



DON'T CUT CHOICE!

What do public spending cuts and NHS reforms mean for reproductive rights?

Cuts in public spending and services are hitting women – especially low income and working class women – hardest. At the same time the NHS is going through the biggest re-organisation in its 62 year history. It's being asked to make £20 billion in 'efficiency savings' and already 27,000 NHS jobs are being cut, waiting times are rising and 'non essential' procedures are being delayed.

At a time like this it's vital that we don't forget that a women's reproductive rights – our rights to abortion, contraception and sexual health services – are a key part of the NHS and must be protected.

Reasons to celebrate

Under the Labour government, sexual health and abortion services and reducing teenage pregnancy were prioritised and invested in. Today we can proud that:

- ◆ The NHS pays for 94% of abortions carried out in England and Wales up from 73% in 1997
- ◆ 75% of abortions now take place at under 10 weeks, when the procedure is safest, compared to just 51% in 2002 – a real sign that access has improved waiting times have fallen
- ◆ Teenage pregnancy is at its lowest rate for 20 years; in some areas the rate has fallen by 45%

But because of ill-considered cuts and reforms introduced by the Con-Dem coalition, these improvements are now under threat:

- ✗ Contraceptive and sexual health clinics are being closed across the country
- ✗ Three-fifths of all Teenage Pregnancy Co-ordinators face losing their jobs in the next year
- ✗ The Independent Advisory Groups on Sexual Health and Teen Pregnancy have been abolished, and the Teen Pregnancy Strategy has been axed
- ✗ The Women's National Commission – a key voice advocating for women's abortion rights in Northern Ireland – has been closed
- ✗ Key service providers like Brook and Education for Choice are having to scale back their services because public service contracts aren't being renewed

So what's going on?

Under proposals in the government's Health and Social Care bill, Primary Care Trusts, which are responsible for commissioning abortion and sexual health services, will be abolished by 2013-14. 80% of the NHS budget will be handed to GP 'consortia' which will be responsible for 'buying' healthcare for their patients.

Abortion, contraception and sexual health will be part of a separate 'public health' budget which will be in the hands of Local Authorities and new Public Health Boards.

What are we worried about?

- Local Authorities are being given a huge new layer of responsibility at a time when they are having to make budget cuts of up to 25%
- Reproductive healthcare will be in the hands of local Directors of Public Health and elected Local Authority officials: how will they be held accountable for their decisions and how do we ensure commissioning and funding of abortion services doesn't become politicised?
- Under the government's Localism bill, charitable, religious and voluntary groups will become more involved in public service delivery. Already anti-choice groups like 'LIFE' are keen to provide 'pregnancy counselling'. How can we guarantee that women will receive unbiased, evidence-based information about their pregnancy options from groups who think abortion should be banned?
- If NHS services are outsourced to private – possibly American – healthcare providers in future, how will access to abortion services be protected if their US shareholders expect them to take an anti-choice stance?

Abortion Rights CUTS WATCH

We've started our own Cuts Watch to collect information on cuts, closures, delays and job losses in the field of abortion, contraception and sexual health services around the country. Email us at choice@abortionrights.org.uk and let us know what's happening in your local area and how you, your colleagues, friends and family are being affected, or forward us stories from the local press. We'll post news regularly on our website - www.abortionrights.org.uk - and we'll feed the info on to the TUC: www.falseeconomy.org.uk