

Women's Health

1999

1. General Principles

- 1.1 The AMA, in determining a position statement on women's health, supports the broad definition of Health as stated by the World Health Organisation (1978 Alma-Ata Declaration)

"Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing, and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity".

- 1.2 Any policy on women's health needs should be understood as encompassing the provision of high quality health care in general, as well as considering issues which apply specifically to women.
- 1.2 The health of women can be adversely influenced by complex social, political and economic factors. The overall health of women is affected by cultural background, education, relationships, their role in the workplace, and the environment.
- 1.3 A national Women's Health Policy should be maintained in order to improve the health and wellbeing of women in Australia. All women have the right to be treated with dignity and respect in an environment conducive to privacy. Maintaining confidentiality, and providing information which enables women to make informed decisions are key aspects of quality medical care.

2. Medical Practitioners and Women's Health

- 2.1 Every woman should be encouraged to attend one general practitioner or practice, in order to promote continuity of service and quality medical care.
- 2.2 Training and continuing education of medical practitioners in the factors and issues which affect women's health are essential to the delivery of high quality medical services for women.
- 2.2 All medical practitioners should develop attitudes and implement procedures and techniques which eliminate social, cultural or gender bias.

3. Medical Research

- 3.1 There is a need for more medical research on women's health and women's health problems and specific research and data collection methods should be developed. Such research projects should conform to the Guidelines laid down by the National Health and Medical Research Council.
- 3.2 In the absence of evidence, the results of medical research based on males should not be assumed to relate to females. Women should not be excluded from medical research except when there are adequate ethical, medical and scientific reasons.

4. Health Services

- 4.1 Services which recognise the importance of the social dimensions of health should be provided for women. Such services should be accessible, appropriate, affordable and acceptable to women. Policy development and in-service provision should recognise the needs of special groups of women who are:

- (a) in receipt of low incomes
 - (b) from culturally diverse backgrounds
 - (c) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders
 - (d) living in rural or isolated areas
 - (e) physically or intellectually disabled
 - (f) chronically mentally ill
- 4.2 Health services for women should reflect the various roles of women in society and should be directed toward those areas which have been identified as important to women. Such areas include:
- (a) ageing
 - (b) mental health
 - (c) reproductive health and sexuality
 - (d) physical, sexual or emotional abuse
 - (e) occupational health and safety
 - (f) the health needs of women as carers
 - (g) research into the adverse health effects of cultural and gender role stereotyping on women
 - (h) substance abuse
 - (i) nutrition and obesity
 - (j) breast cancer and gynaecological cancers
 - (k) menopause
- 4.3 Women should be encouraged to participate in decision-making. Access to appropriate health information and responsibility for their own health are integral parts of that process.

5. Women's Health Centres

- 5.1 Women's health centres should not attempt to duplicate those services already provided by medical practitioners throughout Australia.
- 5.2 Community based health resource centres which are capable of providing educational material on women's health matters and general health problems should be established. Such centres should also provide a focus for support groups and for nursing and other ancillary health services. The AMA acknowledges the valuable role of community support groups in women's health.

Reproduction and distribution of AMA position statements is permitted provided the AMA is acknowledged and that the position statement is faithfully reproduced noting the year at the top of the document.