

Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on petition PE2020 - Provide fertility treatment to single women

Background

The petition is calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to provide the same fertility treatment to single women, as is offered to couples on the NHS.

Eligibility criteria for NHS funded fertility treatment is set nationally in Scotland. It was last reviewed in 2016 following the publication of [a report from the National Infertility Group](#).

This report recommended several changes to the eligibility criteria, all of which were accepted by the Scottish Government. The current criteria are extensive but they all relate to couples. There is no mention of the eligibility of single women.

The aim of the Infertility Group was 'improving the provision of treatment to infertile couples' and NHS funded treatment is focused on the treatment of infertility as a medical condition. This is illustrated in the definition of infertility adopted in the National Infertility Group report:

"...a disease of the reproductive system defined by the failure to achieve a clinical pregnancy after 12 months or more of regular unprotected sexual intercourse." ([WHO](#))

Other parts of the UK do permit single women to have NHS funded fertility treatment. However, until recently, they usually only qualified if they were infertile. This was defined as not conceiving after 2 years of regular unprotected sex or if they had been through unsuccessful cycles of artificial insemination. This meant that many single women and same-sex couples had to fund treatment privately before being considered

eligible for NHS funded treatment. This requirement was recently removed in England via the [Women's Health Strategy](#).

However, the Scottish access criteria do not provide scope for single people to access NHS funded treatment, even if they have fertility problems. All of the criteria are directed towards couples and, most notably, include the following requirement:

- [Couples] need to have been cohabiting in a stable relationship for a minimum of 2 years.

Scottish Government Action

There have been no changes to the access criteria since the acceptance of the National Infertility Group report recommendations in 2017.

According to a previous parliamentary question, the National Fertility Group keeps the access criteria under constant review and makes recommendations to the Scottish Government.

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The purpose of this briefing is to provide a brief overview of issues raised by the petition. SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at spice@parliament.scot

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