

MEDIA RELEASE (FOR IMMEDIATE DISTRIBUTION)

Access to trusted service guaranteed as 1800 My Options celebrates 3rd anniversary and 13,000 calls.

Melbourne - 19/03/2021

Today Women's Health Victoria proudly celebrates the third anniversary of 1800 My Options, Victoria's first dedicated sexual and reproductive health phone line and website. During this time, 1800 My Options has supported 13,000 Victorian women callers and a further 57,000 unique website users to access contraception, pregnancy options including abortion, and sexual health information and services – no matter where they live in the state.

A service of Women's Health Victoria, 1800 My Options incorporates a confidential and women centred phonenumber with a comprehensive database of almost 400 trusted, pro-choice sexual and reproductive health care services across Victoria.

An independent evaluation of the service by the Nossal Institute for Global Health in 2020 demonstrates that 1800 My Options increases timely access to essential sexual and reproductive health services, reduces stigma around abortion and contraception, and services diverse communities across Victoria.

More recently, 1800 My Options provided critical pathways to the service system during 2020 when the impact of COVID-19 made finding services to meet their needs challenging for many women due to workforce and service changes and other barriers such as financial insecurity, rurality, language or visa status.

We are delighted that the Minister for Health, the Hon Martin Foley MP, today announced \$1.67 million in funding for 1800 My Options for a further four years. Many women have already benefited and we are pleased this essential service will continue to support women to exercise reproductive choices and find the information and services they need.

This funding announcement builds upon the Victorian Government's work established through the pivotal strategy, Women's Sexual and Reproductive Health: Key Priorities 2017-2020. The gains of this work are significant – the establishment of 1800 My Options, eight funded sexual and reproductive health hubs across the state, the Clinical Champions Project, and an emphasis on training and workforce development.

These achievements are improving equity of access for women in Victoria. Yet, there is still more work to do to ensure that the service system is visible, accessible across the breadth of the state and integrated. This was further highlighted during 2020 as women's access to SRH services was impacted during COVID -19 due to workforce shortages, concerns about accessing health care, financial insecurity or visa status and rurality.

We are calling on the Minister to commit to a renewed Women's' Sexual and Reproductive Health Plan for 2021-2025 to consolidate the gains made so far and ensure all women across Victoria can access the sexual and reproductive health care they need.

Quotes attributable to Cabinet Secretary, Sonya Kilkenny:

“1800 My Options is an essential service for Victorian women. This Government is proud to support women’s access to the sexual and reproductive health services they need. We are providing \$1.67 million over the next four years to ensure this vital service can continue.”

“Victorian women can be assured that when they need to access contraception, pregnancy options or sexual health information and services 1800 My Options will be there to provide confidential, women-centred support and pathways to trusted providers.”

Quotes attributable to Dianne Hill, CEO Women’s Health Victoria:

“1800 My Options breaks down barriers and stigma for women seeking legal, safe, and common sexual and reproductive health services.”

“Women often don’t know where to go, or who to ask about sexual and reproductive health information or services they need. 1800 My Options is the confidential, evidence-based service that can help them, no matter where they live 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. 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 whv.org.au