



MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate distribution

Women's Health Victoria has appealed to major political parties to take important women's health issues to the polls

MELBOURNE – Wednesday 29 October, 2014 - Women's Health Victoria (WHV) last night appealed to Health Ministers and spokespeople from major political parties at their Annual General Meeting to ensure that key women's health issues are given due platform and consideration in the coming state election. The Hon David Davis MP, Minister for Health and Ageing, Mr Gavin Jennings MP, Shadow Minister for Health and Ms Colleen Hartland MP, for Western Metropolitan Region responded to a range of questions posed by event host, Dr Sally Cockburn, on behalf of Women's Health Victoria.

"There are a number of incredibly important issues that relate to the health and wellbeing of women across Victoria. As such, we were keen to make sure that key political parties take these issues with them to the polls in November," said Rita Butera, Executive Director of Women's Health Victoria.

"We provided them with the opportunity at our Annual General Meeting to publicly share their vision and position statements in relation to a range of issues that are relevant to the health of Victorian women."

Sexual and Reproductive Health

Providing Victorian women with access to fact-based, reputable information regarding a wide range of sexual and reproductive health issues, which then empowers them to make decisions regarding their health, is a key concern of Women's Health Victoria.

When asked about whether they would prioritise the establishment of a state-wide, fact-based pregnancy advisory service that can be accessed by Victorian women in metropolitan and rural areas, all politicians unanimously agreed that this was an important service. David Davis assured the attendees that, "there is a need to expand pregnancy advisory services" and that "more can be done to improve referral points", with the use of technology potentially assisting with the development of other access points for information. Gavin Jennings remarked, "Everyone in Victoria has the right to good quality health services and this is one of them," and Colleen Hartland noted, "Clearly these are issues that are really important", she added there was a need to "develop a strategy to deliver real service and outcomes."

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Women and Abortion Services

Women's Health Victoria is committed to providing Victorian women – of all socio-economic levels – with fair and improved access to abortion services, both in hospital settings and across the wider community.

When asked about their commitment to maintaining the Abortion Law Reform Act 2008 in its current form, all three were unanimous in agreeing that the Abortion Law Reform Act would remain as it is and would not be altered. Gavin Jennings noted that it was the Labor Government who proposed and enacted the Abortion Law Reform Act.

Collen Hartland noted, "It's a Green's policy position not a conscience vote. This is good legislation and we have no intention of tolerating any amendments or trying to turn back the clock. That's not acceptable." David Davis added, that he was "very proud of the decriminalisation of abortion in 2008," which involved more than 61 hours of parliamentary debate, further adding, "Parliament has made a decision and there is no proposal to change."

Women and Prevention of Violence

It was noted that recently there has been an increased focus across Victoria - and indeed Australia - on the devastating impact of male violence against women and children. However, despite the efforts of many in organisations, government and the community, violence is still occurring.

When asked what they would do in relation to this issue, Gavin Jennings recognised the shared concern that all parties have for this issue and that Women's Health Services continue to provide knowledge based advocacy across the myriad of services. Further, he noted that "It was a moment of pride to see the Leader of the ALP commit to the Royal Commission into Family Violence", which would bring about an increase in the package to support and introduce reforms.

David Davis in contrast referred to the proposal of a Royal Commission as carrying too many risks – including cost and a diversion of focus. He added that there has been a significant shift in Parliament, with all parties focused and interested in providing a way forward – and that Women's Health Services forms a critical part of this approach. He referred to \$41 million that has already been committed to a prevention campaign, which comprises a wide range of services.

Colleen Hartland noted that the Greens had developed a \$100 million per year package to tackle this important issue.

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Women and Cancer

Women's Health Victoria's BreaCan service is a unique support service which provides women who are living with breast or gynaecological cancer with information and support, from a team of peers volunteers who have themselves experienced cancer.

When asked whether they would commit to expanding the reach of the BreaCan service in order to provide assistance to women across Victoria, including rural areas, David Davis said, "We have taken steps to do this already and we will continue to do so." Gavin Jennings added, 'Absolutely' and Colleen Hartland remarked, "It makes sense."

Rita Butera noted, "Women's Health Victoria and the BreaCan team were delighted to hear such unanimous and emphatic support for the growth of the BreaCan service in both the community and hospital setting. This will enable BreaCan to reach and assist more Victorian women who are dealing with cancer, particularly across rural and regional areas."

Mental Health

In Australia, young women are nearly twice as likely to have a serious mental illness, comprising of some 62% of reported cases of self-harm. Further, women are 3 times more likely to attempt suicide than men. All three parties agreed that more needs to be done to prevent the risk of mental illness and suicide in young women.

Further, Gavin Jennings commented that they would want to draw together all the different entry or touch points that can be used to reach out to people dealing with mental health issues, noting "We need to look at resources and funding to ensure that mental health is not the poor cousin."

Colleen Hartland remarked that many families of people with a mental health issue are still "lost" and David Davis assured that more money would be spent on services to support people with mental health and their families, state-wide.

In reflection on the day's discussion, Ms Butera said, "It is reassuring to see that the political leaders in health not only recognise the importance of women's health issues and the work that we do together with other Women's Health Services, but that they have committed to helping us expand and improve on what we do to improve the health and well-being of women in Victoria."

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About Women's Health Victoria

Women's Health Victoria (WHV) is a not-for-profit, state-wide women's health promotion, information and advocacy service, focused on improving the lives of Victorian women. WHV works collaboratively with women, health professionals, policy makers and community organisations to influence and inform health policy and service delivery for women.



Women's Health Victoria

healthy empowered equal

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The work of WHV is underpinned by a social model of health and a commitment to reducing inequities in health which arise from social, economic and environmental determinants.

For more information, visit www.whv.org.au

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