

# Pregnancy Counselling

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## AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRATS ACTION PLAN PREGNANCY COUNSELLING STATUS OF WOMEN

*The Australian Democrats have been at the forefront of calls to require all pregnancy counselling services, whether they are anti-choice or pro-choice, to be upfront and truthful in their advertising. In 2005, Senator Stott Despoja introduced the Transparent Advertising and Notification of Pregnancy Counselling Services Bill 2005, which would ensure pregnancy counselling services are subject to the same misleading advertising laws as organisations engaged in trade or commerce.*

*This bill, reintroduced as a cross-party bill in December last year, would put Australia at the forefront of women's rights, highlighting the commitment to not only transparency in advertising, but also the regulation of pregnancy counselling services. The Democrats believe that all women have the right to know what sort of pregnancy counselling organisation they are contacting when they seek information or advice on these sensitive issues.*

*"In the case of pregnancy counselling services, women have a right to help and advice that is non-directive, provides accurate information and refers for all options when resolving an unplanned pregnancy"*

**Jill Michelson  
Marie Stopes  
International**

## Our Action Plan

The Democrats are committed to highlighting the importance of this piece of legislation, requiring only that pregnancy counselling services be upfront and truthful in their advertising – and state whether or not they refer for terminations. We will continue to:

- Push for the enactment of the cross-party Pregnancy Counselling (Truth in Advertising) Bill 2006;
- Lobby all political parties on this important issue, to ensure that women facing an unplanned pregnancy will not be misled or deceived when contacting pregnancy counselling services; and
- Speak out against any organisation, whether anti-choice or pro-choice, that fails to disclose in their advertising whether or not they provide advice on all three pregnancy options: keeping the baby, adoption and abortion;
- Lobby the government to implement a federally funded pro-choice 24-hour pregnancy counselling service.

## Why do we need regulation in this area?

Currently, there is no pro-choice federally funded pregnancy counselling service in operation, which means that no pro-choice service is able to provide national 24-hour pregnancy counselling helpline, and thus is not able to meet Sensis' eligibility criteria for listing in the 24-hour listings in the *White Pages*.



Other ACTION PLANS are available online at [www.democrats.org.au](http://www.democrats.org.au)

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A recent survey commissioned by Marie Stopes International produced findings highlighting that 81% of women believe that a pregnancy counsellor should refer for all three options: adoption, abortion and parenting.

Regulation in this area is not about the decisions women make in regards to an unplanned pregnancy; nor is it about the legality of abortion. It is simply about transparent advertising of pregnancy services and ensuring that women are not misled.

The Pregnancy Counselling (Truth in Advertising) Bill 2006 essentially would:

- Prohibit pregnancy counselling services from publishing, distributing, displaying or broadcasting, by internet, television, telephone, radio or like service, or by post, any material that is misleading or deceptive.
- Ensure services must be upfront about whether or not they refer for terminations.
- Make every Commonwealth-funded pregnancy counselling service ineligible to receive a grant of financial assistance unless it discloses whether it does or does not provide referrals for terminations.

This bill is necessary because although the Trade Practices Act outlaws “conduct that is liable to mislead the public as to the nature, the characteristics, the suitability for their purpose or the quantity of any services”, the majority of pregnancy counselling services are not bound by the Trade Practices Act because they generally do not charge for the services and information they provide – thus not considered to be engaging in trade or commerce.

The need for regulation in this area is even more pressing given the hundreds of women that have contacted the Democrats over the years to share their experiences. Women have said that they have felt bullied and pressured into continuing their pregnancies by anti-abortion services, that they have been offered baby clothes by counselling services and that there is assistance through government funding if they continue the pregnancy.

The Democrats will continue to be outspoken about the problems associated with an unregulated pregnancy counselling system, calling for immediate action in this area to prevent any further misleading or deceptive conduct.