

Sexual and Reproductive Health

AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRATS ACTION PLAN
SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH
HEALTH AND AGEING

RU486 and beyond

The last few years have seen some headline-grabbing gains for women's reproductive health.

Senators Allison and Stott Despoja's introduction of an amendment to remove the ministerial veto over RU486, the 'abortion pill', was the catalyst for the historic passage of a cross-party Private Members' Bill sponsored by 4 female politicians.

Public funding was provided for herceptin (the breast cancer drug) and the cervical cancer vaccine.

The Senate held an inquiry into gynaecological cancers, which arose out of Senator Allison's referral to a Senate committee of a petition on the issue. Senate women (and the one man) involved in the inquiry recommended \$1 million to set up a gynaecological cancer centre and the Government has agreed to this and most other recommendations.

Not all good news

In what some consider a sop to the Health Minister, the Government has provided a massive \$51 million for pregnancy 'counselling'. Meanwhile the Government will not support Senator Stott Despoja's Private Member's Bill which would require pregnancy counselling agencies to reveal whether or not they would provide referrals for abortion to those who contact them for help.

The health Minister agreed to a Medicare item number for midwifery in rural and remote areas providing a very small rebate but made it available to nurses and Aboriginal health workers who do not necessarily have training in midwifery. The college of midwives protested that this could be dangerous for women.

The Government still won't agree to a Democrats reference of an inquiry into sexual health and relationships education in schools and better access to contraceptives.

More still to be done

Increases in sexual abuse and violence and sexually transmitted disease, high rates of infertility, high levels of ignorance about sexual and reproductive health amongst young people and relatively high numbers of unplanned and unwanted pregnancies, in combination with increasing caesarean rates, restricted access to midwives, too



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few maternity supports and high levels of post-natal depression suggest that much still needs to be done to improve sexual and reproductive health.

Democrat action plan :

The Democrats commit to

- an audit of all primary and secondary schools to identify what is taught to students in sexual and reproductive health education
- comprehensive, evidence based, age appropriate sexual health and relationships education provided by adequately qualified professionals in all schools
- school-based or school-linked health centres for health education and access to health care for young people
- a full range of safe, affordable contraception on demand, including over the counter access to the oral contraceptive pill, placement of all forms of contraception on the PBS, and ready access to low cost condoms and emergency contraception in schools
- national public education campaigns on emergency contraception and preconception health
- equal rights for all potential parents who want access to assisted reproductive technologies, regardless of marital status, sexual orientation or financial capacity
- all women having access to legal, free and safe pregnancy termination services including unbiased counselling where requested
- uniform national guidelines for routine antenatal care for all antenatal providers
- a National Maternity Action Plan to give all pregnant women greater choice in where and how they give birth, including the option of publicly funded midwifery services throughout pregnancy and childbirth with a single caregiver throughout the process
- postnatal care and support which is flexible and tailored to individual needs, including funding support for advocacy and support groups
- a national home visitor program for families with a new baby offering a range of services to supplement those of midwives and maternal and child health nurses
- more focus on the gynaecological conditions, including support for research into screening for ovarian cancer
- a significant increase in the percentage of Australia's overseas aid directed at sexual and reproductive health and an end to the current ban on Ausaid funding being used to train overseas health workers in safe abortion techniques



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