

MEDIA RELEASE: LABOR'S PLAN TO SUPPORT WOMEN'S REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS - WEDNESDAY, 6 MARCH 2019



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LABOR'S PLAN TO SUPPORT WOMEN'S REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

A Shorten Labor Government will deliver Australia's first ever National Sexual and Reproductive Health Strategy to make sure all Australian women can access legal, safe, affordable reproductive health services.

Reproductive choice and access to basic health care are fundamental rights.

Every Australian woman should have access to the health services they need, where and when they need them.

Labor's plan will improve access to contraception –

- **We will review the Medicare rebate for long-acting reversible contraceptives (LARCs), to make sure that cost isn't a barrier to their use.**

LARCs are over 99 per cent effective, but Australia's uptake of LARCs is far lower than other OECD countries.

For example in the US and the UK, around a third of women use them but in Australia only about 10 per cent of women do.

- **We will ask the Therapeutic Goods Administration to advise government on options to reduce barriers to improve access to the contraceptive pill.**

That advice will include an investigation of arrangements in New Zealand where you can now get a three year prescription for the pill from your doctor.

In addition, Labor recognises that for many women, the decision to end a pregnancy is one of the most difficult she will make.

Labor's plan will improve access to safe, legal ways to end a pregnancy –

- **We will review the Medicare rebate associated with medical terminations (RU486) to address access and affordability issues.**

Labor added RU486 to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme in 2013, so a prescription only costs \$6.40 if you have a health care card. But out of pocket costs for appointments and tests average close to \$600.

- **We will support doctors in the provision of medical terminations.**

Only around 1,500 of Australia's 35,000 GPs are registered prescribers of medical terminations.

Labor will fund an online community of practice to support the provision of medical terminations and LARCs so practitioners can access peer support and advice, as well as connect with pharmacists and other service providers.

This will particularly help women in country Australia, where it can be hard to find a doctor who provides medical terminations.

- **We will support all women to access termination services in public hospitals.**

For the first time, Commonwealth-State hospital funding agreements will expect that termination services will be provided consistently in public hospitals.

This is critical to end the patchwork of service provision in Australia.

Women have been turned away from public hospitals for termination services, and have not been able to access or afford to go to a private clinic.

In some cases women have been forced to travel hundreds of kilometres or go interstate to get the care they need.

Choosing to terminate a pregnancy is difficult enough.

Forcing a woman to travel long distances or interstate to access surgical services can dramatically increase the emotional and financial burden.

We wouldn't accept someone having to travel that far for a hip replacement or a broken bone. Women deserve better.

- **We will establish a new Tasmanian Reproductive Health Hub.**

Currently, many Tasmania women seeking to end a pregnancy are forced to travel interstate to have a termination, due to a lack of local services.

Labor will put an end to that by building the Tasmanian Reproductive Health Hub, which will be part of the public hospital system.

- **We will fund a national telephone referral service linking women to safe, credentialed providers of termination services.**

When a woman makes the difficult decision to end a pregnancy, she should have access to reliable information about the safe services available.

- **We will progress the decriminalisation of abortion across Australia.**

Abortion remains a crime in New South Wales, impacting around a third of Australian women.

Women can also still be charged for “unlawful” abortions in South Australia.

That causes uncertainty and hampers the provision of essential health care.

Labor will work closely with the states to address these issues.

Labor will also **restore funding to the Australian Women’s Health Network** (AHWN) – Australia’s only peak body for women’s health. The AHWN is dedicated to the health and wellbeing of women in Australia, and has worked for better outcomes in women’s health issues such as informed choice around sexual health and contraception, and domestic violence prevention.

Despite AHWN’s terrific work, the Liberals cut all their funding.

Labor’s plan will provide national leadership so Australian women can access legal, safe, affordable reproductive health services when and where they need them.

A Shorten Labor Government will provide \$9.3 million in initial funding for the plan.

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