

UK Government to commission abortion services in Northern Ireland

Press release

The UK Government will commission abortion services for women and girls in Northern Ireland, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Chris Heaton-Harris MP, has announced today (Monday 24 October).



The Secretary of State is under a statutory obligation to ensure that safe services are available. In the coming weeks, he will meet Chief Executives of Health and Social Care Trusts to ensure these services can be provided. The UK Government has been forced to act three years after the decriminalisation of abortion in Northern Ireland, as the Northern Ireland Department of Health has not ensured the availability of services became available and have shown no indications that they will act to provide them.

The commissioning of abortion services follows the making of Regulations by the previous Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Brandon Lewis in May 2022, which provided the UK Government with the same powers as a Northern Ireland Minister for the purposes of ensuring that the recommendations in paragraphs 85 and 86 of the Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Report are implemented.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland said:

The UK Government has been clear that the Government would commission abortion services if the Department of Health did not act to provide them. "Three years on from the decriminalisation of abortion in Northern Ireland, we will be ensuring the commissioning of abortion services by the UK Government. It is unfortunate that we have been forced to commission these services, in what should be a matter for the Department of Health to implement.

However, the Government has been left with no other option, as

women and girls of Northern Ireland have been without safe and high quality services, with many having to travel to the rest of the UK to access healthcare to which they are legally entitled. That is unacceptable.

I will be meeting the Chief Executives of Health and Social Care Trusts in Northern Ireland in the coming weeks to ensure these services can be provided. Ultimately, it remains the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Executive to fund abortion services in Northern Ireland.

The UK Government will ensure that appropriate funding is available to enable healthcare professionals to take the necessary steps to ensure that essential training and recruitment of staff can progress, and services can be implemented.

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