



## **Advancing sexual and reproductive wellbeing in Australia: the Melbourne Proclamation**

All Australian people have the right to full and enjoyable lifelong sexual and reproductive health and wellbeing. Sexual and reproductive wellbeing includes freedom from stigma, prosecution, disease, coercion and violence. It requires a full range of measures to control or optimise fertility as well as accessible and affordable services for people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. The following proclamation outlines the ten key action areas to advance these goals.

### **Develop a comprehensive and integrated framework**

A national policy initiative is necessary to bring together federal, state and territory governments and their agencies, alongside NGOs, provider organisations and the private sector to develop, implement and monitor an integrated approach to current sexual and reproductive health strategies. Such an agenda should foster and promote integration between the efforts of the diverse professions working in the area of sexual and reproductive health and be inclusive of both fertility and infertility priorities.

### **Improve health literacy and education**

Sexual and reproductive health education should be mandatory, comprehensive and age appropriate throughout schooling. This requires collaborating with the education system in order to train and support teachers and parents to implement standardised approaches. Education and health literacy development should promote positive sexual wellbeing, safety, fertility planning and pleasure while promoting respect and responsibility. Sexual and reproductive health care for boys and men should receive equal emphasis and particular emphasis should be placed on enhancing outcomes for disadvantaged and at-risk groups. Addressing issues of stigma in relation to the full range of fertility control options should be another key area of focus, along with awareness of the impact of age and modifiable factors on fertility outcomes.

### **Develop an effective workforce**

A workforce audit and needs analysis with an appropriate response are necessary to address the gaps in the sexual and reproductive health workforce. Undergraduate and postgraduate training and skills development should be included. Targeted training in the provision of long-acting reversible contraception and pregnancy termination in particular require immediate action.

### **Develop quality integrated systems for data monitoring**

Conduct a data audit and coordinate, link, analyse and report on existing data. Link immediate and future data needs to an integrated framework to support policy and program development in areas such as sexually transmitted infections, teenage pregnancy, effective contraceptive use and abortion. A focus on data for at risk population groups is essential.

### **Fund research in areas of major knowledge gaps**

Dedicated funding for sexual and reproductive health research - inclusive of both fertility and infertility priorities - is critical to provide a sound evidence base for practice, policy and service delivery. A funded collaborating mechanism – including the establishment of a Cooperative Research Centre in reproductive health care - would link current research activity, identify priorities, promote greater innovation, optimise research outcomes in this area and develop future research skills.

### **Make fertility control services accessible and affordable**

Long-acting reversible and emergency contraception – along with the full suite of fertility control options - should be accessible and affordable to all and offered free for targeted at risk groups. The Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS), Medicare schedules and publicly funded health services must adequately cover the full range of sexual and reproductive health products and services, including termination of pregnancy.

### **Promote lifelong sexual and reproductive wellbeing**

Innovative policy for Australians of all ages should lead promotion of and support for sexual wellbeing in all stages of life, from young people through to the demands of an increasingly older/long-lived population.

### **Coordinate strategies at primary care level**

Primary health care agencies should be able to deliver sexual wellbeing and healthy relationship support services, and in partnership with local secondary services provide access to full fertility control and enhancement, and when necessary, the choice of medical or surgical pregnancy termination services. Decentralising the provision of medical termination of pregnancy (MTO) services in rural, regional and remote areas should be an area of enhanced focus, particularly building on the capacity of nurses as key providers in coordinating, organising and follow up for MTO. Further work is also required to address structural barriers such as insurance cover for providers.

### **Improve socio-economic determinants of sexual and reproductive health in at risk populations**

Recognise and prioritise the greater needs of vulnerable or disadvantaged populations such as people with disabilities, those in rural and regional areas, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, those from migrant and refugee backgrounds, and those with minority Sexual Orientations and Gender Identities (SOGI). A more inclusive approach to policy, research advocacy and education should be pursued in sexual and reproductive health that simultaneously articulates specific issues for minority communities. The importance of capacity building and community led initiatives in prevention and health promotion - particularly in addressing highly stigmatised issues such as female genital cutting - should be acknowledged.

### **Create and enact legislation**

Laws, reform and regulation must enable and support sexual and reproductive health rights, prevent discrimination and remove abortion from criminal codes. Equity and consistency across jurisdictions in relation to infertility, surrogacy and fertility control legislation should be pursued by governments at both state/territory and federal levels.

The key to achieving sexual and reproductive health and wellbeing in Australia's complex, diverse and longer-lived population is to place sexual and reproductive rights at the centre of an integrated policy and program planning framework.

