



ABORTION RIGHTS **SCOTLAND** ANNUAL REPORT **MARCH 2022 - APRIL 2023**



Abortion Rights Scotland brings together individuals, trade unions, clinicians and policy makers to campaign for free, safe, legal and local abortion services, free from harassment, provided and delivered by the NHS in Scotland.

Introduction

Abortion Rights Scotland brings together members of the national (England/Scotland/Wales) Abortion Rights campaign.

Our membership is increasing and we look forward to building our campaigns in the year ahead.

All members are welcome to our monthly meetings, which take place on Zoom on the first Wednesday of each month, in the evening.

We have a steering group to assist with organising, which meets between the monthly meetings, and maintains our social media, responds to the press, deals with emails, minutes of meetings and follows up speaker requests. Two of our members attend the national Committee regularly, reporting on Scottish campaign activity, working with abortion rights activists in England and Wales, and building links internationally.





Abortion Rights is supported by a wide range of people including health service workers, politicians, students and trade unions. Affiliated membership is welcome at local, regional and national level.

A weekly newsletter goes out by email every Friday morning to all Abortion Rights supporters and members. During 2022, we established a monthly Scottish e-newsletter too, which is a good way of keeping members up to date with Scottish campaigns, political decisions, and wider discussions on abortion service provision.



It has been a busy year, with abortion featuring in both the national and local media. The devastating decision to overthrow Roe v Wade continues to impact across the United States and has repercussions further afield.

Abortion service provision, and abortion law, is devolved to the Scottish Parliament. Work continues on Safe Access Zones, ensuring service improvements post-COVID, and developing the discussion on moving to achieving decriminalisation in Scotland.



Campaign Activity

Roe v Wade

May and June 2022 were dominated by the potential, and then the actual, impact of the US Supreme Court ruling which overturned Roe v Wade. We organised two successful and well attended events outside the US Consulate in Edinburgh, with a rapid response on Friday 24th June, the day of the Court decision. Bringing politicians, students, American citizens living in Scotland, and trade union activists together, the speeches on that day conveyed solidarity, and the need for continued campaigning across the world.

‘Blanket Ban’

The highly commended play ‘Blanket Ban’ came to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in August, a powerful production conveying the consequences of Malta’s ban on abortion. A team of volunteers ensured that Abortion Rights campaign material was distributed at each performance, working with the theatre company.



Edinburgh Lothian Road – Anniversary of 1967 Abortion Act

In April 2022 and April 2023, we organised an event on Lothian Road in Edinburgh, to mark the enactment of the 1967 Act, and to register the widespread public support for safe, legal, NHS abortion care services. Each year SPUC (Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child) organise a ‘pro-life prayer chain’, against the 67 Act, and our action allows a visible and public response. The 22nd April 2023 event was well attended.

Decriminalisation Campaign

We have been collecting together policy statements from various organisations including political parties and the Scottish government. An Abortion Rights Scotland / Engender webinar in October 2022 ([available online click here](#)) set the scene with a briefing on the legislative position in Scotland (where the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act does not apply) and an introduction to the reality for abortion care services, when working within a criminal law framework, which is inappropriate for both patients and staff. Questions have been asked in the Scottish Parliament, and the Cross Party Group on Women’s Health will be taking up our suggestion of a panel discussion with health service practitioners and politicians later in the year.

We were invited to speak on our campaigns, including decriminalisation, at the Scottish Abortion Care Service Providers conference on 24th February 2023. It was really informative to be able to hear directly from the NHS providers - and our thanks go to Audrey Brown, as Chair of the Service Providers Network, for facilitating that invitation.

Discussions at this year's Abortion Rights Scotland AGM helped to work out our campaigning priorities and tactics, and we were delighted to have been able to follow up a link with a Member of the New South Wales Parliament Alex Greenwich, as we look at international examples of decriminalisation campaigns.

Working with Trade Unions

The STUC (Scottish Trades Union Congress) brings together representatives of all the trade unions in Scotland. The STUC also works closely with the TUC. The STUC has had a longstanding relationship with abortion rights campaigning, and has policy to support decriminalisation, buffer zones, and investment in the NHS services. The STUC Women's Committee has agreed abortion rights campaigning as one of its priorities for 2023.

In August 2022, the STUC hosted an online call with Gillian Mackay MSP, to discuss her proposed Safe Access Zones Member's Bill. Abortion Rights was included in this call. A number of trade unions had flagged up concerns about potential unintended



consequences of the Bill on any industrial disputes taking place, and assurances have been given throughout the Bill's progress that there will be no impact on trade union activity and rights to organise. This was reiterated at the April STUC congress, where a supportive motion was agreed.

A Webinar was held jointly between the STUC Women's Committee and Abortion Rights Scotland on Wednesday 3rd May 2023, with Gillian Mackay MSP, to discuss campaigning and joint work. Sinead Cook spoke on our behalf.

The STUC Women's conference was held in Glenrothes in early November 2022, and Abortion Rights Scotland took a stall over the two days, and placed an advert in the Conference programme. Five trade unions submitted motions for debate, on abortion services, and we were able to speak with many delegates and to assist with speeches and building our membership too.

Thanks are recorded to UNITE the union (Glasgow Voluntary Sector Branch) for the donation which met the costs of the stall, advert, and new campaign postcards.

A UNITE Finance Sector branch donation enabled campaign badges to be produced, these have been well received at various events promoting the slogans 'Abortion is Healthcare' and 'Decriminalise Abortion in Scotland'.



Scottish Government

Abortion Rights Scotland was represented at the three Summits on abortion services, convened by the First Minister in 2022 and 2023.

Good progress has been made during the first year of the Women's Health Plan, with all NHS Boards now able to offer services and support for women seeking terminations up to 20 weeks. A small number of later term patients are still required to travel to England, but there is a commitment to work towards provision of services within the NHS in Scotland.

The evaluation of the changes to services during COVID, through 'telemedicine' provision and support for treatment at home, was published in March 2023, and we welcomed the recommendations to continue with this provision. The report acknowledged some regional variations and a recommendation to achieve standard levels of provision across Scotland.

Scottish Parliament

Abortion Rights Scotland is represented on the Scottish Parliament Cross Party Group on Women's Health. We met with Monica Lennon MSP in 2022 to discuss collaboration on decriminalisation campaign work, and members have provided briefings and support to Carol Mochan MSP as a member of the Scottish Parliament **Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee**.

Working with other organisations

We are pleased to be working with Engender and we have been able to contribute to the work that Engender undertakes on holding the UK and Scottish governments to account with regard to various UN international Conventions.



Abortion Rights Scotland was present at the Edinburgh May Day march and events in 2022, and was represented again on Saturday 6th May 2023.

In August 2022, we were invited to present to an online meeting of Amazon employees working in Edinburgh. We gave an overview of our campaign and of NHS Scotland provision and the legal position. The discussion threw up some positive suggestions for the company's HR policies, and we appreciated the opportunity to engage.

With regard to local authorities, Edinburgh City Council, Glasgow City Council, and Aberdeen City Council all discussed abortion rights, the Roe V Wade decision, and buffer zones policies during 2022, and we have been in contact with supportive councillors in each area. In Edinburgh, Councillor Lezley Marion Cameron hosted an in-person Abortion Rights campaign discussion in November 2022 in the Edinburgh City Chambers, and we look forward to continuing to work together.



Abortion Rights members in the Green Party, in the Scottish Labour Party, and in the SNP, have made sure that our campaign leaflets are available at Conferences. The SNP conference in autumn 2022 adopted a pro-choice motion which came in from a number of local SNP branches. The Scottish Labour Party Conference in February 2023 in Edinburgh adopted policy to support decriminalisation and investment in our NHS services, keeping abortion care clearly in the public sector.

Scottish Women's Convention took copies of our 'Needing Abortion Advice' card for

the delegate packs which were distributed to the 400 women who attended the International Women's Day 2023 celebrations in the Scottish Parliament.

Our members also contributed to the research for the BBC programme **Crisis Pregnancy Centres Uncovered** which looked at the reality of the service provided by the Stanton Healthcare clinics, and members of the Abortion Rights Scotland steering group have been available to provide quotes for various media outlets over the last year.

Abortion Rights Scotland Steering Group April 2023.

Click on the following
links to follow us on:

Twitter
Facebook
Instagram

Email: abortionrightsscotland@gmail.com
www.abortionrights.org.uk

Photography Craig Maclean
www.craigmacleanphotography.co.uk

