

Assessing the availability of abortion care in New Brunswick



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Introduction

In 1988, Canada's abortion law was decriminalized and abortion is now considered a medically necessary service. However, abortion care remains inaccessible to many Canadian women. Indeed, a study conducted in 2006 found that only 15.9% of Canadian hospitals provide abortion services, a 2% drop from 2003.¹ The lack of hospital availability results in geographic disparities in access, a major barrier to women's ability to obtain timely and affordable care.

This study builds on these previous efforts and explores the current availability of abortion care in all non-specialized hospitals in New Brunswick.

Methods

- Using publicly available information we identified 18 non-specialized hospitals in New Brunswick
- We contacted each facility by phone to determine if they provide abortion services using two different approaches:

- The caller identified herself as a researcher from the University of Ottawa
- The caller posed as a 23-year old woman seeking an abortion using a pre-determined client profile and contacted facilities in both English and French

If **YES**, we asked questions to determine:

- The gestational age limit
- If medication abortion is available
- If a physician referral is required
- How long it takes to make an appointment (mystery client only)

If **NO**, the mystery client asked for information about where to go and then assessed the accuracy and appropriateness of the referral (if provided)

- We evaluated the tone, tenor, and quality of the interactions
- We compared responses received to both approaches
- We mapped the location of providing facilities



Results

Approach #1

- 2/18 hospitals (11%) reported providing abortion care
- 2/18 hospitals (11%) refused to provide the identified researcher with information, in one case citing "confidentiality"
- Researchers received very little information

Approach #2

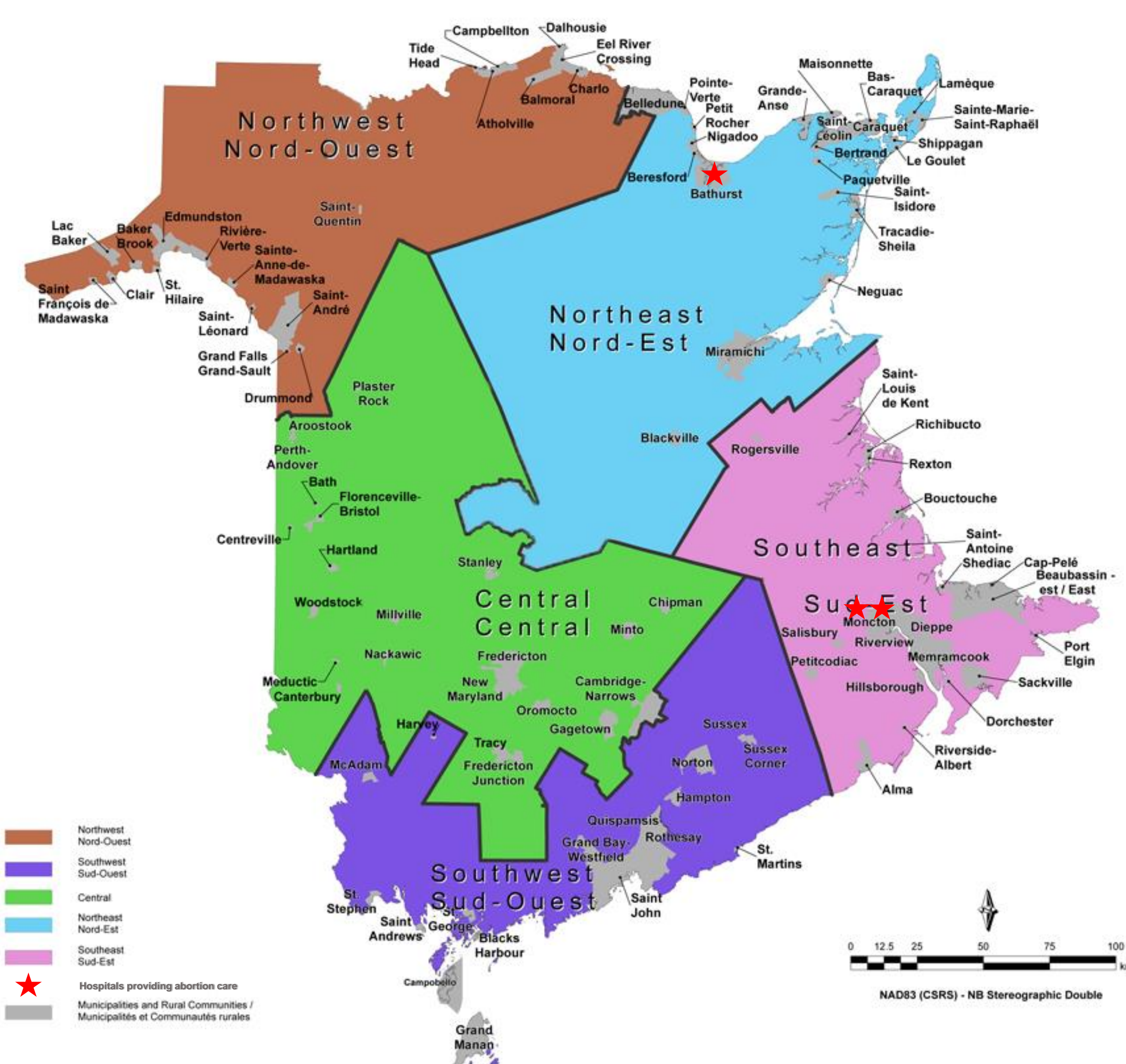
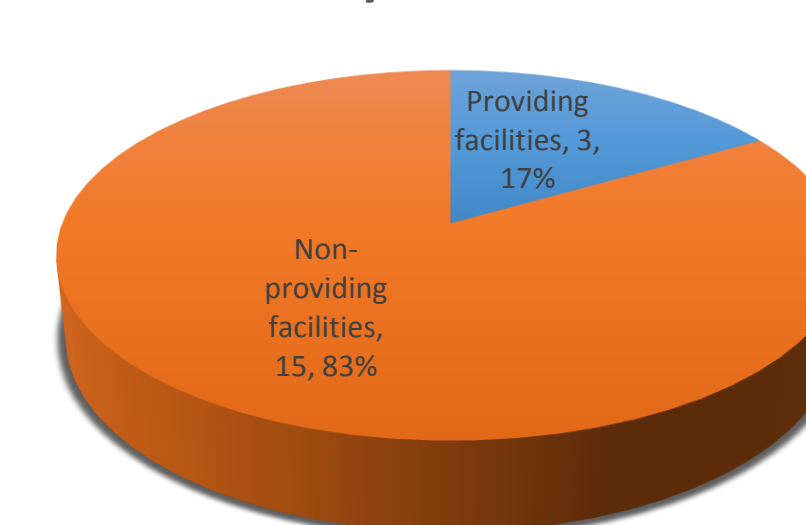
Providing facilities

- 3/18 hospitals (17%) reported providing abortion care
- All 3 facilities provide to 13 weeks and 6 days
- 1 hospital offers a medication abortion option
- 2 hospitals require a referral from a physician
- All appointments could be scheduled within 2 weeks
- All phone calls took less than 6 minutes
- Interactions were mostly friendly, polite or neutral
- Information given from providing hospitals were the same for both profiles (Francophone and Anglophone)

Non-providing facilities

- 6/15 of non-providing hospitals (40%) appropriately referred the Francophone caller to another facility
- 8/15 of non-providing hospitals (53%) appropriately referred the Anglophone caller to another facility
- Hospitals that appropriately referred the mystery client caller referred her to both the in-province clinic and providing hospitals

Availability of abortion care



Discussion

- Access to abortion care in New Brunswick is limited
- Providing hospitals are concentrated in two communities
- Hospitals provided different information to our researchers and the mystery client
- Some hospitals are giving inaccurate information to women seeking abortion care
- Based on the tone and tenor of the interactions, women seeking abortion care are respected and cared for
- Because non-hospital based abortion care is not covered by provincial health insurance, in-province clinic abortions are expensive
- The integration of mifepristone/misoprostol could potentially expand the access to abortion care

Future Studies

- Assess the integration of mifepristone/misoprostol into hospital based abortion care in New Brunswick
- Assess the availability of abortion care in all non-specialized hospitals in Canada



References

¹Shaw, J. (2006). *Reality Check: A close look at accessing abortion services in Canadian hospitals*. Ottawa, ON: Canadians for Choice. 72p.

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