

Northern Ireland: Abortion services cease at South Eastern Trust following Health Department failure



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More than a third of million people affected across County Antrim and County Down

Health Minister's failure to commission services and provide funding is forcing vital abortion care to a halt

Women still have a legal entitlement to this service but will have to travel to other trust areas

'The Minister has created a postcode lottery for healthcare, forcing women to travel in the midst of a pandemic' – Patrick Corrigan

Amnesty International has learned that Northern Ireland's South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has stopped referrals to their early medical abortion service as of today (5 January) due to the failure of Department of Health to commission and resource services.

Despite abortion regulations taking effect from March 2020, the Department of Health's failure to commission services means that health trusts have been left to absorb the costs and resource abortion care themselves, whilst battling through a pandemic.

Amnesty has repeatedly called on the Department to commission services to ensure they are sustainable and accessible but to date the Department has failed.

The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has been

forced to disband early medical abortion services under these conditions, affecting people in Lisburn, North Down, Ards and Down. Women will now have to travel outside their own areas in order to access abortion in other health trusts.

“The fact that the South Eastern Trust has had to stop this service is a direct consequence of Minister Robin Swann’s disastrous failure to commission and fund these health services.

“The Minister has created a postcode lottery for healthcare by forcing women to travel in the midst of a pandemic. At the very time when government is telling people not to travel, this is nothing less than a scandal.

“Abortion is legal and women must not be refused this service. The Health Minister must urgently commission these services and ensure all of health trusts have the necessary resources to care for those who need this healthcare. If Robin Swann continues to refuse to act, then Secretary of State Brandon Lewis must intervene.”

Abortion regulations took effect in March 2020. Since then, health trusts have provided an interim early medical abortion service to ensure access whilst services are commissioned. This service has been facilitated through Informing Choices NI, which acts as the Central Access Point.

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