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At Last - AusAid Maternal Guideline Restrictions Removed

The Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) lends its voice of congratulations to all those who have been supportive of the action taken by the Foreign Minister, the Hon Stephen Smith MP, in gaining support from the Labor Caucus for a comprehensive approach to maternal health.

PHAA wrote to the Minister about a month ago urging the removal of the restrictive Family Planning Guidelines from AusAID funding.

Convenor of the PHAA Women's Health Special Interest Group, Jenny Ejlak said "the restrictions on the guidelines that have now been removed were introduced for political reasons and were not based on good public health principles. The public health approach to reproductive health care allows all options for medically appropriate and safe procedures, as well as comprehensive information provision and prevention programs".

At the time of writing the letter the following additional arguments were put to Mr Smith:

- The vast majority of maternal deaths occur in the developing world, and a significant proportion of these are believed to be due to unsafe abortion. This is evidence that lack of safe medical services will not prevent abortion, but rather increases the risks to and deaths of women. This is a significant public health issue. Allowing AusAID funding to be used for a comprehensive range of advice and services on reproductive health will help to prevent many of these deaths.
- Removing these guidelines will also assist Australia to meet its targets for the Millennium Development Goals and its obligations under the International Conference on Population and Development (1994) and the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (1979). It will allow women in developing countries the same reproductive rights and choices as women in Australia.

"A sensible approach has been taken that echoes that taken by President Obama and is one that deserves congratulations," Ms Ejlak concluded.

For further information/comment:

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