

Inquiry into universal access to reproductive healthcare – Tuesday 28 February public hearing

Opening statement from RANZCOG delivered by Professor Kirsten Black

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RANZCOG; the College) trains and accredits doctors in obstetrics and gynaecology, including both specialists and GPs and so is a key organisation in establishing best practice in women's health. RANZCOG recognises that sexual and reproductive health is an essential component of healthcare and has an established committee to ensure that issues of contraception, abortion and sexual health are addressed in training and guidelines.

The key recommendations from RANZCOG that I want to highlight today are:

1. That public hospital clinics providing long-acting reversible contraception (LARC), including in the postpartum period be expanded to increase both access and training.
2. All public hospitals should provide surgical abortion pathway to enhance equitable access and workforce training.
3. That a dedicated federal funding stream be established to ensure the development of these service pathways, to fund training for obstetricians/gynaecologists and general practitioners in the hospital system in contraception and abortion care and to improve consumer information as has occurred with endometriosis and pelvic mesh care.

In summary, the establishment of public hospital pathways to contraception and surgical abortions are crucial to train health care professionals in contraception and abortion care provision. While much of sexual and reproductive health care can be delivered in the community by non-specialists, complex patients will always be referred to the care of obstetricians and gynaecologists and so it is vital to ensure they receive training in abortion and contraception. RANZCOG has developed a two-year training pathway in sexual and reproductive health with the aim of providing specialist skills and leadership in this area. However, there are only two public hospital sites across Australia offering this training, largely because of a lack of existing public services. Therefore, we seek a dedicated a funding stream to support public contraception and abortion services to increased equitable access but also to train specialists and GPs in these essential areas of women's health.