5.9
19	315	6.4
20 – 24	1,355	27.7
25 – 29	810	18.6
30 – 34	807	16.5
35 – 39	584	11.9
40 – 44	222	4.5
45+	12	0.2
Total	4,888	100.0

WHAT IS THE MARITAL STATUS OF WOMEN HAVING ABORTIONS?

Table 6: Abortions by marital status, South Australia, 2006

Marital Status	Number	%
Never married	2,463	50.4
Married	1,188	24.3
De facto	549	11.2
Widowed	4	0.1
Divorced / Separated	587	12.0
Not Known	97	2.0
Total	4,888	100.0

HOW MANY WOMEN HAD PREVIOUS ABORTIONS?

Table 7: Previous abortions by age of women, South Australia, 2006

Age (years)	Number	%	% of age group
< 15	1	0.1	5.3
15 – 19	145	7.7	14.8
20 – 24	469	25.0	34.6
25 – 29	453	24.2	49.8
30 – 34	410	21.9	50.8
35 – 39	302	16.1	51.7
40+	93	5.0	39.7
Total	1,873	100.0	38.3 (of the 4,888 abortions for 2006)

Table 8: Number of previous abortions by age of women, South Australia, 2006

Number of previous terminations	Age in years	Total							
Under 15	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40+	Number	Per cent	
0	15	837	886	457	397	282	141	3,015	61.7
1	1	123	318	256	228	189	49	1,164	23.8
2	0	21	114	113	100	71	26	445	9.1
3	0	1	26	52	44	21	11	155	3.2
4+	0	0	11	32	38	21	7	109	2.2
Total	16	982	1,355	910	807	584	234	4,888	100

WHERE ARE ABORTIONS PERFORMED?

Table 9: Hospital where abortions were performed, South Australia, 2006

Hospital	Number of terminations	Percent of terminations
Metropolitan-public	4,417	90.4
Metropolitan-private	191	3.9
Country	280	5.7
Total	4,888	100.0

Table 10: Abortions in metropolitan public hospitals, South Australia, 2006

Metropolitan public	Number	Percent
The Queen Elizabeth	75	1.7
Pregnancy Advisory Centre	2,690	60.9
Women's and Children's	596	13.5
Royal Adelaide	102	2.3
Lyell McEwin	254	5.8
Modbury	7	0.2
Flinders Medical Centre	328	7.4
Noarlunga Medical Centre	365	8.3
Total	4,417	100.0

WHAT TYPE OF DOCTORS ARE PERFORMING ABORTIONS?

Table 11: Category of doctor performing abortion, South Australia, 2006

Category of doctor	Number of terminations	Per cent of terminations
Obstetrician/gynaecologist	958	19.8
Trainee obstetrician/gynaecologist	123	2.5
Medical practitioner in family advisory clinic	2,680	75.3
General practitioner	117	2.4
Total	4,888	100.0

Additional note on abortion statistics

The 83,210 figure does not include abortions which were privately funded in those States that do not have compulsory notification (including the three most populous states, New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland). If no Medicare claim was made and the procedure was not performed in a public hospital, they would not appear in the abortion data. For example, a 2004 survey of eight large abortion Victorian clinics over a 12 week period (1,329 women responded) revealed that 13.1% did not have a Medicare card or were not intending to claim a Medicare rebate, and a further 20.7% were not sure whether they would submit a claim. [12]

In addition, abortions caused by chemical drugs, such Morning After Pill, and similar, are not included in the 2004 abortion statistics.

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- Table 1 AIHW, Australia's mothers and babies. Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare; 2004:Table 3-33 p52

- Table 2 South Australian Abortion Reporting Committee, 2006, Fourth Annual Report, Table 4a

- Table 3 *Number of terminations by gestation in SA 2006:* Information supplied by SA Health Department

- Table 4 South Australian Abortion Reporting Committee, Fourth Annual Report, 2006, Table 10

- Table 5 *Pregnancy Outcome in South Australia 2006;* Government SA Dept Health report: Table 38, p 37

- Table 6 Ibid, Table 40, p39

- Table 7 Ibid, Table 46a, p41

- Table 8 South Australian Abortion Reporting Committee, Fourth Annual Report, 2006, Table 6b

- Table 9 Ibid, Table 8a

- Table 10 Ibid, Table 8b

- Table 11 Ibid, Table 9

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