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Submission to the Parliamentary Group on Population and Development

**Sexual and Reproductive Health and the Millennium Goals in the  
Australian Aid Program – the way forward**

**BACKGROUND**

SH&FPA is the national body for the State based family planning organisations in Australia. SH&FPA's members are leading providers of sexual and reproductive health services in this country. They provide high quality clinical, public and professional education and health promotion services. SH&FPA provides a collective voice and national leadership in sexual and reproductive health through collaboration between the state based family planning organisations. SH&FPA undertakes advocacy on relevant issues of national importance, and drives public debate on sexual and reproductive health issues.

**THE ISSUES**

While there are clear links between family planning, lowered fertility rates and poverty reduction, recent estimates suggest that there is a US\$700 million shortfall in funding for condoms and other contraceptives in the developing world. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) estimates that there are currently around 120 million women worldwide with an unmet need for contraception.

Smaller families and longer birth intervals, a result of contraceptive use, allow families to invest more in each child's nutrition and health. That can reduce poverty and hunger for all members of a household.

The Global Gag Rule bars US family planning assistance to foreign non-governmental organisations (NGOs) who, with their own, non-US funds, engage in abortion related activities. This rule has impacted on the level of funding for family planning programs and is eroding family planning and reproductive health services in developing countries. There is no evidence that it has reduced the incidence of abortion globally, rather it impedes the very services that help women avoid unwanted pregnancy from the start. It is important that funding for family planning programs not include conditions that restrict people's reproductive health choices.

Greater numbers of people in the developing world are seeking condoms and contraceptives for both family planning and prevention of sexually transmitted infections (STI). However, funding to meet this growing demand is declining with donors cutting back on procurement assistance, creating a gap of nearly US \$470 million between what is needed in terms of demand and what is available.

The United Nations Population Fund estimates that this gap could grow to US \$737 million by 2015. This will inevitably lead to:

- 265 million unwanted pregnancies,
- 110 million unnecessary abortions,
- 590,000 avoidable maternal deaths, and
- 8 million preventable infant deaths.

Protecting against unwanted pregnancies and protecting against sexually transmitted infections (STI) are often dealt with separately despite the common linkage of sexual activity. Recent research found that there are generally very weak linkages between agencies obtaining condoms for HIV prevention and those obtaining them for family planning

While in some Pacific countries the actual lack of supplies is not an issue, there is inconsistency in the supplies. For example, there may be an over supply of a particular oral contraceptive pill that is rarely prescribed and an under supply of a more popular pill. Supplies of contraceptives can also be erratic – with large amounts being distributed, stock is rendered unusable due to the expiry date.

As well as security and inconsistency of supply, stigma often associated with condoms and sexuality issues in general needs to be addressed with promotion of condoms as protection against pregnancy and STIs. The attitudes of community nurses often make it difficult for people to access contraceptives. The community nurses may restrict access on moral grounds, for example, amount of condoms distributed and marital status of the clients. These issues need to be addressed by training and education that involves addressing the values and attitudes community health workers and local governments.

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## References

The Global Gag Rule & Contraceptive Supplies

[www.globalgagrule.org](http://www.globalgagrule.org)

Supply Initiative, Why Reproductive Health Supplies are Crucial to Poverty

[www.rhsupplies.org](http://www.rhsupplies.org)

Why do we need universal access to condoms?

[www.interactworldwide.org](http://www.interactworldwide.org)