

29<sup>th</sup> May 2020

## **Modifying funded access to mifepristone and misoprostol**

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The New Zealand College of Midwives is the professional organisation for midwifery. Our members are employed and self-employed and collectively represent over 90% of the practising midwives in this country. There are approximately 3,000 midwives who hold an Annual Practising Certificate (APC). These midwives provide maternity care to, on average, 60,000 women and babies each year. New Zealand has a unique and efficient maternity service model which centres care around the needs of the woman and her baby.

Midwives undertake a four-year equivalent undergraduate degree to become registered followed by a first year of practice program that includes full mentoring by senior midwives. The undergraduate curriculum meets all international regulatory and education standards. Midwives are authorised prescribers in relation to their Scope of Practice as determined by the Midwifery Council.

Midwives provide an accessible and primary health care service for women in the community within a continuity of carer model as Lead Maternity Carers. Midwives can also choose to work within secondary and tertiary maternity facilities, providing essential care to women with complex maternity needs.

The College offers information, education and advice to women, midwives, district health boards, health and social service agencies and the Ministry of Health regarding midwifery and maternity issues. Midwives interface with a multitude of other health professionals and agencies to support women to achieve the optimum outcome for their pregnancies, health and wellbeing

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The New Zealand College of Midwives (the College) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the modification of funded access to mifepristone and misoprostol consultation. The Midwifery Council is the regulatory authority set up to protect the health and safety of the public in relation to midwifery education, professional conduct and ongoing competence. The Midwifery Scope of Practice is the legal definition of midwifery in New Zealand and is prescribed and defined by the Midwifery Council of New Zealand in accordance with Section 11 of the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act (HPCAA). The prescribing of medicines is within the scope of practice of a midwife.

The College made a submission, following member consultation, on the Abortion Legislation Bill, and we welcome the recent amendment which updates the primary legislation for abortion, set out in the Contraception, Sterilisation, and Abortion Act 1977 and the Crimes Act 1961. The College supported the removal of abortion from the Crimes Act and we consider this represents significant progress towards reproductive justice and the elimination of discrimination against women/wāhine in Aotearoa New Zealand. We also support funded access in the community to mifepristone and misoprostol to enable safe first trimester abortions within community and primary care settings. The College supports midwives who may not wish to provide abortion services, but we consider that information about access to a provider of these services must be provided to women without bias in a timely manner.

Feedback from the College is below.

1. Care for women undergoing termination of pregnancy is included within the scope of midwifery practice.
2. Prescribing drugs on their own responsibility, that are approved for use during pregnancy, labour, birth and in the postnatal period, is a competency of a practicing midwife.
3. The Midwifery Council has outlined the scope of practice of a midwife in respect to abortion. <sup>1</sup> As described by the Midwifery Council;

*“Competency 3.5 states that the midwife demonstrates an understanding of the needs of women/wāhine and their families/whānau in relation to infertility, complicated pregnancy, unexpected outcomes, abortion, adoption, loss and grief and applies this understanding to the care of women/wāhine and their*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.midwiferycouncil.health.nz/midwives/practice-issues>  
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*families/whānau as required.” “The provision of abortion care to women sits within the midwifery scope and the prescribing of medicines to facilitate this also sits within the scope of practice of a midwife “<sup>2</sup>*

4. The Midwifery Council has set out the knowledge and skills requirements for midwives to provide these abortion services.<sup>3</sup>
5. The College has a consensus statement about midwives prescribing drugs that are unapproved for use in maternity care or for the newborn.<sup>4</sup> It states that unapproved drugs should not be promoted or prescribed by a midwife on her own responsibility.
6. The College consensus statement about drugs unapproved for use in maternity care or for the newborn does mean that the profession does not support midwife prescribing of misoprostol at this time.
7. The College recommends that specific guidance for the use of Misoprostol in abortion care is developed in order that all practitioners whose scope includes abortion services are practically enabled to provide these services.

## Conclusion

The majority of early abortion services can be provided within the community and the College supports access to mifepristone and misoprostol outside of DHB services. As indicated in the feedback, the College supports funded access in the community to mifepristone and misoprostol to enable safe first trimester abortions within community and primary care settings.

Ngā mihi

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.midwiferycouncil.health.nz/midwives/practice-issues/midwifery-scope-practice-abortion-services-march-2020-faqs>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.midwiferycouncil.health.nz/midwives/practice-issues>

<sup>4</sup> New Zealand College of Midwives. (2010). *Consensus Statement: Prescribing of Drugs Unapproved for use in Maternity Care or for the Newborn* <https://www.midwife.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Prescribing-of-drugs-unapproved-for-use-in-maternity-care-or-for-the-newborn.pdf>

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