

Dear Senate Committee,

I write in response to the Health Insurance Amendment (Medicare Funding for Certain Types of Abortion) Bill 2013. I would like to add my strong support for this amendment to be upheld. In a country such as Australia, where infertility rates continue to rise, I find it confounding and ironic that any Government should sanction public expenditure on gender-based pregnancy terminations. One of the little-publicised effects of a termination can be increased difficulty in becoming pregnant again, and the subsequent need for a woman to access IVF services – a situation which places further strain on Medicare funds.

We recently celebrated the life of the scientist who invented IVF, thus bringing joy and hope to millions of people around the world who previously were denied the experience of parenting. How contradictory to the essence of what he set out to achieve for governments to also allow perfectly fertile couples to terminate perfectly normal pregnancies based on gender! Like brown eyes or red hair, long legs or small hands, the gender of a child should not be a reason for a parent to choose whether or not to terminate. In a world where we strive for control over every minute aspect of our lives, I believe we should learn to accept some things just as nature delivers them to us – having the technology to pre-select for gender does not make it ethically right! As a mother of three boys and a girl, I had my own share of hoping for one gender or another. My husband and I agreed that there would be no fourth baby at all until we could be sure in our hearts that we would welcome that child no matter what gender it was. I was prepared to go to counselling to assist me in the process if need be! Perhaps the Medicare funds currently allowing parents to terminate pregnancies based on gender would be better spent on mental health funding, to assist parents to deal with the emotional impact of having a gender of child they don't like. The funds could be allocated to a project called "Parental Resilience" – the skill of dealing with unexpected outcomes of pregnancy and parenting. This would also be useful for parents dealing with unexpected disabilities in their offspring.

To use Medicare to fund gender-based terminations is ethically and morally repugnant, irresponsible and potentially devastating to the futures of women, and to a lesser extent, men, around the world. As a woman I find it disgusting that any government, let alone the Australian government, could sanction terminations based on my gender, an "accident" of birth! As a mother of sons I find it disgusting that any parents should be allowed to terminate the life of an otherwise healthy child simply because they have the wrong gonads. Please let reason prevail – not only should Medicare not fund gender based terminations, make it illegal in our country, and pursue nations who allow this practice.

Yours faithfully,

Cherith Nelson-Milnes