

2 October 2008

Committee Secretary  
Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee  
Department of the Senate  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Email: [fpa.sen@aph.gov.au](mailto:fpa.sen@aph.gov.au)

Dear Secretary

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

Please accept this submission from Family Planning Queensland in response to the senate inquiry onto item 16525 in Part 3 of Schedule 1 to the Health Insurance (General Medical Services Table) Regulations 2007.

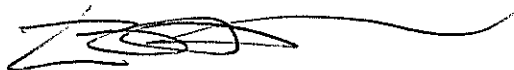
As a leading provider of sexual and reproductive health services in Queensland, FPQ has significant experience over the past 37 years in the provision of best practice clinical health care and training in this area. This has included significant services to women across Queensland through from our six clinic locations and education and medical education to doctors and nurses through our nine centers statewide.

FPQ is concerned that the removal of item 16525, would disadvantage those women who attend as a private patient in a public or private hospital or clinic for a second trimester termination of pregnancy. Consideration also needs to be given to the implications of any change to this Medicare item, in relation to equity and access for women experiencing financial difficulties and those in rural and remote settings.

I encourage all senators to carefully consider the implication of any change to the existing legislation, giving particular consideration to the views of health care providers in the community, directly involved in the provision of these services to women.

FPQ contacts for this issue are Margot Kingston Clinical Nurse Manager, Caroline Harvey Medical Director and Christopher Macaulay Chief Executive Officer FPQ. Initial contact may be by email to [ea@fpq.com.au](mailto:ea@fpq.com.au) or by telephone to 07 3250 0240.

Yours sincerely



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**SUBMISSION TO THE  
SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO ITEM 16525 IN  
PART 3 OF SCHEDULE 1 TO THE HEALTH INSURANCE  
(GENERAL MEDICAL SERVICES TABLE) REGULATION 2007**

BY FAMILY PLANNING QUEENSLAND  
1 October 2008

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**Family Planning Queensland (FPQ) is the leading provider of sexual and reproductive health services in Queensland. FPQ offers a comprehensive range of clinical, counselling, education and training services from metropolitan and regional locations throughout the state.**

**This submission is in response to the motion to disallow item 16525 in Part 3 of the Schedule 1 to the Health Insurance (General Medical Services Table) Regulation 2007, as proposed by Senator Guy Barnett.**

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**THE POSITION OF FPQ**

Family Planning Queensland (FPQ) has provided services to women throughout Queensland for over 30 years. We are very concerned that their sexual and reproductive health needs will be adversely affected by the proposed removal of Medicare Item No. 16525.

It is the view of FPQ that decisions about the fate of pregnancies are very personal and can only be made by the woman and her family in partnership with her medical practitioner.

FPQ respects the rights of all women and advocates that women should have access to safe and affordable abortion; performed by qualified health professionals should they require it.

Best practice medical care of pregnant women in Australia incorporates routine antenatal screening for fetal health and abnormality at 18-20 weeks gestation. The deletion of this item would mean women who experience diagnosis of intrauterine fetal death, gross fetal abnormality and life threatening maternal health conditions would no longer be covered by Medicare.

This action would limit accessibility and affordability for a very small proportion of women who are faced with a difficult and distressing circumstance.

## **ABORTION IN QUEENSLAND**

It is not possible to say how many abortions take place in Australia, at any pregnancy trimester, as a national data set does not exist. However, Health Insurance Commission data is collected for two Medicare benefit claims:

Item 35643: evacuation of the gravid uterus by curettage or suction curettage (a procedure considered only suitable in the first trimester)

Item 16525: management of second trimester labour, with or without induction, for intrauterine fetal death, gross abnormality or life threatening maternal disease in the second trimester. This item number can only be utilized by private medical practitioners providing care to patients in private hospitals or private patients in public hospitals.

Statistics available from HIC for Medicare Item 16525 showed 113 processed claims from July 2007 to June 2008 in Queensland. It is clearly evident the cases of Medicare Item 16525 being claimed occurs rarely in Queensland and would not appear to be excessive.

It should be noted that this and other Medicare Items apply to procedures which are not always pregnancy terminations, such as those undertaken as a result of miscarriage or fetal death. It is therefore impossible to ascertain the exact number of abortions, either first or second trimester, in Queensland.

It also needs to be recognized that this item number only applies outside of the public health system. This is critical in a State such as Queensland where access to public hospital termination services is extremely limited and women facing the most difficult of circumstances are required to navigate the private sector for suitable health services. Removal of the Medicare item number would constitute further discrimination against women experiencing financial difficulties, as they would face an enormous financial cost and restrict their access to a safe and affordable service.

## **REFERENCES**

Family Planning Queensland. (2007). *Abortion statistics*. Brisbane: FPQ.

Health Insurance Commission. Total services for Medicare item No. 35643. 2008, online (cited 29/09/08):

<https://www.medicareaustralia.gov.au/>

Health Insurance Commission. Total services for Medicare item No. 16525. 2008, online (cited 29/09/08):

<https://www.medicareaustralia.gov.au/>

How many abortions are there in Australia? A discussion of abortion statistics, their limitations and option for improved statistical collection. 2005, online (cited 29/09/2008): <http://www.aph.gov.au/library/pubs/RB/2004-05/05rb09.pdf>