



MEDIA RELEASE

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For immediate release

ABORTION FACTS: WOMEN'S HEALTH AT RISK FROM DOCTORS WHO REFUSE TO REFER FOR ABORTION

Prominent Victorian women's health professionals are working to demystify the Abortion Law Reform Act in light of recent media activity.

"Abortion is an essential health service and it is important to protect women's right to choose and to seek assistance and information from doctors," said Rita Butera, Executive Director of Women's Health Victoria, in a media release endorsed by women's health professionals from across Victoria.

"A doctor's refusal to comply with the Abortion Law Reform Act's conscientious objection clause impacts directly on women. Women who go to doctors are seeking their help. When a doctor refuses to assist, women can be left feeling confused and ashamed, and they may not realise that there are other options," Ms Butera said.

"Section 8 of the Act requires that health professionals make a woman aware of their conscientious objection to abortion and refer her on to someone who will be able to support her. Refusal to comply with Section 8 impedes a woman's ability to make an informed decision and can compromise her physical and mental health if it means that she is unable to access care and support," Ms Butera said.

"It can re-traumatise women in cases where the pregnancy is a result of rape, or where there is diagnosis of foetal abnormality, relationship breakdown or intimate partner violence," Ms Butera said.

Leading doctors also support the existence of the clause.

"It's simply good medical practice to refer to another doctor when exercising a conscientious objection. Referring to a health professional that can support the woman with her request ensures she will receive accurate information, good health care and avoids unnecessary delays. Young women, in particular, can face serious difficulties when access to care is delayed," said Dr Kathy McNamee, Senior Medical Officer at Family Planning Victoria.

"The Abortion Law Reform Act ensures that the religious beliefs of health professionals are respected and that the women in their care don't suffer as a result of their doctor's personal beliefs," Ms Butera said.

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This media release is endorsed by the following individuals and organisations:

Organisations:

- *Women's Health Victoria*
- *Family Planning Victoria*
- *Fertility Control Clinic*
- *Women's Health Association of Victoria, representing Women's Health West, Women's Health In The North, Women's Health East, Women's Health Loddon Mallee, Women's Health in the South East, Women's Health Grampians, Women's Health Goulburn North East, Women with Disabilities Victoria, Women's Health and Wellbeing Barwon South West, Multicultural Centre for Women's Health, Gippsland Women's Health Service and Women's Health Victoria*
- *The Royal Women's Hospital (the Women's)*
- *Victorian Medical Women's Society*

Individuals:

- *Dr Maggie Kirkman (Jean Hailes Research Unit, Monash University)*
- *Dr Heather Rowe (Jean Hailes Research Unit, Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences, Monash University)*
- *Dr Carolyn Nickson (Research Fellow, Centre for MEGA Epidemiology, Melbourne School of Population and Global Health, University of Melbourne).*



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