



MEDIA RELEASE

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Remove barriers to mifepristone

The Royal Women's Hospital (The Women's) and Family Planning Victoria are supporting calls to lift the legislative restriction on mifepristone, formerly known as RU-486.

Mifepristone is a synthetic steroid that inhibits the actions of progesterone in the maintenance of early pregnancy. The drug is utilised by medical practitioners throughout the world to induce a medical termination of early pregnancy.

Currently, Australian abortion service providers almost exclusively perform termination of early pregnancy via a surgical procedure because alternatives to mifepristone are less effective.

The Women's Associate Director, Women's Services, Dr Chris Bayly said: "Research has shown that mifepristone, taken in conjunction with synthetic prostaglandins, can be safely used to induce medical abortion.

"Many women undergoing a termination of pregnancy want to access safe medical abortion in preference to surgical abortion. We believe access to medical abortion via mifepristone is an alternative that should be available."

In contrast to Australia, women in the United States, United Kingdom, New Zealand and many other countries worldwide are able to access medical abortion services via the administration of mifepristone and prostaglandin.

Family Planning Victoria Chief Executive Lynne Jordan and Dr Bayly said: "Termination of pregnancy is an important women's health issue, estimated to affect around one third of women in their lifetime. Given this prevalence, access to safe abortion services is a necessary component of the Australian health system.

"Restricting access or creating barriers to access to abortion services - including barriers to medical abortion - has the effect of making abortion less safe, by delaying access until later gestations, or worse, fostering use of unsafe or illegal services.

"The provision of safe, legal, medical abortion services would assist in overcoming current inequities of access, particularly for women in rural areas and others who are unable to access surgical abortion services."

The Women's, Royal Children's Hospital's Centre for Adolescent Health, Family Planning Victoria and Women's Health Victoria have adopted a joint position on access to safe abortion services. The statement is attached.

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ABORTION – A WOMEN'S HEALTH ISSUE

JOINT POSITION STATEMENT BY THE ROYAL WOMEN'S HOSPITAL, ROYAL CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL CENTRE FOR ADOLESCENT HEALTH, FAMILY PLANNING VICTORIA AND WOMEN'S HEALTH VICTORIA

The Royal Women's Hospital (RWH), Royal Children's Hospital Centre for Adolescent Health (CAH), Family Planning Victoria (FPV) and Women's Health Victoria (WHV) acknowledge that termination of pregnancy is an important women's health issue, estimated to affect around one third of women in their lifetime.

Access to safe abortion is a necessary component of any health system. Restricting access or creating barriers to access to abortion services has the unavoidable effect of making abortion less safe, by delaying access until later gestations, or worse fostering use of unsafe or illegal services.

People face and make difficult life decisions such as a termination of a pregnancy in the context of their own particular family situations, including consideration of the future they feel able to offer to existing or future children.

Comprehensive service delivery and care in this area includes the provision of accurate, balanced information and access to counselling which provides for the exploration of all options in a supportive non-judgmental manner. Follow up counselling is available and offered.

Experience shows that privacy and confidentiality of medical and personal information is repeatedly identified as critical to the confidence of women in seeking this care.

Systematic efforts to reduce abortion rates by reducing the incidence of unplanned pregnancy are supported but realistically require a commitment by decision-makers and an investment by the community in research, and community education and other proactive measures.

We support the development of comprehensive sex and sexuality education which empowers young people to make informed and safe sexual choices. There is evidence that such education when started young enough can contribute to a delay in sexual debut activity.

Access to an extensive comprehensive range of contraceptive options and advice, including emergency contraception is an important component of prevention of unplanned pregnancy and subsequent terminations.

The gathering of information and monitoring of rates of pregnancy termination is essential to develop appropriate prevention strategies, as with any frequent and important health issue. Useful elements of monitoring will include demographic parameters, reasons for termination and contraceptive use.

Ideally, as a health issue, termination of pregnancy belongs in health legislation, rather than the criminal law, in the interests of women seeking abortion and of health service providers. Termination of pregnancy is a physical and emotional health issue. As such, in the interests of women seeking abortion and of the health professionals who care for them, it should be solely addressed in health legislation and not criminal law.