

# Pregnancy Counselling Australia

Submission to the Senate Community Affairs  
Legislation Committee

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Transparent Advertising and Notification of  
Pregnancy Counselling Services Bill 2005

Pregnancy Counselling Australia  
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**Pregnancy Counselling Australia** is a non-profit, non-denominational, 24 hour national telephone counselling service for women in a crisis pregnancy and those experiencing post-abortion trauma.

We are funded by independent donations through Right to Life Australia. Our service has been operating for 25 years. We are a pregnancy counselling service. We are not an abortion referral service. We receive no Government funding.

Our advertisement in the 24-hour section of the White Pages reads 'Alternatives to abortion & post-abortion counselling.' This clearly states that we are concerned about supporting pregnant women and those negatively affected by the abortion decision. Sensis has agreed that our advertisement does comply with their requirements. Our web site, 'www.pregnancycounselling.com.au' also states that we do not refer for abortion. Our Duty of Care does not allow us to refer for any service that can cause harm.

Our volunteer counsellors receive an initial training course. Leo Cahill, psychologist, designed our training manual based on current person-centered psychotherapeutic protocols. Kath Allison, M.Psych. M.A.P.S, is our consultant psychologist who reviews our manual and oversees our training. Our volunteers receive regular ongoing upgrading of skills from health professionals, doctors, social workers, adoption agencies, natural family planning experts and post-abortion counsellors.

Thousands of women each year find themselves in a crisis pregnancy situation. Parenting, adoption and abortion are the three options available to the pregnant woman. The majority of women confronted with an unplanned pregnancy will decide to have an abortion. She will not seek independent counselling. When a woman is determined to abort she will contact an abortion clinic or family planning centre and make an appointment. Abortion providers are boldly advertised in service directories. Abortion providers do not offer ongoing pregnancy support or an adoption referral. It is in their financial interest to promote abortion.

*\*Kate, 34 years, had an abortion recently. She was 10 weeks pregnant. She is now having nightmares of a baby screaming. Before the abortion she was ambivalent. She spoke to many people including a professional counsellor. She was encouraged to have an abortion. She now wants to be pregnant again as soon as possible.*

Many women, on realizing they are pregnant are in shock. They are confused and ambivalent. Our telephone service allows them the opportunity to discuss their situation and explore their feelings anonymously with a caring female counsellor. Our role as pregnancy counsellors is to listen to the caller with compassion and understanding. We give them as much time as they need to discuss the issues surrounding their problem pregnancy. Pregnancy Counselling Australia is acutely aware of the fragile and vulnerable state of many of our callers. Our aim is to defuse the emotional turmoil and make room for rational thinking. We respect their privacy and need for confidentiality at all times. We keep non-identifying records of all calls.

In many cases women are seeking affirmation, encouragement and even permission to continue their pregnancy. Many are feeling pressured by the father of the child or by their circumstances to choose abortion although it goes against their beliefs and instincts. Others feel they are too young or too old to have a child. They worry about

how the pregnancy will affect other significant people in their life while ignoring their own thoughts and feelings. Young women are concerned that a pregnancy will interrupt their schooling, career or plans for the future. Mothers are upset that another child will put extra strain on their finances. Others have health issues that may be worsened by pregnancy.

*\*Jenny has 3 girls, the youngest 2 years old. She has just found out she is pregnant. She has a heart condition. She knows if she goes to the doctor he will send her to the specialist who will tell her it is too dangerous to continue and she will have to abort. This is what happened to her last year. She was 10 weeks pregnant. Now she is in the same situation again. She would love to have another child. She is distressed and afraid to go to her doctor. She said, 'I wish I could hide and not see anyone until it is too late to abort.'*

Many women are unaware of the stage of development of their baby. They have no understanding of the negative physical and psychological effects of abortion. We offer information on the impact of pregnancy on the mother's body, mind and spirit. We discuss the joys and challenges of motherhood. Due to the overwhelming evidence of research into the detrimental effects of abortion, it is in the best health interests of women to make them aware of the possible prolonged and profound grief following an abortion. We encourage them to seek further independent counselling or information on all three options before making an informed decision on the future of their pregnancy. Mostly we are not aware of the outcome of their decision.

With every caller, where possible, a counsellor is trained to give our 'Duty of Care Statement' –

- We are not a medical centre.
- We are not a legal service.
- We do not recommend any procedure that may cause physical or psychological harm so we do not refer for abortion.

It is not our role as a counselling service to refer women to an abortion facility. We are a non-medical organization and we do not have the authority to issue a referral for a medical procedure.

Wherever elective medical or surgical procedures occur, the standard policy is –

- To take time to consider all options.
- To be adequately informed about possible adverse effects.
- To explore all alternatives.
- To have a 'cooling off' period.

Yet most abortion clinics are prepared to do the procedure on the day of the first appointment. The lack of information provided at the abortion clinic causes distress in women. The relief they were promised is often short lived. In all too many cases sadness, guilt, grief and regret soon follow the abortion.

Professor Philip Ney, MD, FRCP(C), MA, RPsych, a Canadian Psychiatrist, who has spent over 30 years researching the effects of abortion on mothers, fathers and siblings states in his book, 'Deeply Damaged; 'It is not possible to benefit at the expense of another. When we hurt somebody we harm ourselves. When we contribute to another's death, something of our humanity dies.' (Pg.10.)

After an abortion, a woman may feel initial relief. This is often replaced by numbness. In order to cope with the reality of what she has done she must justify and rationalize her decision. She usually fills her life with distractions. The energy required to deny and suppress her feelings and conflicts has an impact on her relationship with her partner, her surviving children and others. It may not be until years later that the woman realizes that some of her dysfunctional behavior is connected to her past abortion.

*\*Beth had an abortion 15 years previously. She rang PCA on impulse because she was feeling depressed. The relationship which she thought had a future, disintegrated soon after the abortion. The father of her child became involved with another woman who became pregnant. Although this relationship did not last the woman decided to continue her pregnancy and she gave birth to a daughter. Beth lives in a small town. She sees this girl often and she is a constant reminder to Beth of the child she lost. Beth eventually married and has 2 children. She said, 'I love my husband and children but I don't enjoy them.' Her family does not know about her past and she lives with her memories and wonders how different her life would have been had she continued her first pregnancy.*

For some women the grief and regret happen soon after the abortion.

*\*Melissa rang from work sounding agitated. She had an abortion at 6 weeks and is not coping with the daily demands of life. She is married and has 2 young children. When she discovered she was pregnant she felt she couldn't cope with a third child. She rushed into the abortion decision with her husband's approval. She is now on anti-depressants. Her doctor referred her to a counsellor. She has had four sessions but has found no relief. She is not eating or sleeping properly. The children are picking up on the emotional stress and coming into their parents' bed at night. She has moments when she seems well but she is generally distressed and wants to 'melt onto the floor.'*

At Pregnancy Counselling Australia we will never suggest abortion to a woman as a solution to her immediate distress. Pregnancy is a natural consequence of sexual intercourse. It is not a medical condition that requires intervention. Pregnancy has a profound effect on the body, mind and spirit of the mother. If the complicated hormonal process of pregnancy is suddenly interrupted, the woman is often left feeling deflated, empty and aimless. Every pregnancy leaves an indelible imprint on the mind and heart of the mother. Her memory stores the individual characteristics of the child. Attachment to an unborn baby is unavoidable, even if that child is unwanted. Grief is the inevitable consequence of loss.

Every health and counselling facility needs to have a Duty of Care to advise women of the hazards of abortion and the stage of development of their baby. To tell women that abortion is a simple, safe and emotionally benign procedure is misleading.

Pregnancy Counselling Australia at this time, and at no time in the past, has ever received Government funding nor have we requested it. We have support for our policy from an increasing numbers of ordinary Australians who donate to our cause. They are becoming aware that abortion is a poor decision and that women and their children deserve better.

We would welcome the opportunity to address the committee in person.

*\*Names have been changed to protect their identity.*

Yours faithfully,

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