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ABORTION LAW REFORM OVERDUE IN QUEENSLAND

The Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) has expressed its support for proposed changes that would make drug-induced abortions the same as surgical abortions under the current laws in Queensland (QLD). However, the PHAA is disappointed that State Parliament will not be considering the broader issue of the decriminalisation of abortion. The PHAA points out that the broader decriminalisation of abortion in QLD would follow on from similar changes to legislation in other jurisdictions.

“The updating of the antiquated Victorian laws to decriminalise abortion last year was designed to reflect existing clinical practice. We are not aware of any evidence indicating that the law has changed the numbers of terminations performed in Victoria, nor in the ACT where the law is similar. While changes to legislation in relation to drug-induced abortions in QLD represent a step in the right direction, there is still the broader issue around decriminalisation of abortion,” explained Jenny Ejlak, Convenor of the PHAA Women’s Health Special Interest Group.

“Decriminalisation of abortion is supported by a majority of community members. The Victorian Law Reform Commission (VLRC) last year reviewed numerous studies and concluded that ‘A majority of Australians support a woman’s right to choose whether to have an abortion’ and ‘...even among persons with religious beliefs, supporters remain in the majority.’ A Queensland based survey commissioned by Children by Choice and run by Auspoll in May this year found that 79% of Queenslanders wanted the law changed so abortion is no longer a crime.

“Over 100 people attended a rally in QLD on the weekend to support the decriminalisation of abortion.

“The PHAA supports abortion rights within a context of broader sexual and reproductive health with equal support for maternity and post-natal services and a strong education and prevention focus. Last year the Public Health Association, Sexual Health and Family Planning Australia and the Australian Reproductive Health Alliance called on the Federal Government to develop a National Sexual and Reproductive Health Strategy with an emphasis on prevention of unplanned and unwanted pregnancies. The background paper and call to action was endorsed by over 25 national organisations.

“There is currently a strong focus on the importance of preventive health at the national level and ensuring access to education and prevention in the area of sexual and reproductive health is consistent with the broader philosophy that prevention is better than cure.

“Ultimately, if you build a fence at the top of a cliff you will reduce the number of ambulances needed at the bottom. Pro-choice groups want a stronger, more effective fence, in terms of access to the full range of education and prevention services to reduce the number of unplanned pregnancies. However, in practical terms it is also important to recognise that no matter how high you build the fence, there will always be a need for an ambulance at the bottom of the cliff from time to time. The decriminalisation of abortion services would ensure that the full range of options are available to QLD women, as in other jurisdictions,” said Ms Ejlak.

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