



# Improving access to safe abortion and post-abortion family planning in Vietnam

## What was the problem?

Despite strong government support to prevent unintended pregnancies, rates remain high in Vietnam and abortions have been rising in recent years. Limited access to contraception, constraints on method choice and lack of access to post-abortion family planning information and counselling contribute to high levels of unintended pregnancies. As a result, many women have come to rely on abortions, leading to many repeat abortions. Vietnam's National Strategy set goals to reduce the abortion rate down to 27 per 100 live births and to eliminate unsafe abortion in the country.

In 2011, Comprehensive Abortion Care (CAC) standards were introduced with the aim of reducing repeat abortions. However, the standards were not widely disseminated and implementation was not monitored. A gap remained between national level guidelines and policies and actual service provision and behaviours of health management staff. It became clear that updating these standards to be in line with global guidelines was necessary, as was strengthening the regulatory environment, capacity building and training.

## Strategic Interventions

Marie Stopes Vietnam looked to improve the quality of and access to Comprehensive Abortion Care, including post-abortion family planning, by improving the regulatory environment, and improving awareness and understanding of the national standards through three steps:

### 1. Building an evidence base

Marie Stopes Vietnam conducted a mapping and analysis of key sexual and reproductive health policy stakeholders, policy implementation and current challenges at national and provincial levels. A situational analysis of current CAC practices amongst private providers in relation to existing regulations and standards was also completed.

### 2. Linking the national context to international guidelines

A review was carried out of national CAC standards and the CAC training manual and curriculum against World Health Organisation recommendations and international/regional best practice to identify areas for improvement and recommendations.

### 3. Collaborating with government on new standards

Marie Stopes Vietnam supported and collaborated with the Ministry of Health, particularly the Maternal and Child Health Department, to develop new CAC standards for service providers, with emphasis on post-abortion family planning.

## Outcome

Marie Stopes Vietnam's analysis informed recommendations made to the Ministry of Health on supplementing and modifying policies, materials and training programmes on safe abortion practice at private health clinics to enable service providers to deliver safe abortion services and post-abortion family planning.

Marie Stopes Vietnam successfully facilitated the review and revision of national guidelines on safe abortion and the guidelines were launched in August 2016.

## Lessons Learned

Working with government officials and multiple partners was important to achieve success, however, it also presented challenges. There were some delays in completing the review due to clashing schedules and the coordination required between expert groups. Careful planning and the setting of appropriate timelines for all participants helped address this. The involvement of multiple partners also required strong leadership and commitment. A clear strategy was needed to mobilise the different partners effectively and to achieve good outcomes.

Gathering evidence on the implementation and challenges linked to the previous CAC standards, as well as the analysis of those standards as compared to international best practice, required financial and technical resources. However, the evidence gathered during this situational analysis was crucial in successfully advocating for the revision of the CAC guidelines. Evidence-based advocacy proved to be very effective and persuasive with the Ministry of Health.



## Next Steps

Marie Stopes Vietnam has worked with the Ministry of Health to roll out the new guidance to some provinces. Support is also being provided for induction training activities for service providers.



## Why we advocate?

Every day in every country where we operate we see our services restricted by unnecessary regulation and over medicalisation. This prevents women from seeking and receiving the care and services they so desperately want.

Our 2020 strategy, Scaling-Up Excellence, recognises that providing services alone will not secure universal access to contraception or safe abortion, and that to catalyse real change we need to transform the environments in which we operate. We therefore advocate for policy changes that will have the highest potential impact on increasing access for women and girls. Marie Stopes International thanks all our donors, particularly the Governments of Denmark and Norway, who have made this work possible.

For further information and resources please contact the Advocacy Team: [www.mariestopes.org/advocacy](http://www.mariestopes.org/advocacy)