



The Honourable Heather Stefanson
Minister of Health and Seniors Care
Room 302, Legislative Building
450 Broadway
Winnipeg, MB, R3C 0V8

Sent by email: minhsal@leg.gov.mb.ca

February 12th, 2021

Dear Honourable Minister Stefanson,

We are writing to you today about our deep concerns related to your ministry's division of labour. The decision to move reproductive health out of the health department and into that of the minister responsible for the status of women undermines health care access, resources, and social good. Moving the responsibility (but not funding) for reproductive health out of the health department effectively shirks culpability and comprehensiveness for any decisions related to large swaths of health care — the ministry for which you are responsible — and undermines overall public health.

Reproductive health encompasses an array of services, including but not limited to "pre- and post-natal care, birth care, family-planning counselling, safer-sex education, the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases and... abortion care," [according to the *Winnipeg Free Press* \(Jan. 21, 2021\)](#). Simply put, **reproductive health care is health care**.

Manitobans of all sexes and gender identities rely on reproductive health services and as health minister, they should fall under your portfolio. As the *Free Press* editorial board stated in the article cited above, "...transparency offered by the current government in this regard is limited to its transparent effort to avoid public discussion of a specific medical procedure. Engaging in such jurisdictional contortions around the word "abortion" only serves to further stigmatize it."

By relegating reproductive health to the Status of Women department, the provincial government is also creating hurdles for organizations that provide reproductive health care services, like the Women's Health Clinic in Winnipeg. The clinic's interim executive director, Kemlin Nembhard, recently spoke to CBC Manitoba about her concerns related to funding. "We

would be talking to the Status of Women [minister], and yet they wouldn't be providing the funding for us. Or we would be talking to the health minister, but they're completely disconnected from it. So that's a problem," Nembhard told the public broadcaster ([Jan. 13, 2021](#)). The loops and backtracking required to address the funding and responsible portfolio further complicate an already overburdened healthcare system. Accessing reproductive health resources should be a health care concern. Our women, girls, and gender diverse folks accessing these resources deserve efficiency and transparency from their government .

By continuing to subcontract health care to Status of Women, the provincial government is sending a message loud and clear to all Manitobans: reproductive health care — which includes decisions related to family planning, childbearing, and abortion — is just a women's issue. This is not only factually incorrect, but sexist and wrong.

We urge the government to reconsider its stance on the reproductive health file and return it, rightfully, to the health portfolio. If you would like to discuss this matter further, please let us know and we would gladly arrange a virtual meeting or call.

Sincerely,
Institute for International Women's Rights-Manitoba
Social Planning Council of Winnipeg
West Central Women's Resource Centre



CC: The Honourable Brian Pallister, Premier of Manitoba
The Honourable Cathy Cox, Minister of Culture, Sport and Heritage and Minister of Status of Women
Wab Kinew, Leader of the Official Opposition, NDP
Uzoma Asagwara, Opposition Critic for Health, NDP
Malaya Marcelino, Opposition Critic for Status of Women, NDP
Dougald Lamont, Leader of the Manitoba Liberal Party
Dr. Jon Gerrard, Liberal MLA for River Heights
Cindy Lamoureux, Liberal MLA for Tyndall Park