Leading Safe Choices - South Africa
(Western Cape Province)

In South Africa more than half of all pregnancies are unintended and despite having one of the most progressive abortion laws in the world, unsafe and illegal abortions remain a significant public health problem.¹

We know that improving access to safe abortion services and increasing access to contraceptive choice dramatically improves the health of women and their children. Yet there is a critical shortage of trained staff willing and able to provide abortion services as widespread objection and resistance towards abortion persists among healthcare providers (HCPs).

HCPs working in maternity services are in an ideal position to improve uptake of immediate postpartum family planning (PPFP), including postpartum IUD (PPIUD). Offering a wide range of contraceptive methods and prioritising counselling ensures that women can choose the method that best meets their needs, which can in turn prevent unintended pregnancies and reduce the incidence of abortion.

¹ South African Medical Journal, 2017

Our impact

366 healthcare providers trained in postpartum family planning

378 healthcare providers trained in postpartum family planning counselling

91 healthcare providers trained in comprehensive abortion care (CAC)

264 healthcare providers attended values clarification workshops

20 abortion services reopened across the Western Cape province

Introduced PPIUD insertion within 10 facilities, increasing postpartum family planning options available to women

Provided postpartum family planning services to nearly 50,000 women during the programme, one quarter of whom received family planning for the first time

Helped to tackle resistance towards and strengthen abortion services

Reduced referral and waiting times for abortion services

Encouraged staff to talk more openly and confidently about abortion, including on issues of legality and women’s rights
Our programme

We partnered with The Health Foundation and the Western Cape Department of Health (WCDOH) to improve PPFP and CAC services in the Western Cape, South Africa. We adopted a systems approach, working through existing WCDOH structures in country and with local programme and clinical teams, to ensure sustainability of our impact. Our aim was to strengthen the competence and raise the professional standing of family planning and abortion care HCPs by promoting best practice in PPFP and CAC.

- We developed and implemented short, interactive training courses addressing the knowledge, skills and attitudes essential for the provision of high quality PPFP and CAC services.
- We adopted a training the trainers approach to establish and embed training and support systems, and facilitated mentorship for HCPs to ensure modern methods of contraception and CAC became a routine part of reproductive healthcare services.
- We promoted task shifting to mid-level healthcare providers, such as midwives and nurses, to increase the availability of PPFP and CAC providers, which can reduce waiting times and numbers of onward referrals.
- We implemented strategies to tackle systems barriers, such as values clarification workshops and close liaison with facility and district management, to address workforce shortages and promote provider wellbeing.

“I know that LSC training has made a huge impact on the community. We make such a huge impact on staff, that the staff are already taking ownership. We have buy-in from stakeholders, the facility manager, operational manager, and the pharmacy. Everything is there and they are doing an amazing job.”

- Leading Safe Choices Mentor

Our training equipped and empowered HCPs with competencies in family planning counselling, postpartum IUD insertion and manual vacuum aspiration (MVA). Expanding contraceptive choice, particularly the availability and uptake of long-acting reversible methods, can dramatically improve women’s health. For postpartum women in particular, PPIUD can be a preferable option as it can be inserted immediately after delivery of the baby and allows women to space their children and avoid unintended pregnancies.