



# Women's Health Victoria

*"promoting access to quality women's health information"*

Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> October 2005

Elton Humphery  
Committee Secretary  
Community Affairs Committee  
Department of the Senate  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600  
Australia

Dear Sir,

**Re: National Health Amendment (Budget Measures-  
Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme Safety Net) Bill 2005**

Women's Health Victoria is an independent Victorian state-wide women's health promotion organisation run by women for women. We work to identify and respond to the health issues of the women of Victoria through a feminist perspective and a social model of health.

We are informed by, and encourage the validation of, women's experiences of health and ill-health. We promote women's right to control our own bodies in every aspect of health care and work to empower women and communities to act on health matters through the use of information.

We welcome the opportunity to provide comments to the Senate Community Affairs Committee on the National Health Amendment (Budget Measures- Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme Safety Net) Bill 2005.

Women's Health Victoria opposes the proposed National Health Amendment (Budget Measures- Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme Safety Net) Bill 2005 which would raise the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) safety net threshold. According to Parliamentary Secretary to the Federal Health Minister, Chris Pyne (Senate Hansard 14/09/05), growth in government expenditure on prescription medication is due in part to the

---

**Women's Health Victoria Inc.** Reg No. A0029795W ABN 33 365 284 944

**Level 1, 123 Lonsdale Street Melbourne Victoria 3000**

Telephone **03 9662 3755** Facsimile **03 9663 7955** Email [whv@whv.org.au](mailto:whv@whv.org.au) Website [www.whv.org.au](http://www.whv.org.au)

**Postal Address:** GPO Box 1160 Melbourne Victorian 3001

ageing population. Raising the threshold will make medication less affordable and, as the population continues to age, rather than alleviating government expenditure medications, the lack of affordability of medicines will demand government intervention. Therefore the proposed changes to the National Health Amendment (Budget Measures- Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme Safety Net) Bill 2005 will cause long term problems for the community as a whole although the gains for the government will be short lived.

In addition, all Australians and their families who need to spend significant amount of money on prescription medication each year will suffer the negative impacts of raising the safety net. Many of these Australians find their health status leaves them in financially vulnerable situations, and increases in the cost of their medication (via the raised safety net threshold) will only further compound this. This is particularly true for women who are less likely than men to have secure ongoing employment, housing and savings and superannuation.

Women's Health Victoria is also concerned about the increase in the safety net threshold being linked to the cost of two indexed co-payments per year for four years. Co-payment costs continue to increase and shortages in access to medical services will only put additional pressure on this. The proposed changes to the safety net threshold would not only see the costs of medication to Australians increase but, by linking the increase to the cost of co-payments, the amount by which the safety net threshold increases will grow each year. If co-payment costs currently range between \$15 and \$25 for non-bulk billing general practitioners, over 4 years the safety net threshold could increase from \$874.90 to \$1,079.60. As co-payment costs increase, it is likely that this threshold will be even greater.

Women's Health Victoria opposes the National Health Amendment (Budget Measures- Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme Safety Net) Bill 2005 as one which will increase the burden on average Australians needing an affordable safety net for their medication costs.

Yours Sincerely



MARILYN BEAUMONT  
Executive Director