

2 October 2008

Committee Secretary
Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
fpa.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam

**Inquiry into item 16525 in Part 3 of Schedule 1 to the Health Insurance
(General Medical Services Table) Regulations 2007**

**Submission from the Life, Marriage and Family Centre,
Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney**

Abortion performed for any reason and at any stage of pregnancy is always the tragic and unjust taking of innocent human life. The Catholic Church works and prays for the day when greater respect for human life and the necessary support for pregnant women and their families will see the abortion of a human being as unthinkable.

At the same time, we recognise that any reduction in the number of abortions would be a positive outcome for mothers and babies. Accordingly, we wish to make the following brief submission in relation to clause (d) of the Terms of Reference: ***The effects of disallowing this item.***

- Disallowing item 16525 would stop Medicare funding of second trimester abortions in private abortion facilities, whilst ensuring that women whose unborn child dies from natural causes in utero continue to receive appropriate care and assistance;
- Moving second-trimester abortions into public hospitals will hopefully decrease the number of abortions performed for psychosocial reasons or because the unborn child has a disability, due to the likelihood of greater scrutiny and accountability of health care practitioners within the public hospital system;
- This action will hopefully ensure parents have greater access to counselling and support and not be pressured into making a premature decision. It is vital that parents be fully informed about their unborn child's diagnosis and receive information about positive treatment options and supports available for children with conditions such as cleft palate, spina bifida and Down syndrome;

- This action would be an initial response to the community's unease and concern about second-trimester abortions;¹
- At present the implicit social message towards people with disability is that they are better off not being born. This action would express a positive message about the value of every child and our willingness to care, love and respect children with disabilities. The statement by Disabled Peoples' International has particular resonance here: *"In particular we demand an absolute prohibition on compulsory genetic testing and the pressurising of women to eliminate - at any stage in the reproductive process - unborn children who, it is considered, may become disabled ... (and) that having a disabled child is not a special legal consideration for abortion²"*.
- This action would be a significant step forward in helping to meet our international human rights obligations to protect unborn children and provide "special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection, before as well as after birth".³

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the inquiry. We would be happy to meet with members of the Committee for further discussion if you felt that would be useful.

Yours sincerely,



Chris Meney
 Director
 Life, Marriage and Family Centre
 Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney
 Level 11, Polding Centre
 133 Liverpool St
 Sydney NSW 2000
 Tel: 02 9390 5368
 Email: chris.meney@sydney.catholic.org.au

¹ National Opinion Poll on Abortion in Australia, Market Facts (Qld) November 2005: 67% of Australians opposed Medicare funding of second trimester abortions and 78.5% opposed Medicare funding of abortions after 20 weeks of pregnancy.

² Disabled Peoples' International Europe, *The Right to Live and Be Different*, Declaration of Feb 13, 2000

³ *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. <http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu3/b/k2crc.htm>

