



The AusAID Family Planning Guidelines: the facts

What are they?

The Guidelines are a policy document which AusAID has used to guide its family planning or reproductive health programs since 1996.

When were they devised?

They were developed in 1996 under a deal with Independent Senator Brian Harradine where women's reproductive rights within Australia and in Australia's aid program were bargained off in exchange for the Senator's support on government business. Senator Harradine held a powerful position in the Senate at that time. He secured the scrapping of \$130million population program; a ban on information, education or any communication about unsafe or safe abortion; a ban on any training of medical personnel in safe abortion techniques; a ban on access to emergency contraception (EC) in the aid program and a ban on access to RU486 within Australia without ministerial approval. The EC ban was overturned in 2002 as a result of an approach to the Foreign Minister, Mr Downer by the PGPD Chair at the time, Dr Brendan Nelson. It was a policy not a legislative change.

The RU486 ban was overturned as the result of a conscience vote in the Federal Parliament in February 2006.

Why are they harmful?

1. In many respects the Australian Guidelines mirror the US Global Gag which bans US aid money being used for abortion or abortion activities including information or education about safe or unsafe abortion. George W Bush extended the Global Gag which had been set up by Ronald Regan and developed by George Bush Senior to exclude any organization that may have dealings with organizations working with sex workers or which may be involved in abortion or abortion education. In 2005, Brazil refused vital funds from the US because its work in HIV/AIDS prevention meant it worked with organizations on programs involving sex workers as a first line of defence against the virus. Australia successfully worked

- with sex workers and other specific target groups at the beginning of the HIV/AIDS epidemic to prevent the spread of the disease in Australia.
2. Under AusAID's Guidelines no information about abortion can be given and no service provided even to save the life of the woman and even in countries where abortion is legal. Even information about how not to access unsafe abortion is banned. It is our form of the Global Gag where women are denied education about a significant issue of reproductive health and the right to know how to protect themselves from injury and death.
 3. Under the Australian Guidelines if a woman has accessed an abortion unsafely and is injured she can, in theory, access medical help for post abortion care though few if any programs in this have ever been funded. Even then Australian aid money is not allowed to give advice on abortion or safe abortion at that time.
 4. Only some forms of contraception are allowed to be funded with Australian aid monies (contraceptives registered for use in Australia). This limits options in developing countries where other forms of acceptable contraception may be available.
 5. The reporting guidelines about women's reproductive health are extremely cautious and exacting. This has had the desired effect of detracting from family planning programs, singling out reproductive rights for special treatment in the aid program. This scrutiny is not given to any other area of the aid program and instills a level of fear and anxiety that acts a deterrent to undertake family planning activities.
 6. The net result is that few family planning programs have actually been conducted in the last ten years and those that exist are conducted as part of maternal health programs. This means that programs are targeted at those who are already mothers and does not focus on prevention of pregnancy, maternal deaths or education.

If the Guidelines are abolished does this mean abortion on demand?

No. Australia cannot provide abortion services in countries where it is not legal. However many countries in the Asia Pacific region do allow legal abortion in some circumstances. In these countries adequate training and education should be provided so that countries can reduce the death rate of women from unsafe abortion. The ICPD principles (which Australia along with 179 other countries supported in 1994 and has reaffirmed numerous times) state that in countries where abortion is legal it should be safe. Because we are not able to educate

women or men about abortion we are unable to prevent many deaths and permanent disability because people unknowingly access unsafe abortion.

Does access to education and abortion services save lives?

Yes. The evidence is overwhelming. See www.ipas.com

What needs to happen?

1. The Guidelines should be abolished.
2. Australia needs to follow the same protocols as other countries which guide their reproductive health programs such as the World Health Organisation and International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo Program of Action.