OPEN LETTER

To the Members of Queensland Parliament

22 February 2017

The Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) is the leading non-government organisation for public health in Australia. We have around 1900 individual members and represent over 40 professional groups concerned with the promotion of health at a population level - including medical and other public health professionals.

The PHAA is committed to promoting better health outcomes for Australians with a particular focus on the social determinants of health. It is with this objective in mind that we write to you, as you prepare to vote on legislation to decriminalise abortion.

We write to make clear the Association’s support for legal access to abortion and our belief that Queensland’s current laws are bad for women and doctors alike. In our view they impede the provision of the full range of safe, accessible and timely reproductive services.

As public health experts, we recognise the importance of patient autonomy and informed consent in good policy. We also recognise the importance of acknowledging a woman’s right to make personal decisions regarding her health, and in particular, her right to maintain control over her own fertility.

We also note that the current legal system lacks legal certainty for Queensland medical practitioners when it comes to performing terminations. For some practitioners this uncertainty has caused them to restrict the scope of care they are able to provide their patients. We note that this restriction is creating barriers to healthcare access. This is particularly problematic in rural and remote areas as just ten private clinics offer abortion services in Queensland. The majority of these are situated in the southeast corner of the state. The PHAA believe considerations of equity and access should be central in all legal decisions governing health policies.

Further, we note that decisions around timing of a termination of pregnancy can involve a number of extremely complex factors - including the presence of foetal conditions, multiple pregnancy and pre-existing maternal disease. We emphasise the importance of not introducing laws that would restrict the use of the most appropriate treatment options in these situations. We note, as with all other medical procedures, there are good quality, comprehensive, evidence-based guidelines that support medical practitioners involved in termination treatments.

Finally, we note the existence and successful implementation of legal frameworks similar to that being currently discussed in Victoria.

We urge you to consider these factors, and cast a vote to support the proposed decriminalisation package.

Sincerely,

Michael Moore
CEO
Public Health Association of Australia