

MEDIA RELEASE



**The Royal Australian
and New Zealand
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Obstetricians & Gynaecologists joins the Call for NT Children Protection Law to be reviewed

The Royal Australian & New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RANZCOG) urges the Northern Territory Government to review the State's *Care and Protection of Children Act*, and joins in the concerns of other professional medical colleges and the Australian Medical Association (AMA).

The Northern Territory legislation now requires everyone to notify 'the authorities' if they believe any child under the age of 16 to be sexually active.

'This will undoubtedly negatively affect the contact of such children with their medical practitioner and the trust they place in the health care system in general. A trust in the confidentiality of the doctor-patient relationship is key requirement in the care of these adolescents,' according to RANZCOG President, Dr Ted Weaver.

'We recognise that sexual abuse of minors remains a serious problem in contemporary society and that the intent of the new legislation is to protect young people.

'However, RANZCOG is concerned that this legislation may deter sexually-active teenagers from seeking medical advice from their general practitioner or gynaecologist and therefore potentially have adverse consequences in this very important group of patients,' said Dr Weaver.

'Research has shown that many young people are sexually active under 16 years of age, the majority in consensual circumstances. It is our concern that the health care these young people may require in areas such as contraceptive advice, sexually transmitted disease prevention and treatment, antenatal care as well as general medical care may be impacted upon by this legislation.

'Of further concern is that an increased number of reports to child protection agencies that may be inappropriate, may compromise these services' ability to investigate legitimate cases of suspected child abuse in a prompt manner.

'Resources should be directed toward the provision of preventative health care to adolescents - by GPs, specialised services and in the schools. Paying particular attention to a comprehensive sex education programme for school children and enhanced surveillance programmes for STIs,' said Dr Weaver.

For further information or to arrange an interview with Dr Weaver, please contact:
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