



Stop Lying to Pregnant Women!

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The Productivity Commission's Inquiry into Australia's Consumer Protection Policies comes to Melbourne on Tuesday 20 March 2007. A key question for the Inquiry is whether there are gaps in consumer policy coverage.

Dr Leslie Cannold, President of Reproductive Choice Australia, and Ms Lesley Vick, an active member of the group, say "yes".

RCA is concerned about the ability of services that don't charge a fee to engage in deceptive and misleading advertising with impunity.

Foremost among these are pro-life pregnancy counselling agencies that post advertisements in GP's surgeries and police stations promoting 1 300 numbers. The ads ask women whether they are pregnant and upset, and offer "free confidential compassionate counselling". They fail to mention, however, that the advertiser is pro-life, and therefore will not provide accurate, balanced information about abortion, or assist women to access terminations.

Section 52 of the Trade Practices Act, which prohibits deceptive and misleading advertising, is the most widely used consumer protection provision, protecting the right of citizens to make informed choices about the goods they accept and services they engage. But it only applies to services for which a fee is paid.

This, says Dr Leslie Cannold, leaves many Australians unprotected. "It shouldn't matter whether you pay a fee for a service or not. If that service deceives and misleads you with their advertising, they should suffer the full weight of the law".

Lesley Vick agrees. "The role of the State is to ensure all citizens can make choices based on their own needs and values. Deceptive and misleading advertising tricks people into making choices that suit the preference and values of the false advertiser. And no service – whether it takes fees or not – should be allowed to get away with that."

RCA's submission argues that women facing a crisis pregnancy are particularly vulnerable to deceptive and misleading advertising.

RCA is a national coalition of over 20 organisations including Children by Choice, the Public Health Association of Australia, the Australian Women's Health Network, the Women's Electoral Lobby, and all state-based pro-choice groups.

The hearings will be held at the Productivity Commission, Rattigan Room, Level 28, 35 Collins St. Dr Cannold and Lesley Vick are scheduled to give evidence at 10:30am.

For further information contact Dr Cannold on 0417114859 or Lesley Vick on 0406980372