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**AMA**

06/97

Committee Secretary
Community Affairs Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Committee Secretary

Thank you for providing the Australian Medical Association (AMA) with the opportunity to table a submission on the *Transparent Advertising and Notification of Pregnancy Counselling Services Bill 2005*.

The AMA supports the principles behind the Bill, namely, that advertising and notification for pregnancy counselling services must not be misleading or deceptive.

The AMA fully supports the right of every woman to make her own decisions regarding reproductive health. Access to reproductive health services, including family planning, should be free from undue political, commercial, cultural, or religious interference.

Facing an unwanted pregnancy is confronting for any woman. The decision to terminate the pregnancy or to continue with the pregnancy and either raise the child or put the child up for adoption can be extremely difficult and distressing. A woman's decision in this regard is extremely personal and no woman should fear being stigmatised or marginalised for any decision made.

For a woman seeking a termination, the inability to access non-directional services may result in that woman not seeking appropriate advice and support, possibly leading to later term abortions. As such, it is imperative that women are fully informed regarding the range of available pregnancy counselling services. They must be able to readily identify non-directional services from other services that do not provide termination referrals.

Women need appropriate access to pregnancy counselling services that provide objective information regarding all three pregnancy options – raising the child, adoption, and termination of pregnancy. 'Appropriate access' in this sense means that non-directional pregnancy counselling services are widely available, 24 hrs a day, and that, where a service does not provide the full range of pregnancy options for these three options, this is made clear in the notification and any other advertisements.

Whilst recognising that the broader issue of abortion falls beyond the scope of this Bill, the AMA considers that most people, whether 'pro-choice' or 'pro-life', would support interventions to reduce Australia's abortion rate; however, those interventions must be supportive, fair, and equitable to all women.


The AMA believes that interventions to reduce Australia's abortion rate must support and inform women and must not attempt to coerce women into making any particular reproductive choice. Acceptable interventions to reduce abortions should focus on both reducing the number of unwanted pregnancies as well as reducing the number of abortions related to unwanted pregnancies. The AMA's Executive Council has recently developed the following resolution in relation to this issue, that the AMA supports the following as acceptable interventions to reduce Australia's abortion rate:

1. *Acceptable interventions to reduce unwanted pregnancies:*
 - *Increased investment in female education, particularly focused to increased high school retention rates;*
 - *Investment in promotion and improvement of sex education in primary and secondary schools at least financially equivalent to that allocated to pregnancy counseling;*
 - *Investment in self esteem, self confidence building, and assertiveness activities in schools, particularly for females;*
 - *Investment in measures that will increase awareness of and greater access to:*
 - *confidential health services for young people;*
 - *confidential objective family planning/sexual health counseling with family planning trained professional;*
 - *a full range of effective contraception.*
 - *Provision of emergency contraception, as well as a full range of contraception, on thePBS;*
 - *Reduction of the stigma and privacy/confidentiality concerns in relating to obtaining contraception.*
2. *Acceptable interventions to reduce abortions related to unwanted pregnancies:*
 - *Provision of greater financial support to those raising children, such as Federal Government funding of 14 weeks paid maternity leave and an increase in the availability and affordability of child care (eg allow childcare costs to be claimed as a tax deductible expense; allow employers to offer childcare as a FBT exempt salary sacrifice);*
 - *Maintenance of awareness of family planning issues (fertility, contraception) for 'older' women and/or women who already have children, including permanent forms of contraception;*
 - *Investment in 'return to school' support programs for teenage mothers;*
 - *Elimination of pregnancy discrimination related to employment (consistent high rate of complains to Sex Discrimination Commissioner/Human Rights Commissioner).*

Whilst advocating for a reduction in Australia's abortion rate through acceptable interventions, the AMA feels that all women must be able to access non-directional pregnancy counselling services at any time. We support the principles behind the Bill, namely, that advertising and notification for pregnancy counselling services must not be misleading or deceptive. To ensure greater transparency and accountability in the performances of such services, we contend that the Minister report annually on payments to and performance of pregnancy counselling services.

Indeed, for this program to benefit more women, the counselling should be considered for wider access to pregnant women who often have a variety of problems requiring deeper consultation.

Yours sincerely



Dr Mukesh Haikerwal
President

8 June 2006