

24 April 2013

Senate Finance and Public Administration Committees
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Email: fpa.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee members

Inquiry into Health Insurance Amendment (Medicare Funding for Certain Types of Abortion) Bill 2013

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to this Inquiry.

The Health Consumers Alliance of South Australia (HCA) is the peak body for health consumers in South Australia. As an independent alliance of health consumers and health consumer organisations, we work together with our members to achieve our vision of consumers at the heart of health care. A strong and effective voice for the promotion and protection of health consumer wellbeing and rights, HCA promotes health equity and provides systemic advocacy to inform, shape and sustain consumer centred care.

HCA does not support the passage of the Health Insurance Amendment (Medicare Funding for Certain Types of Abortion) Bill 2013.

As outlined in the Inquiry Terms of Reference, gender/sex-selective abortion refers to the practice of terminating pregnancies by parents with a preference for male children. No evidence has been offered that this practice occurs in Australia.

We question the assumption that sex selective abortion using Medicare is prevalent. There is no comprehensive evidence to suggest that sex selective abortion is occurring or that sex selection is a motivation for abortion, for family balancing, or other reasons.

The Medicare rebate that the Bill is seeking to restrict is not specific to abortion (certainly not sex selective abortion), and is also used to fund miscarriage and foetal death. As health consumer advocates we accept that Medicare is a reasonable base for subsidising health care for consumers but it is blunt instrument for health policy.

Access to safe and legal abortion is an essential health service for Australian women and it is an important reproductive health right. A woman's ability to control her own fertility is vital to the maintenance of her health and wellbeing. We must not pass legislation that impinges on the human rights of women.

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If the Australian Government is concerned about addressing gender equality and the status of women, legislators should support the provision of safe, affordable, legal and evidence informed health care to every Australian, including reproductive health services such as abortion.

As such we would prefer to see investment in community and practitioner education, fully funded reproductive health services and lowered costs of contraception.

We urge Parliament to reject the Bill in its entirety.

Yours sincerely

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