



17 September 2014

Senate Select Committee on Health
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the committee's inquiry into health policy, administration and expenditure. We make comment only around our area of expertise and our status as a non government organisation.

By way of background, Family Planning NSW is the leading provider of reproductive and sexual health services in NSW. As well as our clinical services, we provide information and health promotion activities, as well as education and training for doctors, nurses, teachers and other health, education and welfare professionals.

Our services are targeted to communities, including people from culturally and linguistically diverse and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, refugees, people with disability, young people, people from rural and remote communities and LGBTI people.

Our work is evidence-based, and shaped by our research through the Family Planning NSW Sydney Centre for Reproductive and Sexual Health Research, our published clinical practice handbooks on reproductive and sexual health, our nationally recognised education and data and evaluation units and validated through our own extensive clinical practice.

Our comments

With the shortage of General Practitioners (GPs) in rural and remote areas of Australia, there is a significant opportunity to expand the role of nurses in these areas. This requires an examination of issues such as education and training (including upskilling) and the role of Medicare in supporting nurse practice. In the area of reproductive and sexual health, there is currently no Medicare rebate for IUD insertion consultations for registered nurses, so while many nurses are capable of delivering the service, the incentive to expand their scope of practice is non-existent.

Increasing access to long acting reversible contraception such as IUDs is critical to reducing the rate of unintended pregnancies in Australia. This is particularly important in targeted populations including young people and in women from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds who find accessing women's health services difficult and prefer seeing female GPs.

We would strongly encourage the committee to look specifically at the role of nurses and the barriers to increasing their contribution to health outcomes. Increasing the role of nurses also works to address workforce issues more generally, particularly in rural and remote communities.

As mentioned, a significant issue we have identified is around the inability of nurses to claim the Medicare rebate. We note the committee will be examining the sustainability of Medicare. We believe Medicare is an important safety net for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in the community. Any change to Medicare must not undermine this core responsibility.

We support the committee's examination of the impact of reduced commonwealth funding for health promotion, prevention and intervention. Our health promotion work is closely related to our clinical practice. In fact we believe it is imperative that health promotion activities are driven by clinical needs. We know there are organisations that are being funded whose practice is not based on evidence. This is particularly true in our area of expertise in reproductive and sexual health where we are aware of pregnancy counselling services ignoring evidence and pushing ideological views that are not supporting by clinical practice. These organisations often receive state and commonwealth funding. Evidence based practice must be fundamental requirement to receiving government funding.

Health promotion activities are particularly important in reaching isolated and marginalised populations and in addressing entrenched issues that require a targeted approach such as reducing the rates of sexually transmissible infections and teenage pregnancy. It's recognised that not every issue requires health promotion as a strategy to improve health outcomes.

If you require further information, please contact Jodi McKay, Director of Communications, Government and Community Affairs 0287524356 or jodim@fpnsw.org.au

Yours sincerely

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