

Birthline Pregnancy Support Inc
SUBMISSION - Universal Access to Reproductive Healthcare
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs

In this submission, Birthline wishes to address the following Terms of Reference as outlined in ***bold italics***.

“...services that offer options to women to empower choice and control in decision-making about their bodies’, with particular reference to:

b. cost and accessibility of reproductive healthcare, including pregnancy care and termination services across Australia, particularly in regional and remote areas;

and

i. any other related matter.

The availability of termination services is widespread across Australia and is often the only option offered to women with unplanned pregnancies. However, not all women wish to go down this option and many look for alternative choices.

Often a pregnant woman in distress would be comforted by the fact that there are others who are willing to support her during her pregnancy and that pregnancy care is available for her if she needs it during this time.

It is crucial that the services Birthline offers during this decision-making time is available to all who are unsure about their decisions. Birthline offers our callers the time to discuss all options whether they are considering having an abortion, continuing with their pregnancy, or seeking to pursue the adoption process. Informed decision involves providing women with information to investigate all options available to her.

Many of our callers would be contacting Birthline from remote or regional areas. Many of them feel isolated and lonely during these trying times and would often need someone to talk to. Their partners and /or friend and families may not be available to give them the emotional support they need during this time. Most of them would just like to have a “chat” or would like to have someone to be a “listening ear”. Often our callers will phone Birthline for emotional support during their pregnancy.

Birthline offers free 24/7 telephone counselling support for pregnant women and their families who are experiencing emotional distress during this time. Women in remote or regional areas especially, would be able to peruse of these services easily through the telephone. If there ever was a need for women in remote and regional areas to be supported with material goods such as baby clothes, prams, cots, bassinets etc., Birthline is always willing (and has done so in the past) to provide these goods to some of our callers. Birthline will find a way to somehow send these goods to them or will find another agency to help them.

Our caller statistics indicate, that for women, having an abortion can result in grief and depression. Our 2021-2022 Statistics is attached for your reference.

Birthline offers after-abortion recovery counselling to our callers too. Our callers have access to free and confidential after abortion counselling through the 24-hour telephone-line and face-to-face services. After abortion counselling can offer support in the following areas: closure, acceptance, grief therapy, relationships, identity issues, behavioural therapy, and parenting.

Birthline also provides support for those who have experienced pregnancy loss through miscarriage or stillbirth. Ongoing support is available if caller wishes.

In summary, Birthline therefore provides services and/or a listening ear to those who are -

- a. undecided about their pregnancy
- b. considering abortion
- c. wishing to continue with their pregnancy
- d. wishing to pursue the process of adoption
- c. experiencing loss and grief through miscarriage, stillbirth, or after-abortion.

I also wish to present below in detail the services Birthline Pregnancy Support Inc offers to pregnant women and their families since 1972 (50 years!).

About Birthline Pregnancy Support Inc

- Birthline is a pregnancy counselling and support organisation committed to providing free and confidential telephone and face-to-face counselling, material assistance, pregnancy tests, information and resources to pregnant women and their families.
- Birthline believes all women are entitled to receiving complete and accurate information requested to enable informed decision making relating to their pregnancy and options moving forward.
- Birthline supports callers taking sufficient time to fully understand the nature, consequences and risks of different options relating to their pregnancy.
- Birthline supports the perspective of the client seeking counselling whether they are considering parenting the child, arranging adoption or an abortion.
- Birthline provides non-judgemental and non-directive counselling to all clients, no matter their personal situation, maintaining client confidentiality and person-centred outcomes.
- Birthline is not affiliated with any religious or political group.
- Birthline counsellors are organisationally mandated to refrain from medical referral including recommending/advising on medical matters. This includes referral for abortion.
- Birthline continues after 50 years to provide unparalleled service to the local community and is accessed nation-wide through the telephone counselling line.

Birthline Services

Birthline provides the following services free of charge

- 24Hour telephone counselling - non-directive and non-judgemental telephone counselling accessed nation-wide by over two-thousand callers annually.
- Face-to-Face Counselling – non-directive and non-judgemental counselling by appointment or walk-in.
- Material Assistance - such as cots, bassinets, prams, change-tables, highchairs, and baby clothes among other items to support women and their children. These items have been donated by generous members of the community and are then passed on to families in need free of charge.
- Pregnancy Testing – kits are available free of charge.

- Information and Resources - to enable informed decision making relating to pregnancy.
- After Abortion care and recovery - access to free and confidential after abortion counselling through the 24-hour telephone-line and face-to-face services. After abortion counselling can offer support in the following areas: closure, acceptance, grief therapy, relationships, identity issues, behavioural therapy, and parenting.
- Pregnancy Loss and Grief Counselling – counselling support provided for those who have experienced pregnancy loss through miscarriage or stillbirth. Ongoing support is available if caller wishes.
- Emotional Support – ongoing emotional support is available for pregnant women who may find it challenging to cope emotionally during or post pregnancy.

Birthline - Supporting Welfare Agencies

Birthline is accessed by people sometimes in very vulnerable and difficult circumstances.

Birthline receives calls by individuals and agency case workers seeking support for their clients, dealing with poverty, homelessness, domestic violence, mental health issues, bars to health-funding, isolation, house arrest or imprisonment, foster care arrangements and settling in as refugee and migrant families.

Birthline is accessed daily by social services among which are St Vincent de Paul's Australian Migrant Refugee Centre, CFARN, Anglicare, CaFHS, Strong Start, Uniting Care Wesley, Mission Australia, Lyell McEwin, Modbury, Flinders and W&C Hospitals, Australian Refugee Association, Correctional Services, Life Without Barriers, AMES Australia, various women's shelters such as Yarrow Place and accommodation agencies such as Louise Place.

Both government and non-government organisation connect their clients to Birthline to source items vital to the health and safety of their infants. Many new arrivals to the region gain their first impressions of welcome through Birthline's genuine care and providence.

Donations to Birthline

Birthline operates solely on the financial donations of its supporters. The community life that surrounds Birthline's daily activities, its reach and practical support provision are crucial to the wellbeing of many volunteers, clients, and allied service providers both locally, State and Nationwide.

SUMMARY OF BIRTHLINE CALLER STATISTICS FOR THE YEAR OF 2021-2022

| TOTALS | | OF THE PERSON WITH THE PROBLEM | FIRST CALL | REPEAT CALLS | FACE TO FACE | | |
|--|-------------|--------------------------------------|---------------|-----------------|--------------------|------------|-------------|
| Total Number of First Calls | 1020 | Single | 174 | 128 | 35 | | |
| Total Number of Repeat Calls | 639 | Married | 189 | 170 | 65 | | |
| Total Number of Face to Face | 238 | Defacto | 115 | 69 | 19 | | |
| Total Number of Counselling Sessions | 1897 | Single Parent | 20 | 53 | 21 | | |
| Total Number of Cases from Previous Y | 76 | Div/Separated | 2 | 4 | 1 | | |
| | | Unknown | 520 | 215 | 97 | | |
| Total Number of Cases | 1096 | TOTAL | 1020 | 639 | 238 | | |
| <u>Sex of First Callers</u> | | REASON FOR CALL | CALL | CALLS | TO | R | L |
| | | Accommodation | 6 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 12 |
| Female | 907 | Adoption | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Male | 113 | Considering Abortion | 252 | 16 | 1 | 10 | 262 |
| | | Contraception | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| | | Fertility/ Infertility | 8 | 4 | 0 | 3 | 11 |
| <u>Time of Call (First + Repeat Calls)</u> | | Health / Drug | 152 | 4 | 1 | 15 | 167 |
| Office | 1084 | Material Assistance | 229 | 551 | 232 | 5 | 234 |
| At Home | 575 | Morning After Pill | 6 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 9 |
| | | Parenting | 4 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 8 |
| | | Paternity | 6 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 8 |
| <u>Pregnancy Status</u> | | Possible Pregnancy | 44 | 3 | 0 | 9 | 53 |
| Planning for Pregnancy | 13 | Post Abortion | 88 | 16 | 1 | 8 | 96 |
| Possible Pregnancy | 99 | Post Natal Depression | 6 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 8 |
| Confirmed Pregnancy | 643 | Pregnancy Loss | 11 | 2 | 1 | 12 | 23 |
| Post Natal | 134 | Pregnancy Related | 111 | 11 | 1 | 41 | 152 |
| Post Abortion | 94 | Pregnancy Test | 19 | 6 | 0 | 4 | 23 |
| Other Loss | 3 | Relationship Issues | 23 | 21 | 1 | 40 | 63 |
| Pregnancy Tests | 2 | Resources | 4 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 7 |
| | | Sexual Problem | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | | Other | 46 | 4 | 0 | 26 | 72 |
| | | TOTAL | 1020 | 639 | 238 | 193 | 1213 |

Baby Goods Given Out in 2021-2022

Number indicates number of families who received these items

| | | | |
|-----------------|----|--------------------|----|
| Bassinets | 49 | Bouncer | 56 |
| Bath | 47 | Sterilizer | 11 |
| Car seats | 48 | Mattress | 14 |
| Cot- Porta | 12 | Baby bundle-boy | 51 |
| Cot | 54 | Baby bundle -girl | 46 |
| Change Table | 24 | Baby bundle either | 8 |
| Highchair | 44 | Child bundle-boy | 11 |
| Pram | 59 | Child bundle-girl | 10 |
| Pram-double | 17 | Baby bottles | 17 |
| Stroller | 13 | Safety Gate | 21 |
| Stroller-double | 3 | Nappies | 44 |
| Bedding | 71 | Toys | 50 |