Hon Robyn Jane Lambley MLA
Minister for Health
PO Box 3146
Darwin NT 0801

24 September 2014

Dear Minister

Northern Territory legislative arrangements for termination of pregnancy

The Public Health Association of Australia Incorporated (PHAA) is recognised as the principal non-government organisation for public health in Australia and works to promote the health and wellbeing of all Australians. The Association seeks better population health outcomes based on prevention, the social determinants of health and equity principles.

At PHAA’s Annual General Meeting in Perth on 17 September 2014, an updated Abortion Policy was adopted and a copy of this policy is attached for your information.

In summary, PHAA believes that the following steps should be undertaken by legislators, policymakers, funding bodies and health services:

- Organisations should support and collaborate in the development of a comprehensive national sexual and reproductive health strategy.
- Organisations working at public health and individual health care levels should address fertility control and informed decision making. This should include education and information about access to abortion services and choice of method where available.
- Women should be supported at both individual and population levels in their right to choose the fertility control options that are most appropriate to their individual circumstances and without coercion.
- Research, training and workforce development should be adequately funded, as for other areas of health practice, to promote evidence based quality care, adequacy of and access to service provision and service improvement.
- Regulation of abortion should be removed from the criminal laws and codes of the States and Territories of Australia. Abortion should be regulated, as are all other medical services, under existing health care legislation.
- Barriers and restrictions to access such as requirements for multiple opinions or mandated counselling should not be applied through legislation, regulation or policy. Care should be delivered in accordance with evidence based standards of best practice and informed consent.
- Abortion services should be included in service planning for all state and territory health authorities
- Service development and funding arrangements should increase access to medically induced abortion in the interests of improving access to earlier abortion and increasing women’s capacity to choose the care most appropriate to their circumstances. This is especially important in rural and remote areas where surgical abortion is not readily available.
• A mix of private and public services should be available in all jurisdictions as for other reproductive health services; adequate public services must be available for women experiencing financial disadvantage and limited access, so that cost is not a barrier to access.
• Routine, complete and systematic data collection on abortion should be implemented in Australia to increase understanding of how services may be improved, including how to improve strategies to reduce unintended pregnancies.
• Medicare rebates for abortion procedures should be sufficient to prevent cost presenting a barrier to access.
• Counselling offered to women considering abortion should always be non-judgmental, professional and provide advice on all options including referral pathways.
• Abortion service providers should always offer optional, comprehensive pre and post-abortion counselling.
• Any health professional with a conscientious objection to personal participation in abortion care should inform their patients of this and refer patients wanting to consider or discuss abortion to another health professional without such objection (this does not have to be an abortion service provider). Registration, professional and educational bodies should reinforce this responsibility.
• Legal protection should safeguard clients and staff of legal abortion services from harassment.

We trust that this information is of assistance to you in considering legislative arrangements for termination of pregnancy in the Northern Territory. Further, we endorse the reforms being promoted by the Family Planning Welfare Association and Top End Women’s Legal Service, which are in line with national best practice.

Please do not hesitate to contact PHAA should you require additional information with regard to the attached policy.

Yours sincerely

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The Public Health Association of Australia is a non-party-political organisation with a membership drawn from more than 40 health-related professions. The Association makes a major contribution to health policy in Australia and has branches in every State and Territory.