



## Abortion law reform in Victoria – IT'S TIME

Resounding support for repealing abortion from the Crimes Act was heard tonight in the former Melbourne City Watchhouse, as respected community leaders met to examine the issues surrounding law reform.

The Reproductive Choice Australia event, '**Does "not now" mean never? the case for committing to abortion law reform in Victoria**' highlighted the social, legal and medical costs as a result of the state's criminalisation of abortion.

Wayne Berry MLA, an ACT politician who successfully decriminalised abortion in that territory, told how his electoral support actually increased after moving to repeal abortion from the ACT Crimes Act., despite being targeted during the election by the Right to Life Association.

"The important thing that I learned from my experience as a campaigner for abortion law reform was that most in the community supported the actions I took and my stance earned their respect," Wayne Berry MLA said.

"While anti abortion campaigners are loud and well organized, they are out of step with the rest of the community.

"It is a mistake to view their loudness and organisational ability as a reflection of how the rest of the community will vote on the issue of abortion."

Dr Lachlan de Crespigny, Obstetrician Gynaecologist at Melbourne Ultrasound for Women, and Head of Ultrasound at Royal Women's Hospital at the time of the controversial abortion case drew on his experience of providing specialist pre-natal and gynecological care for women to argue that Victoria's abortion laws put women's health in danger by forcing doctors to withdraw services necessary for optimum patient care.

"State abortion laws are a health hazard for women and their doctors - they are from the Victorian era and were designed for the Victorian era," Dr de Crespigny said.

"Uncertain laws and the risk of criminal proceedings force doctors to routinely compromise clinical care because of fear of personal repercussions."

According to Lesley Vick, an academic legal researcher specialising in medical ethics and the law, women's reproductive health is compromised or adversely affected if they are denied access to reproductive information, services, choice and support.

"If the law has a useful role to play in the area of fertility control, particularly in relation to abortion, it is not achieved by imposing criminal sanctions on a choice which is supported by an overwhelming majority of the community and exercised by substantial numbers of women," Lesley Vick said.

Dr Leslie Cannold, medical ethicist, researcher, columnist and author of two award-winning books on reproductive choice: *The Abortion Myth* and *What, No Baby?*, highlighted the lack of a commitment from both political parties to law reform.

"What Reproductive Choice Australia and the 81% of the Australian public that support a woman's right to choose want is simple: a commitment from the leaders of both major parties that if they win office, they will facilitate a debate and a conscience vote on a repeal bill," she said.

**Reproductive Choice Australia is a coalition of organisations and individuals dedicated to protecting and enhancing women's reproductive rights in Australia. For information on Reproductive Choice Australia, please visit [www.reproductivechoiceaustralia.org.au](http://www.reproductivechoiceaustralia.org.au)**  
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