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Reproductive Rights: Protecting the health and wellness of single women and lesbians

gay & lesbian equality
human rights at risk: fact sheet



The issue:

Protect all women's reproductive rights

It is inarguable that being able to give birth to and nurture a child is the dream of a large number of women.

Most women in Western Australia will have such children within a heterosexual relationship.

But for single women and lesbians falling pregnant is problematic. These women used to seek pregnancy with a stranger via unsafe sexual intercourse

or non-medical sperm donation.

This placed the health of single women and lesbians at risk. Luckily, these women now have access to clinical, safe artificial insemination (AI).

In addition, some women are medically infertile — they can't become pregnant without medical technology. These women need treatments like in-vitro fertilisation (IVF).

The current laws:

Equal access for single women & lesbians

In 2001, the Government identified that both single women and lesbians were not given equal access to both donor AI and — if medically infertile — assisted technologies like IVF.

One medical expert estimated about 1% of all AI and IVF treatments Australia-wide are for single women and lesbians, mostly AI treatments.

A Government report found: "Lesbian women who wish to have children are

left with little choice but the use of sperm outside a clinical context."

In response, the Government changed the *Human Reproductive Technology Act 1991* to allow single women and lesbians access to donor AI and IVF.

For most single women and lesbians, access to IVF technology still requires the person to be proven by medical professionals to be medically infertile — usually after donor AI fails repeatedly.

The Liberal plan:

Liberals will stop access to IVF

The WA Liberal Party now wishes to fiddle with WA's fair reproductive technology laws to stop the small number of single women and lesbian couples from accessing IVF.

The Liberal Party says they need to keep IVF only for heterosexual couples to save marriage and families.

This is plainly untrue — removing IVF for

single women and lesbians won't protect one family or marriage.

Also the Liberal Party's colleagues — the Nationals — have said moves to undo these laws are a "waste of time".

It is cruel and hurtful to penalise single women and lesbians who either want access to clinical methods of falling pregnant or who are medically infertile.

The myths and facts:

Single women and lesbians also want kids

Myth: Single women and lesbians don't need access to donor AI.

Fact: Medically-tested donor AI in a clinical environment is safe. Not allowing single women and lesbians donor AI will force them back to risky and unsafe self-insemination methods.

Myth: IVF should be reserved for infertile heterosexual couples.

Fact: Single women and lesbians can also be medically infertile. This is through no fault of their own. Medical treatments should be given to all

women who are medically infertile – irrespective of relationship or sexuality.

Myth: Children need a mum and a dad.

Fact: Scientific evidence shows kids raised in single or same-sex parented families fare no worse than other kids.

Myth: Allowing single women and lesbians access to AI and IVF destroys the institutions of marriage and family.

Fact: Allowing single women and lesbians the ability to have children does not impact at all on the marriages and families of heterosexuals.

Talking points:

Speak up about unfair AI and IVF laws

Single women, donors and lesbians clearly need to have access to fair laws on AI and IVF to:

- eliminate backyard insemination or unsafe sex to fall pregnant
- protect sperm donors rights by recognising they are not the father of any child born from AI
- provide a clinically-controlled and safe source of donor sperm
- provide fair and equitable access to IVF when a woman is known to be medically infertile
- allow these women the ability to fulfil their dreams of parenthood and raising and nurturing a child

What you can do:

Help keep fairness in WA law

There are a number of ways you can oppose the Liberal Party's plans to undo equality for gays, lesbians, single women and de facto straight couples.

You can write letters to newspapers, ask to meet your local Liberal MP or candidate, and tell friends and family

about the issues. You could also vote for a progressive political party like the ALP, Greens and Australian Democrats.

Every individual can make a difference. For more information on what you can do to keep WA's AI and IVF laws, please visit our website at www.galewa.asn.au

More information:

About Gay and Lesbian Equality

Gay and Lesbian Equality is WA's peak gay and lesbian human rights body.

We also lobby to keep the human rights of others in related issues – like the reproductive rights of single women and relationship rights for de factos.

Our website at www.galewa.asn.au contains more fact sheets.

Topics include the age of consent, adoption rights for gay and lesbian parents, and Family Court access to straight and gay de facto couples.