

**TRANSPARENT ADVERTISING AND NOTIFICATION OF PREGNANCY  
COUNSELLING SERVICES BILL 2005**

**Submission to Community Affairs Legislation Committee**

**Submission from**

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**Submission to the Community Affairs Legislation Committee of the Australian Senate re the Transparent Advertising and Notification of Pregnancy Counselling Bill 2005.**

The Women's Services Network of South Australia is a network of Government and non-government organisations/agencies that receive government funding and provide services to women in South Australia and agree with the philosophy of the Women's Services Network.

See attachment 1

We write to support the Transparent Advertising and Notification of Pregnancy Counselling Services Bill 2005.

It has been a matter of concern to the Network for some time that women cannot be assured of receiving unbiased counselling and accurate information when accessing assistance with an unplanned pregnancy.

In South Australia women seek assistance from their General Practitioner, community health centres, women's health services and hospitals and also the pregnancy help organisations that are listed in telephone directories.

Member organisations of this network have raised the public health problem of women reporting that pregnancy help services do not provide unbiased support for them in their crisis, including information about all pregnancy options and will not provide information about services providing termination of pregnancy.

This can and does result in unnecessary stress for women and if needing a termination of pregnancy delays for them in accessing this procedure, which is safest when done early in pregnancy.

In regulating the advertising of pregnancy counselling services the Bill requires that all such services advertise in a clearly transparent manner. This includes informing potential callers/clients that a service does **not** refer for termination of pregnancy.

The Bill goes further in requiring that telephone service providers can only list on its 24-hour health and help pages non-directive counselling services. It is these pages that women often turn to when first faced with an unplanned pregnancy.

Women from rural and remote areas access these services. Women who live in rural, remote and regional areas do not have easy access to pregnancy counselling services. Even if a service exists within their area they are often reluctant to access it due to fears about privacy, confidentiality and 'small town' gossip. Women usually prefer to maintain their anonymity when making initial enquiries about their available options. These women rely on advertisements for services delivering what they purport to do ie provide non judgemental information about a range of options.

Whilst General Practitioners have professional accountabilities to the Medical Board there is currently no accountability for these pregnancy help organisations. This means that they can continue to do harm to women without being held accountable for the consequences. Section 8 of the Bill addresses this by ensuring that organisations that have been found to have been deceptive in their advertising, and so mislead women to contact them when seeking advice or information on all pregnancy options, do not receive funding until the organisation is compliant with the Act.

**The South Australian Women's Services Network strongly supports the intent and provisions of the Bill.**

**Ms Ann Marie Hayes  
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Co Chairs  
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**16<sup>th</sup> June 2006**

Attachment 1



## Women's Services Network of South Australia

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### Women's Services Network Of South Australia (WSNSA)

#### **BACKGROUND**

The Office for Status of Women convened a meeting for Women in collaboration with Women's Health Services Advisory Group in February 2003 to pursue the idea of a Women's Services Network. At this meeting a variety of Women's Services, non-government and government organisations attended. The outcome of this meeting was unanimous support of a Women's Network as it would provide an opportunity for collaboration between services, provide a forum to raise and debate issues of concern, share information and advocate for women's services in South Australia to both Federal and State government.

#### **PHILOSOPHY**

The Women's Services Network is committed to a feminist philosophy and actively addresses issues of concern to organisations/agencies providing services to women.

## **STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

To promote social justice, health and well-being and advance the rights and interests of women in South Australia. The network will provide support, information and collective action, of and for, women's services in South Australia and in particular to:

- ❑ Advocate on behalf of women and women's services in South Australia.
- ❑ Work co-operatively and collaboratively with other women's networks and services to advocate for improved services for women at both state and national level.
- ❑ Provide a forum to raise and debate issues of concern to members and to formulate collaborative responses to these issues.
- ❑ Provide input to state and federal government on issues that effect women.
- ❑ To enhance, support and strengthen the capacity of organisations that provide services to women.

### ***Types of membership***

There are two types of membership:

1. Voting members being women's services representatives
2. Associate members being key individuals who are able to contribute to the network and are willing to adhere to the philosophy and terms of reference.

The process for enabling the addition of new members to WSNSA is as follows:

1. Executive to receive information including completed nomination form and supporting documents by prospective member
2. Executive checks eligibility according to membership criteria suggested by WSNSA
3. Executive will ratify or reject nomination.
4. Applicant will then be notified of decision.
5. Network is notified of new member by the Executive.