



Statement from the Women's Health Tasmania “Access and Quality Tasmanian Reproductive Health Conference”.

Background

This statement draws from the presentations and discussions that were brought together in Nipaluna/Hobart on Tuesday 13th May.

We recognize that Tasmania was a leader in decriminalising abortion in 2013 and since 2019 it has been a leader in the provision of financial support for access to surgical and medical abortions and long-acting reversible contraceptives.

While we applaud these statutory and policy initiatives, formidable barriers still limit access to good reproductive healthcare in local communities across the state. This includes encountering stigma in healthcare settings, a lack of specialist reproductive health knowledge and often the requirement to travel long distances for services. Improving the quality of reproductive health services in Tasmania requires changes to both broader health systems like Medicare and within local healthcare settings.

Challenges faced by Tasmanians

This Conference highlighted the difficulties faced by people seeking assistance from an overstretched primary healthcare system.

We heard personal stories of medical sexism where women felt at best misunderstood and at worst mistreated. These stories included maternity care and childbirth, as well as chronic reproductive conditions such as pelvic pain and endometriosis. Too many women experience arduous diagnostic journeys and both a lack of validation and medical support.

Solutions Tasmanians have developed

We learned that innovation is both possible and effective.

We heard how we can start by supporting young people to understand sexual wellbeing, relationships and consent as well as how to prevent STIs and unwanted pregnancies. Young people want a more inclusive, interactive and sex-positive approach that fosters open dialogue and reduces stigma. We also learnt of resources developed with consumers to aid conversations about respectful relationships and understanding rights.

We looked at practices that health practitioners can use to be more confident and competent with reproductive health including Tasmanian-based training in identifying reproductive coercion or providing effective support for persistent pelvic pain.

We heard how one rural GP expanded their services to meet local needs for contraception and abortion while a pilot program expanded the services that chemists can provide for contraception and the treatment of uncomplicated UTIs. We need more of this.

What we are calling for

This conference notes that the State Government's intention to achieve a gender equal Tasmania, where "women and girls have access to equal choice, opportunity, and resources to participate in our economic, social, political and community life" and gender equality is "embedded in our culture, attitudes, and practices".

We therefore call on the Tasmanian Government to:

- Develop a Women's Health Strategy that includes sexual and reproductive health and maternal health as key focus areas
- Commit to the Tasmanian implementation of state-based recommendations from the national inquiry into universal access to reproductive healthcare.
- Expand the Women's Health Fund to cover the cost of medical abortion for all people living in Tasmania, not just those in financial crisis.
- Identify opportunities for Tasmanian reproductive healthcare workers to work to their full scope of practice in a clinically safe way, including nurses, nurse practitioners, midwives and pharmacists.
- Further resource specialist reproductive healthcare services and practitioners within Tasmania's public health system.
- Ensure the provision of training in best practice reproductive healthcare for health professionals and students (including gynaecology and GP trainees, nurses, nurse practitioners, sonographers, midwives and pharmacists)
- Consider opportunities and initiatives to increase the availability of antenatal, birth and postnatal continuity of care.

Finally, this Conference asserted that reproductive health is essential and should be a building block in the goal of a gender equal Tasmania.



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