

## Submission

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### Draft National Stillbirth Action and Implementation Plan

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08 July 2020

The Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia (AHCWA) welcomes the opportunity to provide advice on the Draft National Stillbirth Action and Implementation Plan (the Plan).

AHCWA is the peak body for 23 Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHS) providing primary health services across diverse regional, rural and remote locations in Western Australia. AHCWA exists to support and act on behalf of our 23 Member ACCHS, and our principal vision is for Aboriginal<sup>1</sup> people in Western Australia to enjoy the same level of health and wellbeing as all Western Australians.

This submission outlines AHCWA's support for the Plan, whilst providing additional feedback regarding culturally relevant and Aboriginal specific elements.

#### **Social determinants of health**

WA ACCHS provide comprehensive primary care services using a model of care which acknowledges eight essential determinants of health; family, community, culture, language, connection to Country, physical wellbeing, spiritual wellbeing and emotional wellbeing. This model of care acknowledges that these elements directly contribute to the emotional and physical wellbeing of Aboriginal people and communities.

AHCWA welcomes and recognises that the Plan outlines that services, programs and resources need to be culturally safe, however, it does not address the other social determinants of health that contribute to poorer outcomes for Aboriginal people. All determinants of health need to be addressed by the Plan to improve the outcomes for Aboriginal women during pregnancy.

#### **Domestic and family violence**

The Plan has no mention of the well-documented contribution of domestic and family violence to stillbirth outcomes. It is imperative that the Plan considers the impacts of domestic and family violence and is inclusive of protocols around screening for and addressing violence experienced by pregnant women.

#### **Environmental issues**

Environmental issues, such as overcrowding in houses (which in turn increases the likelihood of domestic violence and exposure of pregnant women to infections), poor water quality and lack of appropriate nutritious food at affordable prices, along with other environmental factors, impact the health of the pregnant woman and babies' outcomes. These risk factors must be included in the Plan.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this submission, AHCWA uses the term 'Aboriginal' to respectfully refer to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across Western Australia.



### **The impact of drugs, alcohol and other trauma**

Drugs, alcohol and emotional trauma can lead to violent situations or the disempowerment of women, which may reduce the likelihood that pregnant women will seek help and assistance during their pregnancy. Given that this can decrease presentation for maternal care, strategies to manage this should be included in the Plan.

### **Health promotion**

Health promotion for pregnant women must be a key part of the Plan. This includes promoting the importance of chronic disease management to prevent gestational diabetes and prenatal hypertension, and the prevention and management of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (e.g. syphilis). Prevention underpins the ACCHS philosophy of comprehensive primary health care and their holistic model of care.

### **Conclusion**

AHCWA supports the development of the Plan, however strongly recommends that it must be developed in ongoing consultation with ACCHS. The Plan must consider and address the social determinants of health, domestic violence, environmental issues, and the impact of drugs, alcohol and other trauma on pregnancies. AHCWA strongly supports a health promotion approach to the Plan which must include supportive and culturally appropriate antenatal care for Aboriginal women.