

Submission

on

Transparent Advertising and Notification of  
Pregnancy Counselling Services Bill 2005

to

Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

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by

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## **Definitions of pregnancy counselling services**

For the purposes of this Bill a definition of non-directive pregnancy counselling services has been provided. According to this definition such a service should offer counselling and information with respect to the three pregnancy options available, as well as referral to termination of pregnancy services where requested. The use of the term 'non directive' in describing referral policies and practices is an inaccurate and misleading use of the term which has long been held to describe a counselling process or modality.

The term 'non directive' in the field of counselling refers to a counselling modality developed by Carl Rogers in the 1930s and is also referred to as 'person centred' or 'client centred' therapy. Within this term there exists no room for dictating either practical services or referral to other services.

Whilst the ideal of 'non directive' counselling aims to ensure that the counsellor does not 'direct' a client in a particular way, nor impose their own values base onto a client, it is not always the only modality of counselling that is beneficial to the process in pregnancy counselling. The majority of counselling services using a 'non directive' philosophy and basis in their counselling will also utilise other modalities such as cognitive behavioural strategies in ways that enable women to more fully explore their experiences.

While this term is firmly entrenched in the field of counselling to define a process, it is simply inappropriate to attempt to change its meaning by the introduction of this Bill.

## **Referral for abortion services**

Abortion services in Australia are widely advertised and readily accessible by the majority of the population. Most people accessing pregnancy counselling services will have made such contact by utilising a phone book or internet, and information about abortion services is also readily available through these media.

To suggest that women who access a pregnancy counselling service, regardless of its referral policy, are unable to locate an abortion service without such a referral is both judgmental and patronising.

Counsellors in the pregnancy counselling field are for the most part not medically trained or qualified and therefore not professionally entitled to refer for an abortion or any other medical procedure. Referrals of this nature are a function of medical practitioners and suitably qualified health practitioners, not a function of a counselling service.

A large proportion of calls to pregnancy counselling lines are for purposes other than decision making, for example, calls from women seeking support or advice in a continuing pregnancy. If it becomes mandatory that pregnancy counselling lines must offer referrals for termination of pregnancy, and if it is accepted that such referrals can only be made by medically appropriate personnel, the range of support services offered by pregnancy counselling lines becomes restricted, thus limiting access to appropriate support services for those seeking such assistance.

Abortion remains illegal in most states of Australia. Therefore, in these situations, the Bill requires the counsellor to be complicit in an illegal act.

### **Misleading and deceptive advertising**

Pregnancy Help Australia is supportive of the requirement of truth in advertising in relation to all counselling services, including pregnancy counselling.

It is unprecedented that a service be required to advertise that which it does not provide, let alone to be so specific regarding a single service such as abortion referral. There is no evidence that a service which does not provide a particular service or referral provides a less adequate or effective counselling service to women.

There are 'for profit' abortion services currently advertising in the help pages of local telephone directories. These services provide no practical or material support, nor referral to pregnancy support services, to women who access their 'counselling' but who do not choose to have an abortion. In fact, many services, promoting themselves as 'pro choice', have a clear financial vested interest in women choosing and undergoing abortion. In not addressing this issue, the Bill, in effect, seeks to reduce women's options when faced with unplanned pregnancy.

### **In Summary**

Pregnancy Help Australia supports truth and transparency in advertising for all services related to health matters. However, this Bill will not achieve these aims, even in the narrowly defined area of pregnancy health and help. This Bill seeks to redefine widely used and accepted counselling terminology, targets only specific services and proposes changes that will be detrimental not only to the range of choices available but also to the quality and substance of counselling on offer to women at a very vulnerable time in their lives.