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The only abortion provider in northern Lower Michigan is closing

By [MORGAN SPRINGER \(/PEOPLE/MORGAN-SPRINGER\)](/PEOPLE/MORGAN-SPRINGER) • JUL 14, 2016

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Dr. Flora Biancalana, a family practice physician, began prescribing abortion pills when she opened her Traverse City practice 15 years ago. At the end of this month, she is closing her practice, Rising Star Wellness Center. She's the only abortion provider for women in the region. So next month, women will have to drive to Grand Rapids or Marquette to get an abortion.

"Certainly that has become glaringly obvious that abortion services are missing any place north of Saginaw or Bay City," says

Lori Carpentier, president and CEO of Planned Parenthood of Michigan.

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Dr. Flora Biancalana is closing her practice, Rising Star Wellness Center, at the end of July.

CREDIT DAVID CASSLEMAN

She says Planned Parenthood only found out about the closure a few weeks ago. Its health clinic in Traverse City refers patients seeking an abortion to a list of providers in the state. Dr. Biancalana is one of the referrals on that list.



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1:52

Biancalana says she provides between six and ten medication abortions per week to women from as far as Cheboygan, Alpena and Petoskey.

Despite the fact she is closing her practice, Biancalana is passionate about women having reasonable access to abortion services.

"It's ridiculous," says Biancalana. "I shouldn't be the only person [providing abortions]. You know, it should be available."

Biancalana and Carpentier both say it will be harder now for lower-income women who can't make the drive to Grand Rapids or Marquette.

"We aren't going to have a ready answer for those women," says Carpentier. "That's the truth of it."

"It always leaves the door open for women to take things into their own hands," Biancalana says, "and then potentially have unsafe methods of trying to abort a pregnancy."

Genevieve Marnon, the public affairs associate with Right to Life of Michigan, says this is a typical argument from people who support access to abortion, especially when an area loses a provider.

"And it's just not been born out in the facts," Marnon says. She says people in northern Michigan often travel great distances for their medical procedures already.

"Whenever an abortion clinic closes," says Marnon, "we're very pleased about that because fewer abortion clinic providers equates to fewer unborn babies killed through abortion."

Biancalana's practice is not an abortion clinic, but she does provide medication abortions through her family practice.

Lori Carpentier says Planned Parenthood is considering providing abortion services Up North.

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