

## Media Release

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20 August, 2008

# The Women's welcomes State Government's Abortion Law Reform Bill

The Royal Women's Hospital today welcomed the Victorian Government's historic legislative reform initiative to remove abortion from the Crimes Act with the tabling of the *Abortion Law Reform Bill 2008*.

The Women's Chief Executive, Dale Fisher, said: "Abortion is a health issue. As such, it is in the interests of women seeking abortion, and of the health professionals who care for them, that abortion should be addressed in health legislation and not criminal law.

"The State Government's *Abortion Law Reform Bill* reflects current clinical practice and will provide clarity for both women and health professionals. We encourage all members of parliament to promote the interests of Victorian women by supporting the legislation in its current form.

It is estimated that around a third of Australian women will have an abortion at some stage in their lives.

Ms Fisher said: "Access to safe abortion services is a necessary component of any health system and the *Abortion Law Reform Bill* represents an enormous step forward in safeguarding women's rights to appropriate, timely and safe clinical care.

"It is widely acknowledged that restricting or delaying access to abortion services results in women presenting for an abortion much later in pregnancy and may lead to women using clinically unsafe alternative practices.

"Clarity for doctors through an improved legal framework for abortion will improve both the working environment for providers and timely access to abortion services for women."

The Women's is Victoria's leading public provider of services for women with unplanned or unwanted pregnancy and provides comprehensive counselling and social support, clinical, medical and surgical services for women.

As part of its comprehensive support services, the Women's provides professional counselling which encompasses all options relating to pregnancy and supports women with either continuing or terminating a pregnancy.

Ms Fisher said: “Women consistently report that they want access to factual information, unbiased support and advocacy; respect and non-judgement and the opportunity to make a considered and informed decision without coercion, pressure or influence.

“Proposals for mandatory counselling are inconsistent with current practice, not warranted on the basis of evidence-based research and may, in fact, present further barriers to women accessing abortion services. This matter has been considered and discussed in detail by the Law Reform Commission,” Ms Fisher said.

The Women's Pregnancy Advisory Service ensures that every woman who contacts the service is provided with impartial, skilled and professional support and is *offered* referral to a full range of reproductive choices including antenatal care, parenting support or other care arrangements and abortion.

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**Further information:**

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