



WOMEN NEED LEGITIMATE COUNSELLING, NOT STATE-SPONSORED MANIPULATION

For immediate release: 27 February 2006

Reproductive Choice Australia welcomes Federal funding for voluntary, all-options counselling services. However, RCA is worried about the lack of understanding key Government ministers have about important difference between legitimate counselling and state-sponsored manipulation. "Key members of government have been promoting 'counselling' as a way of reducing the abortion rate. But pushing a patient to do one thing rather than another is not 'counselling', it's manipulation, especially when that patient is trusting you to act professionally. State-sponsored manipulation isn't just wrong, it's likely to cause emotional and psychological damage to women," said Melbourne University ethicist and RCA spokeswoman Dr Leslie Cannold.

Currently, both government proposals for Federal funding to "counselling" services – via a national telephone line and a Medicare item number for pregnancy counselling - are being described as voluntary. "This is key," says Dr Cannold, "Because if a woman is forced to have counselling, that counselling will have no therapeutic value".

But to be truly voluntary, key changes to current government policy will be necessary. Currently, the Federal Government provides significantly more funding to pro-life than all-options pregnancy support services. According the Dept of Health and Ageing's own figures, since 1999 the pro-life Australian Federation of Pregnancy Support Services has received \$1,163,684 for pregnancy counselling. "Unfortunately, the Federal government has shown no interest in stopping pro-life agencies using false and misleading advertising to trick women into calling them for advice. Because they don't charge for their services, such organisations are not covered by the Trade Practices Act. They also have not ensured the 'counsellors' are professionally qualified, and free from religious or philosophical commitments that prevent them supporting and referring for all three options: adoption, motherhood and abortion."

"Legitimate and experienced services exist and stand ready to support women to make decisions consistent with their own needs and consciences. Australian must insist their taxes are only used to fund *bona fide* services."

Reproductive Choice Australia is a coalition of over 20 organisations including Sexual Health & Family Planning Australia, 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 coalitions.

For more information, contact Dr Leslie Cannold on 0417 114 859