



**Sexual Health &  
Family Planning  
Australia**

*Leading the way in sexual and reproductive health*

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Chairperson  
Senate Committee on Finance and Public Administration  
Senate  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Senator

Sexual Health and Family Planning Australia (SH&FPA) is pleased to make a submission to the Senate Committee on the matter of the Access Card, formally Human Services Enhanced Service Delivery Bill 2007.

SH&FPA is the national peak organisation for Australia's eight State/Territory sexual health and family planning organizations. In 2005-06 our Member Organisations (MOs) provided over 200,000 individual clinical services and education and professional training to over 100,000 persons across Australia. Our MO clinical and health promotion services cover issues such as fertility, contraception, pregnancy (planned and unplanned), sexual health, sexual assault and violence, lesbian and gay sexual health, disability, female genital mutilation, STI reduction, HIV/AIDS, and relationships counselling.

SH&FPA has not developed and does not state a public policy position on the development of the Access Card, *per se*. SH&FPA wants to ensure that services to young people are not altered or made more difficult to access as a result of the development of the Card, and would be concerned if its implementation resulted in additional obstacles for young people to obtain confidential access to sexual and reproductive health services.

We note that, for Medicare, eligibility is defined as being a person who is currently eligible under the Health Insurance Act 1973, and the Medicare Card is currently regulated by the National Health Act 1953. This arrangement should continue.

Division 2, Paragraph 22(b) of the draft Access Card Bill states that people are eligible if "...you are at least 18, or if you are exempted from this requirement (see section 65)..." Division 5, Paragraph 65 (5) includes requirements for which individuals might be exempted including "the requirement to be at least 18 for an access card (see paragraph 22(b))". Paragraph 70 covers the delegation by the Secretary to various Commonwealth officers.

The Explanatory Memorandum states that "from time to time there may be cases where children under 18 may need to be provided with a card of their own (for example to access medical services)". The exemptions for individuals are with the Secretary, not the Minister. Class exemptions rest with the Minister.

It is clear that as the Bill is currently drafted, the requirements for persons 15 years and older wishing to obtain an Access Card is more onerous than current arrangements, in that young people in this age group will need to apply for an exemption from an exclusion. This may be administratively complex. SH&FPA is concerned, therefore, that implementation of the Card may result in additional obstacles for young people to obtain access to sexual and reproductive health services.

There are important issues concerning the health, safety and welfare of young people at stake in this discussion. For example, one Member Organisation of SH&FPA has highlighted particular circumstances of young women being sexually abused by family members, and the absolute necessity for the young women to be able to access health and medical services without the knowledge of the perpetrator.

We have noted Minister Hockey's Media Release of 24 January 07 which stated:

"A person under the age of 18 who currently holds a Medicare card will still be able to obtain an access card. The application process will stay the same as now."

Accordingly, SH&FPA submits to your Committee that the Access Card Bill should be amended so that current arrangements with regard to access to Medicare Cards for persons 15 years and older are clearly adhered to, in the least administratively complex manner consistent with the aims of the Bill and other legislation.

In summary, SH&FPA supports, that as a minimum, the current arrangements with regard to Card access and age be maintained, namely that people aged fifteen and over be able to obtain their own Medicare (or equivalent) card.

We are happy to provide additional information if requested. Please contact our National Secretariat CEO, Ann Brassil, as required.

Yours sincerely

[authorised for transmission by email]

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Dr Devora Lieberman MD MPH RANZCOG  
NATIONAL PRESIDENT

28 February 2007