

## MEDIA RELEASE

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19 May 2010

### **CALL FOR NATIONAL STRATEGY ON SEXUAL & REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH**

The Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) is calling for the development of a national strategy on sexual and reproductive health to reduce soaring rates of sexually transmissible infections and unplanned pregnancies. This week's Australian Women's Health Conference in Hobart has heard that Tasmania has the second highest teenage pregnancy rate in Australia and rates of Chlamydia have tripled in recent years.

"We need more coordinated action at the national level to tackle problems like inadequate access to the full range of available contraceptive methods, rising rates of Chlamydia and too many unplanned pregnancies, just to name three," said Dr Angela Taft, Convenor of PHAA's Special Interest Group on Women's Health.

"In Tasmania in 2008, 27.6 out of every 1000 teenage girls and women gave birth - that's 449 births to teenage mothers. Tasmania has the second highest teenage pregnancy rate in Australia, second only to the Northern Territory. Tasmania's Department of Health and Human Services also recently released the results of a long term study into Chlamydia infection rates indicating that rates tripled in the state between 2001 and 2007.

"Prevention has to be the bedrock of a national approach. We need national leadership on sexual and reproductive health to ensure that interventions address all the inter-related issues. For example, parents and governments are naturally worried by excessive drinking among young people. While there's anxiety about the associated anti-social behaviour and violence, we should also be concerned about excessive drinking increasing young people's vulnerability to sexually transmissible infections and unplanned pregnancies.

"We need to combine good quality, evidence-based sex education, accessible reproductive health services and an awareness of the wide range of needs across our multi cultural society. That will be best achieved through a comprehensive national strategy.

"A comprehensive approach, such as that in place in Scandinavia, Holland and Germany gets the results. These countries have the lowest rates of teenage pregnancies, no significant changes in the age of first intercourse in 20 years, low rates of HIV and sexually transmissible infections and have also achieved a reduction in the number of teenage abortions," said Dr Taft.

**For further details/comment:**

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*A copy of PHAA's Call to Action is available on the website at:*

[http://www.phaa.net.au/documents/SRH\\_call\\_to\\_action.pdf](http://www.phaa.net.au/documents/SRH_call_to_action.pdf)

*A background paper is also available at:*

[http://www.phaa.net.au/documents/SRH\\_background\\_paper.pdf](http://www.phaa.net.au/documents/SRH_background_paper.pdf)