



Women's Sexual and Reproductive Health COVID-19 Coalition

A Consensus Statement on implementation and monitoring of the National Women's Health Strategy 2020-2030: 'Maternal, sexual and reproductive health' priority area

In relation to implementation and monitoring of the National Women's Health Strategy 2020-2030, the Coalition calls upon the government to act upon the following recommendations:

- *Undertake a national consultation process with government and non-government representation from all states and territories, including metropolitan, regional and remote areas of Australia, to inform the development of:*
 - a. *An implementation plan outlining:*
 - *how the key outcomes outlined in the strategy will be achieved (noting that approaches need to be social, clinical and data driven with a focus on priority populations)*
 - *the associated timeframes*
 - *a detailed budget to support the achievement of the key outcomes*
 - *currently funded projects and plans for future projects*
 - b. *A set of key performance indicators (KPIs) for the purposes of monitoring and reporting against the implementation of the Strategy and approaches to data collection for this purpose*
- *Publish the implementation plan and KPIs*
- *Allocate funding to support the achievement of the key outcomes of the Strategy*
- *Allocate funding for a formative evaluation process that focuses on timely and disaggregated data collection and monitoring against each KPI and enables future research on priority areas*
- *Publish an annual progress report, reporting at both state/territory and national levels on outcomes and KPIs*

The National Women's Health Strategy (2020-2030) is the second women's health strategy to be developed in Australia, building on the 2010 National Women's Health Policy. It outlines a national approach to improving health outcomes for women and girls in Australia (1).

Similar strategies relating to women's health have been introduced in other countries, for example the Sexual Health Quality Standard in England and Wales (2), the Sexual Health Standards in Scotland (updated standards out for consultation in 2021) (3), and the National Sexual Health Strategy 2015-2020 in Ireland (4). These strategies differ to the Australian National Women's Health Strategy, however, in that those governments have mandated regular monitoring and reporting of the strategy outcomes to track progress.

As a Coalition of sexual and reproductive health experts and stakeholders from around Australia, we seek a commitment from the Australian government and government agencies on developing a transparent approach to implementation, monitoring and reporting of the National Women's Health Strategy. This will enable the goals of the Strategy to be met for the improvement of women's sexual and reproductive health access and equity throughout Australia.



Priority area 1 of the National Women's Health Strategy, 'Maternal, sexual and reproductive health', outlines three key priorities (1):

1. Increased access to sexual and reproductive health care information, diagnosis, treatment and services;
2. Increased health promotion activity to enhance and support preconception and perinatal health; and
3. Support for enhanced access to maternal and perinatal health care services.

and "key measures of success":

- Decrease in the notification rates of sexually transmissible infections for priority populations
- Increase in the availability and uptake of Long Acting Reversible Contraception (LARCs)
- Equitable access to pregnancy termination services
- A continued increase in the rate of vaccinations under the National HPV Program
- Increased early access to antenatal services by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and culturally and linguistically diverse women
- De-stigmatisation of urinary and faecal incontinence and improved access for women to care for these conditions, including pelvic floor physiotherapy
- Improved access to counselling and care of adult women with sexual function concerns

However, as the priority areas and actions are quite broad and not comprehensive, and the measures of success are not directly transferrable as key performance indicators, it is not evident how these will be implemented, tracked or achieved.

Furthermore, at the launch of the Strategy in April 2019 it was announced that \$52.2 million would be provided to organisations working in the area of improving women's health (5). However, it is not clear how this funding has been allocated, the implementation plan for funded projects, or how these will be monitored or evaluated, both as individual projects or against the priorities and actions outlined in the Strategy. The Department of Health has implied that state and territory leadership and funding will be critical to ensure the success of the National Women's Health Strategy, yet there appears to be no articulated plan for national coordination or collaboration between state and territory health agencies to ensure efficient and accountable implementation.

We feel that there is a critical need for a transparent implementation and monitoring plan for reporting progress against the National Women's Health Strategy (with data collection to support this), a clear evaluation plan to measure impact and success, clarity on the level and nature of funding being made, and stronger communication and engagement with consumers and stakeholders. These elements will be crucial to monitor change and impact, inform service provision, ensure accountability and transparency, and promote optimal outcomes for women and girls in Australia.

*The Coalition uses *women* as an inclusive and broad term that refers to and acknowledges the diversity in needs and experiences of all people who may access and use abortion and women's sexual and reproductive health services including other people who do not identify as women but can experience pregnancy and abortion and may need to access these.



References

1. Department of Health. National Women's Health Strategy 2020-2030. Canberra: Australian Government Department of Health; 2018.
2. National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. Sexual health: Quality standard. National Institute for Health and Care Excellence; 2019.
3. Healthcare Improvement Scotland. Sexual health standards [Online]. Healthcare Improvement Scotland; 2021 [Available from: https://www.healthcareimprovementscotland.org/our_work/standards_and_guidelines/stnds/sexual_health_standards.aspx].
4. Department of Health. National Sexual Health Strategy 2015-2020. Department of Health, Ireland; 2015.
5. Department of Health. \$52.2 million to improve women's health [Online]. Department of Health, Australia; 2019 [Available from: <https://www.health.gov.au/ministers/the-hon-greg-hunt-mp/media/522-million-to-improve-womens-health>].