



Submission of Family Planning NSW

Review of the strategic effectiveness and outcomes of Australia's aid program in the Indo-Pacific and its role in supporting Australia's regional interests

June 2018





For the attention of:

Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Family Planning NSW welcomes this opportunity to make a submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade.

About us

Family Planning NSW is the state's leading provider of reproductive and sexual health services.

We are experts on reproductive and sexual health and provide clinical services, education and health information to people throughout New South Wales.

We are an independent, not for profit organisation responsible to a voluntary board of directors and we rely on government funding, donations and self-generated income to provide our services. Our government funding comes from the Federal and New South Wales governments, as well as Local Health Districts.

Founded in 1926 Family Planning NSW is the oldest family planning service in Australia, providing reproductive and sexual health care services and information to the community for 92 years.

Who we are

We work to ensure everybody has access to quality reproductive and sexual health. We respect the rights of our clients to make choices about their reproductive and sexual health and we treat each and every person with respect, dignity and understanding.

We are experts on contraception, pregnancy options, sexually transmissible infections (STIs), sexuality and sexual function, menstruation, menopause, common gynaecological and vaginal problems, cervical screening, breast awareness and men's sexual health.

Our Research Centre undertakes nationally and internationally recognised research which underpins our clinical practice. We publish clinical practice handbooks on reproductive and sexual health for medical professionals and are recognised leaders in this field.

What we do

We provide clinical services, health promotion and education and training at clinics in Ashfield, Fairfield, Penrith, Newcastle and Dubbo and use innovative partnerships to deliver services in other key locations.

We also provide health information and education and training for doctors, nurses, teachers and other health, education and welfare professionals.



We see more than 28,000 clients annually at our clinics and our education services conduct courses with over 1,300 professionals each year.

Our NSW Talkline service 1300 658 886 provides a confidential, non-judgemental telephone and email information and referral service for all who need advice across New South Wales.

We also work to provide reproductive and sexual health services in the Pacific through funding from Australian aid and donations. Find out about our international development work here.

Who We Help

Our clinics welcome everyone and provide high quality reproductive and sexual health services.

Our education and training services provide expert education for doctors, nurses, teachers and other health, education and welfare services.

We reach out in particular to priority communities including people from culturally and linguistically diverse and Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander backgrounds, people with disability, young people, and people from rural and remote communities.

Our International Program

Family Planning NSW works to assist poor and disadvantaged communities in the Indo-Pacific region to improve access to comprehensive reproductive and sexual health services. We utilise our expertise in the Pacific to strengthen health systems by building the capacity of non-government organisations and government services to increase access to reproductive and sexual health services.

Our international projects to improve the reproductive and sexual health of communities in the Pacific have reached 56,000 direct beneficiaries in 10 Pacific countries since 2010.

All of our international projects closely align with achievement of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goal 3, 5 and 17.

We build partnerships with family planning organisations at national and international levels, and with local NGOs and government health services to improve access to comprehensive reproductive and sexual health services with funding from Australian Aid, through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and private donors.

Our approach is to develop collaborative partnerships at local, national and international levels. We are committed to long term capacity building with government and non-government organisations to address reproductive and sexual health needs of the community. We achieve this by providing best practice services, enhancing the knowledge and skills of service providers, improving the body of knowledge about reproductive and sexual health through rigorous research and evaluation, and leading international development projects to promote the rights of marginalised people in developing countries.



Australia's Aid Program - Aligning Australia's aid program with the Sustainable Development Goals

Australia should continue to be a key stakeholder at the UN and associated meetings and mechanisms, especially in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and to developing and proactively signing on to accountability measures for the achievement of the SDGs.

Australian officials should increase their engagement and consultation with Australian NGOs about UN priorities and processes and be seen to do so by the world and the Australian community.

Achievement of the SDGs, to which Australia is a signatory and has been a prominent advocate for on the international stage, must be at the centre of our agenda. To address our progress we must have agreed, world-leading, built-in accountability mechanisms for Australia and for our international development work. We must ensure that the focus of funding for regional and international organisations supports the achievement of the SDGs, especially SDGs 3 and 5, and provides ongoing capacity building (SDG 4) of local government and non-government organisations to implement sustainable change. Australia must continue to support women's empowerment by investing in reproductive and sexual health and rights.

Case study – Saving Lives

Cervical cancer is the second most common cancer in women worldwide. It is one of the most preventable and treatable forms of cancer if it is detected early and managed effectively. Cervical cancer deaths in Australia have halved since the introduction of the National Cervical Cancer Screening Program in 1991. Despite the evidence that regular cervical cancer screening saves women's lives, screening is not routinely available in Pacific nations and women are dying up to nine times the rate of women in Australia (Australia 1.8; Papua New Guinea 23.3; Solomon Islands 10.9 and Vanuatu 9.7 per 100,000 women).

Our cervical cancer program aims to reduce deaths from cervical cancer by working with national governments, non-government organisations and key stakeholders to strengthen national health systems and increase cervical cancer screening and treatment appropriate to the local context using visual inspection with acetic acid (VIA) and treatment with cryotherapy, Pap tests or HPV DNA testing.

Since 2010, we have worked in Fiji, Cook Islands, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu supporting government and NGOs to deliver sustainable cervical cancer screening and treatment programs. 160 clinicians have been trained and 10,000 women screened, promotional resources developed to raise community awareness and a customised cervical screening training program developed for the Pacific. We supported the Fiji Ministry of Health and Medical Services to develop the Cervical Cancer Screening Policy 2015, implementing VIA and cryotherapy as part of the cervical cancer screening pathway. This was the first national cervical cancer screening policy in the Pacific.

We have advocated for cervical cancer prevention, screening and treatment to be a regional priority in the *Framework for Pacific Regionalism*.



By implementing population-based prevention, screening and treatment pathway appropriate to the country which includes HPV vaccination, cervical screening (using VIA, Pap tests or HPV DNA testing) and access to appropriate treatment, we can save women's lives.

Empowering Women and Girls through the Australian Aid Program

The Australian government must continue to support the empowerment of women and girls by supporting their ability to maintain and improve their reproductive and sexual health. An absolutely critical foundation for this is to provide women and girls with access to contraception. This allows them and their families the ability to choose the timing and spacing of her children, which leads to longer school attendance, better tertiary education, better jobs and housing and longer, more productive life spans.

Another pressing priority in empowering women and girls is to keep them alive. Cervical cancer is at extremely high levels in the Pacific, due solely to the lack of organised cervical cancer immunisation, screening and treatment programs. The high death rates of women from cervical cancer are completely preventable. Losing women from the family due to cervical cancer, often at young ages, has devastating social impacts in relation to family integrity and it is something we can readily address now. We have the protocols, access to low cost technology, trainers and Pacific workforce ready to be trained. Investing in saving the lives of Pacific women so that they can make meaningful, long-term contributions to Pacific life is essential to our commitment of empowering women and girls.

The right to access contraception, cervical cancer screening and other forms of reproductive and sexual health services in Australia is an absolute given. However, the Pacific has some of the worst reproductive and sexual health indicators globally, with high rates of maternal and infant mortality, unintended and teenage pregnancies, sexual violence and unacceptably high rates of cervical cancer deaths.

The involvement of men and boys in reproductive and sexual health programs is key to ensure men are partners in change in addressing gender equality. We must ensure that all programs consider the broader perspective of ensuring the empowerment of people from marginalised groups including people living with disability.

Aid funding should be prioritised to remove basic barriers to women's greater economic and social participation by providing a greater level of investment in family planning programs and services, including access to contraception and cervical cancer screening, as well as programs which target cultural attitudes to reproductive and sexual rights and gender-based violence.

Reproductive and sexual health and rights save lives, empower women, and lift women and their families out of poverty. Family planning is one of the most cost-effective investments in global health and development. If we provide reproductive and sexual health services and meet the need for modern contraception, every dollar spent will yield \$120USD in benefits. If we meet the need for modern contraception and quality care, unintended pregnancy will decline by 70% and unsafe abortions will decline by 74% (Women Deliver, 2016).

Case Study – Working with Men and Boys to Reduce Gender Based Violence

Gender equality is a human right, necessary for advancing development and reducing poverty. Empowered women contribute to the health of their families and communities and improve prospects for future generations.



Our gender-based violence program works with men to empower women to make informed decisions, enabling them to gain control over their reproductive and sexual health.

Working in Papua New Guinea and Timor Leste, we have implemented a peer education program addressing gender inequality and the high rates of violence against women, enabling men to become agents of change for improving reproductive and sexual health in their family and community.

Since 2010, we have developed Men and Boys training programs which have been published in English, Tok Pisin and Tetum and trained 271 peer educators who have provided gender training to 30,000 men and boys in PNG and Timor Leste.

Additionally, the program increased access to clinical services providing family planning and contraception, including to women with disability and women who live in rural and remote areas.

Scaling up the program and integrating it within government programs is essential for ongoing sustainability. This involves gathering evidence on the outcomes of programs, and advocating to stakeholders on the program benefits.

Australia's aid program in developing partnerships

Australia's Aid program should increase its commitment to developing collaborative partnerships at local, national and international levels with a specific focus on long term capacity building with non-government and government organisations to address the needs of communities. To foster capacity building, community-determined goals and best outcomes the Australian aid program should focus on providing best practice services, enhancing knowledge and skills of local communities, strengthening community education programs and implementing development projects in developing countries in conjunction with smaller/local entities. Stability should be prioritised within the Australian aid program with a specific commitment to long term capacity building of NGO's and health systems with an emphasis on achieving long term impact for marginalised groups.

We believe that the Australian government should focus on advocating for continued development in the Pacific region and work with our Pacific neighbours to build the capacity of local entities. In order to improve the reproductive and sexual health of Pacific communities, we must facilitate the delivery of accessible and equitable sexual and reproductive health services and programmes. We need to continue to build on the investment of the Australian government and international donors, and to work in partnership with governments to build the infrastructure and workforce to implement sustainable health and education programs.

Case Study – Working in Partnership with Disability People's Organisation to increase access to Family Planning Services

Family Planning NSW has, for many years, advocated for the rights of people with disability in Australia to make their own reproductive and sexual health choices. Our goal is full inclusion of people with disability in reproductive and sexual health services through equity of access to information and services provided by a skilled workforce. We are expanding our programs in this area in the Pacific region so people with disability can benefit equally from development programs funded by the Australian Government. The Australian Government strategy 'Development for All 2015 – 2020: strategy for strengthening disability inclusive development in Australia's aid program' guides this work.



The success of our Disability Program can largely be attributed to the partnerships which have been formed with local government and non-government organisations to build the capacity of reproductive and sexual health service providers to offer disability inclusive services. We are working towards ensuring that all our programs are disability inclusive.

This program is in its third year of partnering with the Reproductive and Family Health Association of Fiji to implement a targeted disability inclusion program which aims to improve the reproductive and sexual health, and uphold the rights of people with disability in Fiji.

As a result of this program, partnerships with Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs) were strengthened. Reproductive and Family Health Association of Fiji worked alongside the United Blind Peoples Association to reach out to young people not in school living in rural villages. This contributes to scoping the needs of this group of people who tend to be missed by services.