

24th April 2013

Dear Senate Committee members,

We are writing to demonstrate our support for the **Health Insurance Amendment (Medicare Funding for Certain Types of Abortion) Bill 2013**. Abortion of a baby based on its sex is a gross injustice and should not be allowed to occur nor be funded by the Australian taxpayer.

In undertaking your inquiry, please consider:

The unacceptability to Australians of the use of Medicare funding for the purpose of gender selection abortions

- A Poll conducted by Galaxy in Tasmania in February 2013, for *Emily's Voice*, found that 92% of respondents opposed abortion based on the sex of the child. For young people aged 16-24, 97% were opposed. This figure is remarkable, given that 61% of respondents supported abortion.
- A Poll conducted by *Southern Cross Bioethics* (2005) found that, of the respondents who were 'strongly in favour of abortion' 82% believed that sex selection abortion should not be legal. Of that 82%, 85% said that gender selection abortion is not morally acceptable.

The prevalence of gender selection - with preference for a male child - amongst some ethnic groups present in Australia

- In other countries where male children are preferred (eg. in China and India) there is a huge gender imbalance, with more boys than girls being born due to sex selection.
- Even when people from these countries migrate to Western countries such as Australia and America, these cultural pressures remain. Women who give birth to girls in families where males are preferred are often the subject of verbal and physical abuse.
- A study by the University of California involving 65 South Asian women living in America, found that 40% of them had previously aborted a female baby and 89% of them aborted the baby girls they were currently carrying.
<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0277953611000700>
- While in Australia there are no statistics kept of reasons for each abortion and no requirement to state whether an abortion is for the purpose of 'sex selection', there are case reports by doctors of such abortions taking place in Australia

The use of Medicare funded gender-selection abortions for the purpose of 'family-balancing'

- There is one high profile case in Melbourne of a couple who aborted twin boys because they already had three sons and wanted a daughter. They then sought permission 'to select a female embryo' in IVF. Their application was rejected, because sex selection in IVF is prohibited (except for genetic diseases).

- Sex selection abortions should likewise be prohibited. The life of a healthy baby should not be extinguished because the parents selfishly want a baby of the opposite sex to 'balance the family'. It is a sad indictment on our society that this is allowed to happen. Babies should be welcomed regardless of their sex.

Support for campaigns by United Nations agencies to end the discriminatory practice of gender-selection through implementing disincentives for gender-selection abortions

- A number of United Nations agencies have expressed grave concerns about sex selection or gender selection abortions: Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR), the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) and the World Health Organization (WHO).
- The UN condemned sex selection abortion in a 2011 Report: http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2011/9789241501460_eng.pdf.
- The Council of Europe in a November 2011 resolution voiced its concern over the rising trend of prenatal gender selection. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/health/9794577/The-abortion-of-unwanted-girls-taking-place-in-the-UK.html>
- Removing Medicare funding for sex selection abortions would act as a disincentive.

Concern from medical associations in first world countries about the practice of gender-selection abortion

In Australia:

- **The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians** has expressed concern that use of 'gender test' kit could lead to sex selection abortions. They have also opposed the statements by a Sydney obstetrician calling for sex selection abortions for 'family balancing'. <http://www.smh.com.au/national/when-parents-select-babys-sex-20111015-1lq8b.html>
- **National Health and Medical Research Council**
NHMRC ART GUIDELINES: "Sex selection (by whatever means) should not be undertaken except to reduce the risk of transmission of a serious genetic condition". <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/health-ethics/australian-health-ethics-committee-ahec/assisted-reproductive-technology-art/assisted->
- **National Association of Specialist Obstetricians and Gynaecologists** state in their submission to this Inquiry, in a survey of their councillors, "no-one was in favour of social gender selection". They proposed not revealing the sex of a child until 20 weeks.

In the USA:

- **American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists** opposes sex selection for family planning [balancing or choice] purposes. http://www.acog.org/About_ACOG/News_Room/News_Releases/2007/ACOG_Opposes_Sex_Selection_for_Family_Planning_Purposes

- **American Association of Pro-life Obstetricians and Gynecologists** oppose gender selection abortion <http://www.aaplog.org/>
- **American Society of Reproductive Medicine ("ASRM")** oppose gender selection abortion, noting "central to the controversy of sex selection in the use of assisted reproductive technology ("ART") is the potential for "inherent gender discrimination", . . . the "risk of psychological harm to sex-selected offspring (i.e., by placing on them expectations that are too high)," . . . and "reinforcement of gender bias in society as a whole."
<http://beta.congress.gov/bill/113th-congress/house-bill/447/text>

In the UK:

- **British Medical Association**
After noting it is illegal, and covering genetic diseases, they state, "The Association believes that it is normally unethical to terminate a pregnancy on the grounds of fetal sex alone except in cases of severe x-linked disorders." <http://bma.org.uk/practical-support-at-work/ethics/ethics-a-to-z>

In Canada:

- **Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada**
Dr. Michiel Van den Hof, spokesman for the society and professor of fetal and maternal medicine in Halifax, says his society's policy is clear, "we do not at all condone sex selection by pregnancy termination. And we oppose it vehemently."
<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/story/2012/06/13/ultrasounds-entertainment-ban.html>

We believe the **Health Insurance Amendment (Medicare Funding for Certain Types of Abortion) Bill 2013** should be passed into law, as Australian taxpayers should not have to foot the bill for sex selection abortions. Perhaps the money could be better spent on supporting families in our society to look after their children, regardless of their sex.

Yours sincerely,
David and Taryn Price