

12 December 2022

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

E: community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

To whom it may concern,

Universal access to reproductive healthcare

The Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association (AHHA) welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the inquiry into universal access to reproductive healthcare.

ABOUT US

AHHA is Australia's national peak body for public hospitals and healthcare providers. Our membership includes state and territory health departments, Local Hospital Networks (LHNs) and public hospitals, community health services, Primary Health Networks (PHNs) and primary healthcare providers, aged care providers, universities, individual health professionals and academics. As such, we are uniquely placed to be an independent, national voice for universal high-quality healthcare to benefit the whole community.

To achieve a healthy Australia supported by the best possible healthcare system, AHHA recommends Australia reform the healthcare system over the next 10 years by enabling person-centred, outcomes-focused and value-based health care. This requires:

1. A nationally unified and regionally controlled health system that puts people at the centre
2. Performance information and reporting that is fit for purpose
3. A health workforce that exists to serve and meet population health needs
4. Funding that is sustainable and appropriate to support a high-quality health system.

AHHA's *Healthy people, healthy systems*¹ is a blueprint for reform (the Blueprint) with a series of short, medium, and long-term actions to achieve this goal. The actions outlined in the Blueprint closely align with the initiatives mapped out in the Australian Health Minister's *National Health Reform Agreement (NHRA) – Long-term health reforms roadmap*².

¹ Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association. 2021. Healthy people, healthy systems. Available at <https://ahha.asn.au/Blueprint>

² Australian Health Ministers. 2021. National Health Reform Agreement (NHRA) – Long-term health reforms roadmap. Available at <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/national-health-reform-agreement-nhra-long-term-health-reforms-roadmap>

OUR RESPONSE

AHHA would like to bring to your attention a project undertaken in 2017 to explore the policy, regulatory, workforce and funding factors that enable or hinder the ability of health care providers to support women in their choice for contraception according to best practice.

This work resulted in the development of a consensus statement with accompanying recommendations for reform³.

The consensus statement identified:

- Goals for effective and equitable contraceptive management
- Current priorities for action
- Recommendations for action to progress these priorities.

The consensus statement is endorsed by peak bodies and service providers across the sectors. It can be accessed on the websites of a number of the endorsing bodies and here:

https://ahha.asn.au/sites/default/files/docs/policy-issue/larc_consensus_statement_2017.pdf.

Although this work was undertaken over 5 years ago, the outcomes and recommendations are still relevant to the current Australian context today.

Project Summary

Contraceptive management is relevant in all levels of Australia's health system: primary, secondary and hospital care. Services may be provided in several different environments and by a range of health professionals. Health system factors were explored in this project through:

- A desktop review and consultation with peak bodies and key opinion leaders across the sectors, and
- Survey feedback from a broad range of health providers across a variety of practice environments.

AHHA then facilitated a forum on the 19 May 2017 to bring together a diverse range of stakeholders, including health consumers, health professionals, experts in the field and service providers, under the guidance of a Steering Committee.

In terms of sexual and reproductive health, Australian women experience relatively poor health, with unplanned pregnancy being a key health issue.

There has been increasing recognition, nationally and internationally, that a way to reduce unintended pregnancy is to use more effective and less user-dependent methods of contraception, such as the long-acting reversible contraceptive (LARC) methods. Clinical guidelines recommend that their promotion and use is supported as a public health priority.

³ Long Acting Reversible Contraception (LARC) - Consensus Statement 2017. Available at https://ahha.asn.au/sites/default/files/docs/policy-issue/larc_consensus_statement_2017.pdf

Despite evidence for the effectiveness of, and satisfaction with, LARC methods, as well as support for their use by peak bodies and key opinion leaders in Australia and internationally, use of LARC methods in Australia continues to remain low.

Barriers to the equitable access to evidence-based contraceptive management in Australia include lack of knowledge and misconceptions amongst women and health professionals, funding models, service models and care pathways, and inadequate data.

The consensus statement outlines the priorities and recommendation for action to ensure:

- Women are supported to make an informed choice about contraception.
- Value in contraceptive care is achieved.
- Data and research informs contraceptive policy and practice.

We would be happy to discuss any aspect of this response further.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kylie Woolcock". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kylie Woolcock
Chief Executive
Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association