

MEDIA RELEASE
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The balance between safety and support essential for the mental health of expectant mothers

Gender Equity Victoria and members of the Women's Health Services Council is pleased that the Victorian Government is balancing the safety of women to birth in hospitals free from COVID19 infection across the state, while balancing the needs of all parents to be present during and after childbirth.

No limit will be placed on the time expectant mothers and their partners will be able to bond with their babies post birth, reducing stress and anxiety on new parents. However, visitation will be limited to one person per day for a two-hour time period thereafter in a further strategy to safeguard patients within the Victorian hospital system from the risk of COVID19 infection.

"We have seen that the COVID19 pandemic is a gendered problem, impacting on women in many ways - from their physical and mental health and financial wellbeing. Women present routinely to hospitals and medical clinics during pregnancy and birth, posing an increased of exposure to the virus when there are large community outbreaks." said Gender Equity Victoria CEO, Tanja Kovac

"During the Ebola crisis in Africa, the infant and maternal mortality rate rose sharply as expectant parents avoided hospitals and midwives, choosing to birth at home and away from the risk of infection. It's important that there is a strategy in Victoria in place to ensure the safety and health of Victoria's expectant mothers"

"We have already seen that women are staying away from health services because of COVID19 with alarming reductions in breast cancer screening and a reduction in the numbers of premature babies. It's important that women have confidence in the safety of the health system and that means a delicate balance between ensuring parents are present during the birth and early days of a child's life, while also limiting opportunities for the COVID19 infection in maternity wards" said Ms Tricia Currie, Chair of the Women's Health Services Council

"Protecting women's health during COVID19 is essential and we welcome initiatives to protect maternity services, sexual and reproductive health and specialist mental health supports for women at this difficult time" said Ms Dianne Hill, CEO of Women's Health Victoria "Women are calling our service with concerns about birthing within hospitals due to COVID19 so strong and certain rules that keep women safe while reducing potential risk to mental health through access to support structures is essential."

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