

Advocating
for Change



**A WHO-
Compliant
Abortion
Advocacy
Toolkit for
Reproductive
Health Reform
in South Africa**

Prepared by:
*Candace Sara
Ciju*

LiA Destination:
*Centre for Human
Rights at the
University of
Pretoria*

Challenges and Realities of Safe Abortion Access in South Africa

Key Challenges:

Delays and Denial in the Public Sector:



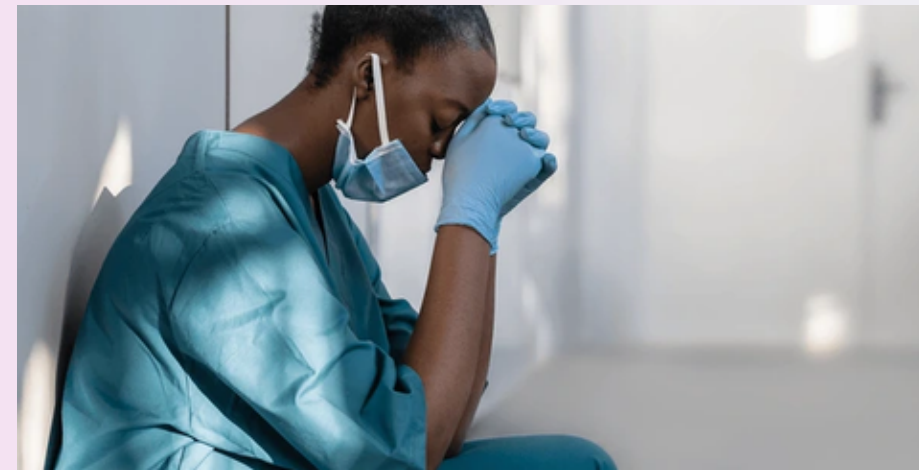
Limited Facility Access:



Unregulated Belief-Based Denial of Care:



Provider Hostility and Burnout:



Alarming Consequences:

In 2016, a university student in Johannesburg sought a legal abortion at four weeks of pregnancy. She was bounced between five public facilities, scolded for being sexually active, and ultimately denied care because of inconsistent and discriminatory facility practices. Unable to access care through the state, she turned to a private provider and paid R2000, borrowing money to afford it. When she discovered that she was pregnant a second time, she did not bother to go through the public service. Instead, she resorted to an unregulated backstreet provider. The experience nearly cost her life and resulted in her hospitalisation.

~ Case Study by Nontsikelelo Mpulo

Due to delays and systemic failures, 25% of abortions in South Africa occur in the second trimester, which is more than double the global average in countries where abortion is legal. Nearly half of all abortions are also estimated to take place outside the formal healthcare system, increasing risks of complications and death.

ABORTION ADVOCACY & ACTION TOOLKIT

*For Those on the Frontlines of Change: Empowering
Advocates, Providers, and Communities to Champion
Safe and Stigma-Free Abortion Care in South Africa*



JUNE 2025

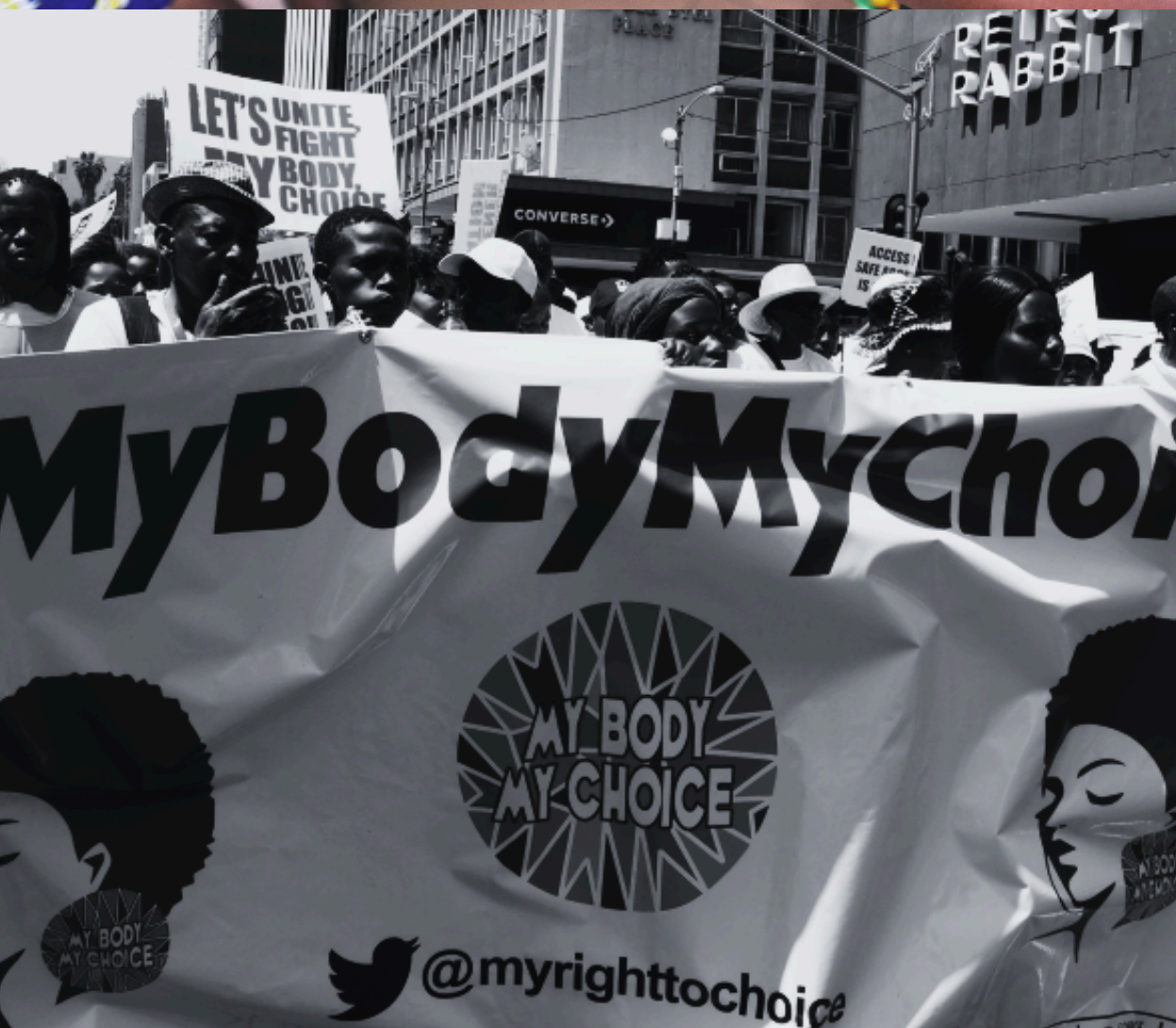
TABLE OF CONTENTS

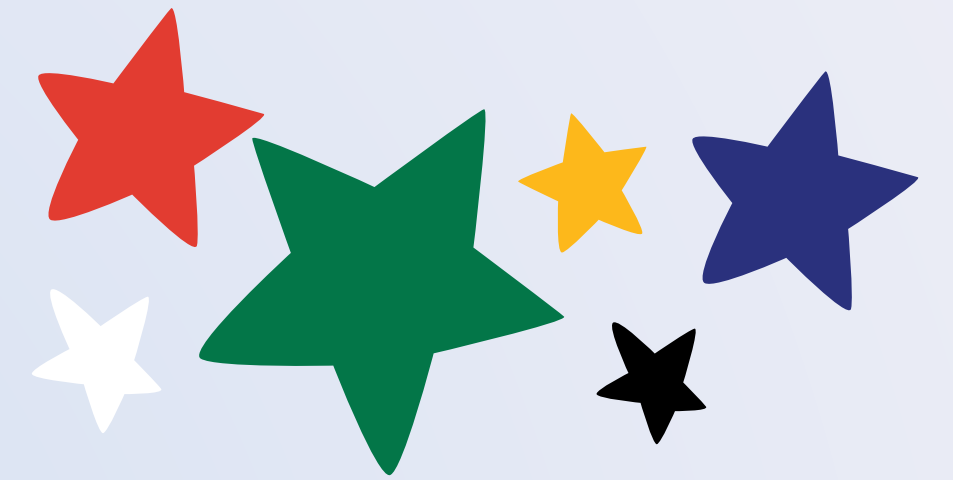
| | |
|--|----|
| 1. Introduction | 1 |
| 1.1. About the Toolkit | 1 |
| 1.2. Overview of safe abortion access as a fundamental aspect of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) | 1 |
| 1.3. Challenges and Realities of Safe Abortion Access in South Africa | 2 |
| 1.4. Aim of the Toolkit | 3 |
| 1.5. Intended Audience | 3 |
| 2. Legal and Policy Frameworks | 4 |
| 2.1. Choice on Termination of Pregnancy Act (CTOPA) 1996 | 4 |
| 2.2. The National Clinical Guideline for Implementation of the CTOPA (SA Guideline) | 4 |
| 2.3. Maputo Protocol | 4 |
| 2.4. International Human Rights Instruments | 4 |
| 2.5. WHO Guidelines on Abortion Care | 5 |
| 2.6. Comparison of WHO Guideline (2022) & WHO Handbook (2023) with SA Guideline (2019) | 6 |
| 3. Understanding Self-Managed Abortion (SMA) | 7 |
| 3.1. What is Self-Managed Abortion? | 7 |
| 3.2. Research supporting SMA in South Africa | 7 |
| 3.3. Who can support SMA dispersal in South Africa? | 8 |
| 3.4. Benefits of SMA | 8 |
| 3.5. Current realities of SMA services in South Africa | 8 |
| 4. Key Barriers to Abortion Access | 9 |
| 4.1. Unconstitutional Conscientious Objection (Belief-Based Denial of Care) | 9 |
| 4.2. Lack of Trained Providers | 9 |
| 4.3. Misinformation and Poor Referral Systems | 9 |
| 4.4. Stigmatization and Workplace Hostility | 10 |
| 4.5. Geographic and Infrastructural Challenges | 10 |
| 4.6. Challenges faced by Vulnerable Groups | 11 |
| 5. Strategies to Overcome Barriers to Safe Abortion | 12 |
| 5.1. Legal, Religious, and Rights-Based Arguments Against Conscientious Objection | 12 |
| 5.2. Training and Mentorship | 13 |
| 5.3. Workplace Support and De-Stigmatization Campaigns | 14 |
| 5.4. Improving Referral Networks | 14 |
| 5.5. Telemedicine and Digital Services for SMA | 15 |
| 5.6. Making Information Available, Standardised, and Accessible | 15 |
| 5.7. Developing Supportive Health Systems | 16 |
| 6. Putting Recommendations into Practice: Guidance for Service Providers | 18 |
| 6.1 For the National Department of Health, Hospitals, Clinics, and Pharmacies | 18 |
| 6.2. For Telemedicine Providers & Pharmacists | 21 |
| 6.3. For Doctors, Nurses, Clinical Associates, and other Healthcare Workers | 22 |
| 7. Putting Recommendations into Practice: Guidance for Abortion Advocates & Women's Health and Rights Organizations | 24 |
| 8. Abortion Provider & Activist Supports and Protection | 27 |
| 9. Resources and Appendices | 29 |
| 9.1. Glossary of Terms | 29 |
| 9.2. Reference List | 31 |



“The right of women to have an abortion should always be fully located and discussed as part of the rights and the transformation of society that enable the complete emancipation of women.”

Former Minister Bathabile Dlamini





*And that's a wrap on
Mzansi summer
2025!*

