

Telemedicine to expand access to abortion pill in Maine

February 29 2016, by David Sharp

Maine is set to become the third state where women can utilize telemedicine to access abortion pills to end early pregnancies without the need for an in-office consultation with a doctor.

The operator of one of Maine's three clinics, Augusta-based Maine Family Planning, announced Monday that it intends to allow patients to visit one of 16 regional planning clinics, where they'll consult with a physician via webcam. One of the medications to induce abortion would be given at the clinic, and the second could be taken at home.

The expanded use of telemedicine for abortion access comes at a time of clinic closings across the nation, and telemedicine abortions have faced pushback in other states. Legislatures in at least 18 states have passed laws effectively banning the practice by requiring face-to-face meetings between patients and physicians.

The other states allowing it are Minnesota and Iowa, where the state Supreme Court struck down its ban last year.

Maine Family Planning contends the process is safe and vetted by the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists.

"We have the science behind us and we'll deal with any opposition as it comes," said Jenn Thibodeau, spokeswoman for the reproductive [health care provider](#).

But any increase in abortions is opposed by people like Carroll Conley from the Christian Civic League of Maine who believe that "[abortion](#) stops a beating heart."

Conley said there are also safety concerns about skipping the face-to-face meeting with a physician on something with such serious implications.

"We just think that flies in the face of common sense," he said.

The vast majority of abortions are surgical procedures. The [abortion pill](#), which is different from emergency contraception known as the morning-after pill, is applicable only to women in the early stages of pregnancy—those within 70 days of their last menstruation.

Maine Family Planning doesn't expect that its initiative will lead to a significant increase in abortions, but it'll be more convenient and less costly than traveling to one of the existing clinics, which include Planned Parenthood in Portland and Mabel Wadsworth Women's Health Center in Bangor.

"In a state as large and rural as Maine, being able to access care means traveling long distances, missing work, finding childcare—all kinds of barriers that make it hard," Thibodeau said.

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