

## Abortion in Northern Ireland

Email to MPs, 01/06/2018

Dear MP,

Doctors for Choice UK are a group of UK-based doctors and medical students who promote comprehensive, evidence-based reproductive healthcare including safe and timely abortion, and support and campaign for the decriminalisation of abortion in the UK.

As doctors, we see the negative impact existing laws have on women who are seeking treatment, for instance by requiring two doctors' signatures for a medical procedure or requiring women to return to the clinic twice to receive a medical abortion. Nowhere are these impacts more keenly felt than in Northern Ireland where a Victorian law forces women to travel over the sea to access basic healthcare or risk being prosecuted as at least three women have been in recent years. This situation cannot be allowed to continue.

**We call for Westminster to act to ensure that the right of women to access essential healthcare is realised in Northern Ireland through decriminalisation of abortion.**

We are not the only medical professionals calling for decriminalisation. You may also be interested in the position of official medical bodies on Northern Ireland and decriminalisation –

- The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists [said this week](#):  
*“The current legal situation means healthcare professionals in Northern Ireland struggle to provide support for women requesting an abortion or safely manage any post-abortion complications. We recognise that this is a highly politicised issue but the current situation is unacceptable and leaves doctors, nurses and midwives working in a precarious legal vacuum in this core part of women’s sexual and reproductive healthcare... Decriminalisation of abortion presents a unique opportunity to address once and for all the inconsistent and unequal access to abortion care in Northern Ireland and **we call on the UK government to decriminalise abortion across all UK nations.**”*
- The Royal College of Midwives [said this week](#):  
*“The RCM wants to see equitable access to all aspects of healthcare for the women of Northern Ireland. Unfortunately we are now in the middle of this vacuum where women in Northern Ireland still have to travel and or take illegal abortion pills risking prosecution. The recent result in the abortion referendum in the Republic of Ireland makes changes to legislation in Northern Ireland all the more urgent and **the RCM hopes this can be achieved quickly, despite the absence of a government in Northern Ireland.**”*
- The British Medical Association [said last year](#) after their conference voted to support decriminalisation of abortion:  
*“This is clearly a sensitive and complex issue, on which doctors voiced a broad range of views during an informed and considered debate. Abortion is currently a crime, with exceptions, throughout the UK. Following the debate **the majority of doctors were clear that abortion should be treated as a medical issue rather than a criminal one.** What must be clear is that decriminalisation does not mean deregulation.”*

We hope that you will consider supporting calls for Westminster to act on decriminalising abortion in Northern Ireland and ensuring no more women are unduly criminalised for seeking essential healthcare.

If you need any more information or would like to confirm your support, please get in touch.

Dr Jayne Kavanagh  
Co-Chair, Doctors for Choice UK  
[www.doctorsforchoiceuk.org](http://www.doctorsforchoiceuk.org)