



What is reproductive health?

At the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in 1994, 180 countries, including Australia, prepared and adopted by acclamation a Programme of Action (PoA), widely regarded as one of the finest collective products of the human intellect.

All signatory nations, including Australia, agreed to "do our utmost to remove all remaining barriers in our countries that inhibit access to family planning services, information and education, as well as to help support the provision of reproductive health and family planning services as widely as possible".

Australia's commitment to the Cairo PoA was reaffirmed by the Prime Minister, Mr Howard, in January 2005. It set out comprehensive definitions and actions for the global community for the next twenty years. The definitions below are taken from the PoA.

Reproductive Health. Reproductive health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being in all matters relating to the reproductive system and to its functions and processes. It implies that people have the capability to reproduce and the freedom to decide if, when and how often to do so. Implicit in this is the right of men and women to be informed and to have access to safe, effective, affordable and acceptable methods of **family planning** of their choice, as well as other methods of their choice for regulation of fertility, which are not against the law, and the right of **access to health-care services** that will enable women to go safely through **pregnancy and childbirth**.

Reproductive health care services encompass:

- Family planning/birth spacing services
- Antenatal care, skilled attendance at delivery, and postnatal care
- Management of obstetric and neonatal complications and emergencies
- Prevention and treatment of reproductive tract infections and sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS
- Early diagnosis and treatment for breast cancer and reproductive tract cancers (men and women)
- Promotion, education and support for exclusive breast feeding
- Prevention and appropriate treatment of sub-fertility and infertility
- Active discouragement of harmful practices such as female genital cutting
- Adolescent sexual and reproductive health
- Prevention and management of gender-based violence
- Management of abortion complications and provision of post-abortion care, as per paragraph 8.25

ICPD PoA 8.25

In no case should abortion be promoted as a method of family planning. All Governments and relevant intergovernmental organizations are urged to strengthen their commitment to women's health, to deal with the impact of unsafe abortion as a major public health concern and to reduce the recourse to abortion through expanded family planning services. For more information on this section please refer to – *What the ICPD says about Abortion, ARHA Fact Sheet*