

PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA
MEDIA RELEASE

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Public Health Association condemns mandatory reporting of sex for 14 and 15 year olds

The Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) today added its voice to the coalition of peak health bodies that have condemned the aspects of the Northern Territories *Care and Protection of Children Act* that require the mandatory reporting of all sex for 14 and 15 year olds.

“It appears that the Northern Territory is becoming a “police state” whereby it is acceptable for the police to interfere in the private affairs of consenting mature minors. No other jurisdiction in Australia has given the police such powers. Why does this one legislative assembly think it is acceptable to establish such a dangerous precedent?” said Ms Jane McQueen, President of the NT Branch of the PHAA.

“While we welcome the requirement to report all children under 14 years of age so that FACS can undertake a family assessment and ensure there is no abuse occurring it is deeply problematic to extend this to all 14 and 15 year olds,” she said.

“There is a wise old professional ethic in the health field that dates back to Hippocrates –*First do no harm*. It now appears that overwhelmingly health professional, public health and legal peak bodies in Australia believe that this new requirement will do extensive harm to the health and well being of young people in the Northern Territory,” she added

“Young people will stop coming to health services and will not confide in their GP or other health care provider whether they are sexually active or not. This will lead to more unprotected sex and teenage pregnancies. It will lead to untreated and potentially life threatening STIs some of which will cause infertility. It will lead to young pregnant women not presenting for antenatal care in order to optimise birth weights. And for what purpose?” she asked.

“There is no evidence that health professionals had failed to report suspected abuse under the previous legislation. In the current tragic case in the public arena from Munitjulu, a case we understand had been used to justify the new powers, the health professional involved reported suspected abuse even though her manager had advised her not to. The capacity of FACS to properly assess and follow up on the report was almost non-existent. This new legislation is going to increase FACS and police workloads making it even less likely that they will be able to effectively focus on those cases where abuse is already suspected,” she observed.

“The state has many important roles to play in protecting the health of the public but interfering in the private affairs of mature minors who are doing no harm to themselves or others should not be a new role for the state. This new legislation needs to be amended such that the requirement to report consensual sex in 14 and 15 year olds is removed,” she concluded.

For further information/comment:

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