**Doctors for Choice UK Position Statement**

**Time limits**
Doctors for Choice UK are in favour of removing restrictions on women accessing abortion and believe that a decision to have an abortion should be made on an individual basis, by a woman, with the support of healthcare professionals.

Abortion should ideally be performed as soon as possible once a woman has chosen this route, to reduce both distress to the woman and the risk of medical complications (although we know that serious medical complications of abortion are rare at any gestation, the risks are greater at later gestations). Although most women present relatively early in pregnancy – with 90% of abortions performed under 13 weeks in 2017– some women do need abortions at later gestations.

Reasons for abortions performed at later gestations include:

* Serious fetal abnormalities (usually not detected until the ‘20-week’ scan in pregnancy),
* Significant change in social circumstances e.g. following relationship breakdown, an existing child becomes seriously ill
* Difficulties in accessing abortion e.g. delays in referral to an abortion clinic or in obtaining two doctors’ signatures (as required by the current law), for non-English speaking women
* Delays in recognising pregnancy e.g. in very young women, perimenopausal women, with contraception failure, women addicted to drugs/alcohol, women with mental health illness or learning disability
* Hidden pregnancy, e.g. in very young women, women in violent or abusive and controlling relationships
* Woman unsure about whether she wants to be pregnant and needs time to think

Strict time limits will ultimately mean that some women will be forced to continue with pregnancies they do not want which can lead to significant psychological morbidity. Furthermore, women presenting for abortion at later gestations are more likely to be vulnerable, meaning strict time limits for these women can be particularly harmful. The current law stipulates that a woman in need of an abortion presenting at 24 weeks gestation and one day should automatically be denied access to abortion. We believe that it would be preferable that requests for abortion be managed on an individual basis, with the support of local and national guidelines and regulations on best practice.

Although we are in favour of removing the arbitrary time limit on gestation, we do not believe that this would lead to a consequential increase in the total number of abortions performed or in the number of women having later term abortions as there is no evidence of this in places where abortion has been decriminalised, such as Canada and some Australian States.

Ultimately, Doctors for Choice UK trust women to make responsible decisions about their own lives and health.