



MEDIA RELEASE

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Victorian State Budget 2023: Women's Health Victoria welcomes important commitments to Sexual and Reproductive Health, with further investment needed in Women's Mental Health

MELBOURNE – 25 May 2023

Women's Health Victoria welcomes the women's health funding announcements made this week in the 2023-24 Victorian State Budget, noting there are a broad range of measures that will have a significant positive impact on the health and wellbeing of women, girls and trans and gender diverse people across the state.

The Victorian Government's investment of \$154 million into women's health includes vital measures that will ensure women's sexual and reproductive health needs are prioritised across the health system. We particularly welcome investment of \$10 million to establish nine new hubs for sexual and reproductive health care including abortion, and \$58 million for 20 new comprehensive women's health clinics and a dedicated Aboriginal-led women's clinic, to overcome barriers to treatment such as cost, confidentiality, location of services, and cultural and communication barriers. \$20 million will be invested to expand the role of community pharmacists to treat minor illnesses including reissuing contraceptive prescriptions. A further \$65 million for 10,800 additional laparoscopies will help treat debilitating endometriosis that affects one in every nine women and people with a uterus.

As part of reproductive healthcare, Women's Health Victoria also welcomes the announcement of \$50 million for public IVF services, \$5.3 million for a mobile women's health clinic to improve access to specialised women's health services for women in regional and remote Victoria, and \$12 million for research initiatives that will directly benefit women's health, such as an inquiry into women's pain management and early work to establish a Women's Health Research Institute.

Dianne Hill, CEO of Women's Health Victoria said, "This investment builds on work over the last three years and will significantly scale up efforts to build a comprehensive and integrated sexual and reproductive health system to meet the needs of all women across Victoria and deliver on the Women's Sexual and Reproductive Health Plan 2022-2030".

The government has honoured its pre-election commitment to help alleviate period poverty through providing free pads and tampons in public places, with \$23 million allocated in the budget and additional funding for free period products in all government schools. "With the rising cost of living, this initiative comes at a crucial time," said Ms Hill. "Period poverty negatively impacts on people's health and engagement in community – providing free products in public places across the state is an important initiative to enable equal participation of people who menstruate."



In women's mental health, several important measures were announced, including \$10 million to support mothers and birth parents experiencing acute mental health and wellbeing issues during the critical perinatal period. An additional \$10 million is allocated to upgrade mental health facilities across Victoria, including a focus on making women safer through the physical design of facilities. These investments will help ensure that more Victorian women and trans and gender diverse people can get the specialist care and treatment they require.

"While we welcome the emphasis on these areas of women's experiences of mental health and wellbeing, we want to see the government continue to invest in and embed gender across all the Royal Commission reforms, including prevention. Addressing gender inequality, keeping women well, and assisting them to stay connected and supported in their community is vital so that women experience less crisis and specialist care is available for those who need it," said Ms Hill.

Further to this, Women's Health Victoria welcomes the establishment of the Adult Eating Disorders Residential Centre at the Alfred. However, we are disappointed that the Victorian Government has provided no further uplift to existing services at Eating Disorders Victoria. Ms Hill said, "With eating disorders on the rise, we expect to see further investment in this area once the Victorian Eating Disorders strategy is released".

A raft of other encouraging budget measures addressing critical areas of women's health and wellbeing include:

- \$86 million to help parents with their newborn babies, including more access to free Maternal and Child Health services and lactation support;
- \$43 million to deliver expanded primary health services in Victoria's two women's prisons, including increased access to medical officers and a focus on continuity of care for women exiting custody; and
- \$2 million in grants to women's health NGOs to provide women's health and wellbeing support programs, particularly online.

Women's Health Victoria are also pleased to see \$9.7 million directed towards expanding the Rainbow Tick program, including affirmative care training. Increasing the number of community and mental health providers that are Rainbow Tick accredited will increase access to better quality and more targeted support for LGBTIQ+ Victorians.

These investments will go some way to address the health and gender inequities women and trans and gender diverse people experience across the health system, including reproductive healthcare. However, sustained investment and an expanded focus on primary prevention are vital to achieve gender equality and more equitable health and wellbeing outcomes.

Women's Health Victoria looks forward to working with the government to ensure that these investments have a focus on access and equity and meet the needs of priority population groups in communities across the state, so that postcode and money don't continue to determine access to health services.

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About Women's Health Victoria

Women's Health Victoria (WHV) is a not-for-profit, state-wide women's health promotion, information and advocacy service, focused on improving the lives of Victorian women. WHV works collaboratively with women, health professionals, policy makers and community organisations to influence and inform health policy and service delivery for women. The work of WHV is underpinned by a social model of health and a commitment to reducing inequities in health which arise from social, economic and environmental determinants. **For more information, visit whv.org.au**