



Yukon Legislative Assembly

Box 2703, Whitehorse, Yukon Y1A 2C6

June 24, 2024

Hon. Tracy-Anne McPhee
Minister of Health and Social Services
P.O. Box 2703
Whitehorse, Yukon
Y1A 2C6

Dear Minister McPhee,

Re: Abortion Access

In a 2018 press release, both the Yukon Government and the Yukon Hospital Corporation boasted that they would be offering universal coverage of Mifegymiso, to reduce barriers and provide more equal access for those seeking abortion services. Unfortunately, the reality of access does not match this claim.

Your current policy requires that a patient must visit their family doctor, the Yukon Sexual Health Clinic, or a walk-in clinic. Furthermore, a patient must have a follow up with the prescribing physician. That means that coverage is based out of hub communities with full-time resident physicians: Whitehorse, Dawson, Haines Junction, and Watson Lake. Everyone else in the territory is supposed to be able to access Mifegymiso AT NO COST through a physician in the closest community hub.

Yet the devil is in the details. The Whitehorse walk-in clinic is only open Monday to Friday during business hours. The Opal Clinic in Whitehorse is only open Tuesday mornings. The Yukon Sexual Health Clinic has no posted hours on its Facebook

page (it has no website of its own), and finding its open times requires a dedicated search through the Yukon Government health and wellness directory. The hours that are posted are limited to midweek business hours, and Tuesday evening drop-ins from 5-7pm.

This week we heard from an individual who experienced multiple barriers to accessing care. To start with, those living outside the communities only have access to pregnancy tests when clinics are open. For anyone who works regular 9-5 business hours, it means that there is no access at all to home pregnancy tests. That is not low barrier.

In theory this means that a person would have to drive to a community health centre hub just to find out if they are pregnant. However, all the community health care centres operate on those same business hours. The only exception is the Yukon Sexual Health Clinic, which does drop-ins rather than appointments. It would mean that a person would have to drive to Whitehorse from their community, and hope for space in the drop in. That is not low barrier.

Additionally, this set up means that access requires time off work, to drive to a health centre, in hopes of possibly getting access to a health care provider. That is not low barrier.

Sadly, this is just the beginning. This means that if a person cannot take time off and find a way into an approved health care centre, their only option is to travel to Whitehorse on a weekend and visit the ER. The hospital, as we all know, is very busy. That means hours of waiting just to pee in a cup, just to access a prescription for Mifegymiso. Filling that prescription after hours means paying up front for it, at a cost of more than \$300. That is not low barrier!

The Yukon government website states that this Mifegymiso is universally covered, no questions asked. That is not what is happening in the Yukon for those seeking access to abortion services. For anyone accessing abortion services, this care is essential and it is time sensitive. Many people are also having to deal with concerns about privacy.

It is dehumanizing for a person to face this kind of bureaucratic nightmare to get care that the Yukon government claims is universal, low barrier, and free. Access to abortion care in the Yukon is none of these.

The Yukon has billing codes for telemedicine in the Physician Fee Guide, and the Yukon Medical Council has a Practice Standard for telemedicine that could help facilitate the provision of prescriptions for abortion services. Telemedicine abortion is as safe and effective as medical abortions provided at clinics. It allows patients to access care in their homes, without extended travel. Expanding this availability is critical to providing abortion access for people in rural communities, who can't take time off for appointments, or who are at risk of stigma, discrimination, or other issues.

Will you please answer the following questions:

Why is there no centralized system to assist Yukoners with connecting to abortion services?

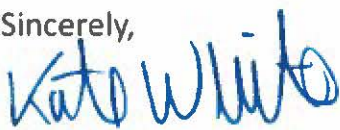
Why is information about abortion services so limited on the Yukon government website?

Why are pregnancy tests not freely and easily available in communities?

Why are people being charged hundreds of dollars for prescription medication that is supposed to be universally covered?

Why is there no telemedicine service to provide care to the people who are falling through the gaps of the existing system?

Sincerely,



Kate White

Leader of the Yukon NDP

MLA Takhini-Kopper King