

Women's Health Policy Alliance Communique

16 August, 2019

Forum 1 | Maternal, sexual and reproductive health

Jean Hailes for Women's Health, together with the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RANZCOG), co-hosted the first Women's Health Policy Alliance forum on Tuesday evening. This is the first in our policy series focusing on how the women's health sector can work together to address the priorities and actions identified in the National Women's Health Strategy 2020-2030 (NWHS).

David Lloyd, CEO of Jean Hailes, and Dr Vijay Roach, president of RANZCOG opened the inaugural forum, focused on Priority 1 of the NWHS – Maternal, sexual and reproductive health. In his introductory remarks, Dr Roach emphasised the need to affect cultural change in the way that we provide women's health care. "Equality and equity for women, a recognition of the impact of social determinants of health and basic human respect should be the principles that underpin the National Women's Health Strategy," Dr Roach said.

The forum brought together a range of policy officers, clinicians and researchers working across the women's health sector to share their knowledge and expertise with the broader group, as we collectively work towards improving health outcomes for women and girls in Australia.

Participants engaged in a constructive discussion centring around identifying existing successful initiatives, both within Australia and internationally, that can be leveraged either through expansion of existing programs, or adaptation of successful initiatives to address an unmet need. A number of Australian initiatives were identified, such as the Specialist Training Program, which could be expanded to provide specialist training places for sexual and reproductive health, or the Rural Locum Scheme, which could be expanded to provide support for a wider range of general practitioners undertaking professional training and education.

A number of international initiatives were also identified, such as a program in the United States that is training the next generation of leaders in sexual and reproductive health, and in Canada, where free contraception is provided for vulnerable women and women following termination of a pregnancy. There, health practitioners have developed a simple way to start a conversation with women around contraception.

It was agreed that a number of actions require a coalition within the women's health sector to drive change, and an authorising environment to affect change. This emerged in discussion around improving equitable access to termination services nationally, building health literacy amongst priority populations, and supporting the health care workforce to deliver on the NWHS.

"A lot of passionate people spent considerable time collaborating on the National Women's Health Strategy and we're determined to support the Government in ensuring it doesn't gather dust," said Mr Lloyd.

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