



Health Care Consumers' Association ACT INC  
114 Maitland Street, HACKETT ACT 2602  
Phone: 02 6230 7800 Fax: 02 6230 7833  
Email: [adminofficer@hcca.org.au](mailto:adminofficer@hcca.org.au)  
ABN: 59 698 548 902  
[hcca.org.au](http://hcca.org.au) | [hcca-act.blogspot.com](http://hcca-act.blogspot.com) |  
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30 January 2015

The Health Care Consumers' Association (HCCA) welcomes the opportunity to provide written feedback on the proposed consumer handouts Women's Health Service - Medical Referral.

HCCA recognises the importance of documents like these in developing the expertise of health consumers to actively engage with our own health care, understand the health care system and to be able to participate as equal partners with health professionals to make informed decisions about our own and our family's health. Health literacy is an essential right of a health care consumer as addressed in the Australian Charter of Health care Rights, particularly the charter rights of access, communication and participation.

We would like to commend your team for developing these resources to increase understanding of how your service works and what patients, families and carers can reasonably expect from their experience.

Comments on this document have been compiled by the HCCA Policy Steering Committee which works to provide oversight and advice in relation to HCCA policy submissions and position statements. Our comments are as follows:

1. The document does not explain what the role of the women's health service is rather it focus on what the service does not provide. It would be useful to provide some context and background information on the service.
2. The website describes the service criteria which would be useful to include on the handout. The website states:
  1. *Women's Health Service sees women who have significant difficulty in accessing health services due to the impact of:*
  2. *Violence, abuse or neglect*
  3. *Identifying as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin*
  4. *Language or cultural barriers*
  5. *Homelessness or risk of homelessness*
  6. *Substance abuse issues*
  7. *Mental health issues*

8. *Disability*
9. *Sexual identity issues*

The website also describes the range of services as follows:

10. *Our services include:*

11. **Well Women's Clinic** - *A comprehensive women's health check that includes a health history, routine screening and cervical screening (PAP Smear) and life style advice.*
12. **Counselling** - *Short, medium and long term counselling is offered on a range of issues*
13. **Education** - *Women's Health Service provides training to health professional and community agencies on working with women who have been subjected to interpersonal violence.*
14. **Specialised Medical Services** - *Nurse Practitioner and Doctor services can provide you with short term comprehensive care and assist you to link in with a general practice in the community.*

We suggest that the Handout could to address these same things to provide some clarity around the services provided by the Woman's Health Service. Including information around;

- a) who can use the services- eligibility criteria
- b) what the services are for women attending, and;
- c) how you gain access to the service eg do you need a formal referral or can you self-refer if you fit the criteria;
- d) what else, if anything, a woman needs to bring to her first appointment; and
- e) what the cost of using the service will be e.g. is there a charge, are women bulk-billed, is there a co-payment.

From looking at the website, it looks like there is an intake who assesses women for entry to the program it would be helpful to include this information so women know what to expect.

Thank you again for asking for consumer feedback on this document.

Should you have any questions regarding this feedback, please contact HCCA Policy Officer Eleanor Kerdo [eleanorkerdo@hcca.org.au](mailto:eleanorkerdo@hcca.org.au) or phone 02 6230 7800

Yours sincerely,

Health Policy Steering Committee

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