



**The Hon Greg Hunt MP**  
**Minister for Health**  
**Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the**  
**Public Service and Cabinet**



Ref No: MC20-030420

The Hon Chris Bowen MP  
Member for McMahon  
PO Box W210  
FAIRFIELD WEST NSW 2165

18 AUG 2020

Dear Mr Bowen *Chris*

I refer to your letter of 22 July 2020 concerning Labor's feedback on the Draft National Stillbirth Action and Implementation Plan (Draft Plan).

I am extremely pleased that the Australian Government is leading the development of this important piece of work. The Draft Plan has been informed by the *Senate Select Committee on Stillbirth Research and Education Report* (Senate Report) and developed with extensive input from stakeholders. I note the issues you have raised in your correspondence and I will address each of these in turn.

**Recommendation 3**

The Senate Report recommended that advice be sought from the Medical Services Advisory Committee (MSAC) on the economic costs and benefits of adding stillbirth autopsies as a new item in the Medical Benefits Schedule (MBS). Advice has been sought and MSAC has advised that the MBS is not a suitable mechanism for funding autopsy services. The Draft Plan recognises that alternative strategies to increase stillbirth investigations therefore need to be explored and includes a range of tasks to address this issue.

**Recommendation 6**

This recommendation involved a review of research funding arrangements administered by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC), in consultation with stakeholders, to examine options for longer-term funding cycles for targeted, large scale, collaborative research partnerships, potentially through the Medical Research Future Fund.

As outlined in the Government response to the Senate Report, the NHMRC implemented a revised grant program that began in 2017–18 with the majority of grants now running for five years. I understand that much of the feedback received through the Senate Inquiry pre-dated the revised grant program. Key stakeholders, including the Stillbirth Centre of Research Excellence and the Stillbirth Foundation have advised officers in my Department that they are satisfied with current research funding arrangements administered by the NHMRC.

### High level of First Nations stillbirth rates

The Government recognises that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, experience higher rates of stillbirth. Action Area 2 of the Draft Plan focuses on ensuring culturally safe stillbirth prevention and care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, and includes a range of tasks that specifically aim to reduce stillbirths in this high-risk group. The provision of culturally safe care is prominent throughout this section.

In addition, the Commonwealth engaged the Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses and Midwives (CATSINAM), the peak representative organisation, to undertake an indigenous consultation process to inform the drafting of the plan.

The CATSINAM Report on the Consultation of the Implementation and Review of the Stillbirth Plan 2020 was noted by the National Stillbirth Project Reference Group meeting on 30 July 2020 and will inform the National Stillbirth Action and Implementation Plan.

### Evaluation measures

The Government is committed to reducing stillbirth rates in Australia by 20 per cent and recognises the importance of establishing a monitoring and evaluation framework as soon as the plan is finalised. The framework will provide a mechanism for Governments and stakeholders to assess progress against the target of reducing stillbirths, in line with the Stillbirth Plan. It is anticipated that the monitoring and evaluation framework will be developed in 2021.

### Funding

The Government is committed to reducing stillbirths and has allocated \$8.5 million (over 2018–19 to 2021–22) to support a range of specific measures to reduce stillbirths. This includes funding stillbirth education and awareness programs, supporting national implementation of the Safer Baby Bundle, investing in research to prevent stillbirth, and supporting parents and families affected by stillbirth. Further information about these measures can be accessed at: [www.health.gov.au/maternity](http://www.health.gov.au/maternity). The Government will consider further funding following the finalisation of the Draft Plan.

Thank you for writing concerning the draft National Stillbirth Action and Implementation Plan and for your commitment to work with the Government on such an important issue.

Yours sincerely



Greg Hunt