



**National Council of
Women of New Zealand**

Te Kaunihera
Wahine O Aotearoa

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**Submission to the Health Select Committee on the Health (Screening
Programmes) Amendment Bill.**

Introduction

The National Council of Women of New Zealand (NCWNZ) is an umbrella organisation representing 42 nationally organised societies. It has 34 branches spread throughout the country to which women from some 150 societies are affiliated.

Members of the Health Standing Committee of NCWNZ, together with branch members have made some comments on this Amendment Bill. Originally sent out in May 2002, it has taken an excessive time to come to this stage.

NCWNZ has maintained a policy in favour of screening programmes since 1987, and advocates quality for all health issues. It is pleasing to read on page 15 of the Explanatory Notes that "... quality control should be an ongoing activity that is fully integrated into the NCSP..."

General comments

In general, members felt that the document was comprehensive. Several commented that they were surprised at the need for so much detail to be included in the Bill. On the other hand, others felt strongly that the Bill must have well-defined parameters, and cover all aspects for all screening opportunities now and in the future. The Bill gives an opportunity for this to be done.

All respondents felt that the programme evaluation recommendations were positive as they would give direction, wider knowledge, and consistency. Lines of responsibility are well defined.

Several of our members felt it is important for women and others to consent to their statistical information being available to appropriate persons for research and health planning. Those respondents all commented on the need for such data to be confidential.

Another aspect raised was the apparent stumbling block caused by not being able to use the information in the Gisborne inquiry. On the other hand, some respondents could not understand why the evaluation of such data should cause any more concern in terms of privacy than the activity of a health professional reading a smear test in a laboratory. As long as privacy is maintained no particular concerns should arise.

A concern was expressed by some respondents who have an interest in these issues, and recognise the need for comprehensive knowledge about trends. For example, the percentage of women who opt off the register and those who refuse screening would be of importance in judging the success of the programme. While those who develop cancer will be accounted for on the Cancer Register, no record of the percentage will be available. One respondent went as far as to question whether the proposed legislation would actually protect women or whether it would simply hinder research.





Specific Comments

Part 4A Screening Programmes 112F(2)

Concern was expressed at the discretionary power of the NCSP manager to enrol a woman in the NCSP in the event of a specimen taken during a surgical procedure that includes a cervical component if the results of the analysis are reported to the NCSP. It appears that this may override a woman's decision not to be on the register.

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Permitting the Director General to limit the types of information an evaluator may have access to, may diminish the 'net benefits' of that proposal as outlined on p16 of the Explanatory Notes. Protection of disclosure and risks must be minimised. This Bill is broad in the interpretation of "health information" and "hospital records". The women involved in the programmes may ask for more detailed definitions of these terms.

11 2X Duties of screening programme evaluators 2(d)

The evaluator "may use and disclose evaluation material for the purpose of advising the person in charge of the relevant screening programme that, in the screening programme evaluator's opinion, a particular person who is enrolled in a screening programme may benefit from follow-up action;" This is seen as a good check for the NCSP, providing added safety for women on the programme.

But we can see difficulties where a difference of opinion arises between the evaluator and the original determinator. It should be made clear where the final decision is to be made.

Conclusion

NCWNZ is pleased to have the opportunity to comment on this important Amendment Bill which should improve the health of New Zealand women in the future.

NCWNZ endorses the intentions of the Bill, "...to ensure that the NCSP operates as safely and effectively as possible, and can be comprehensively and efficiently evaluated on a routine basis

(Explanatory Notes, page 15)

Research to enhance knowledge of screening, and the lives saved by these population health initiatives is commended by NCWNZ.

Beryl Anderson
National President

Elizabeth Bang
Health Standing Committee