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## **NATIONAL MATERNITY SERVICES FRAMEWORK FACING A DIFFICULT BIRTH**

The AMA is warning that the planned new National Framework for Maternity Services (NFMS) is doomed to fail due to inadequate stakeholder consultation and the spectacular failure to adequately engage expert obstetric, general practice, and other crucial medical specialists in its development.

Following an agreement at the April 2016 COAG Health Council meeting, the Queensland Government was tasked to lead the project to develop the NFMS, under the auspices of the Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council (AHMAC).

AMA President, Dr Michael Gannon, said today that the AMA first became aware of the NFMS project in December 2016 – eight months after it commenced, and without any direct contact from AHMAC's Maternity Care Policy Working Group (MCPWG) or its consultants – and has raised concerns about the project ever since.

Dr Gannon, an obstetrician, said the AMA's concerns are shared by the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RANZCOG) and the National Association of Specialist Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (NASOG).

"It is outrageous that specialist obstetricians and GPs have been marginalised in this process. You could be forgiven for thinking it a joke," Dr Gannon said.

"Obstetrician-led care is an essential tenet of Australia's maternity system.

"There is clear and compelling evidence that shows that obstetrician involvement translates into lower mortality rates and fewer complications, not to mention lower costs.

"When issues and problems arise during labour, it is invariably an obstetrician who is called to assume responsibility and manage care, working to ensure the best possible outcome for mother and baby.

"I am pleased that midwives are strongly represented on the Working Group responsible for drafting the NFMS, and in subsequent consultations. They are key members of the maternity team.

"But not involving a single obstetrician in a 12-member group tasked with looking at maternity services is like conducting a law and order review without talking to the police," Dr Gannon said.

Dr Gannon said that AMA members have reported maternity services and outcomes in their respective States have deteriorated under the current National Maternity Services Plan.

"Obstetricians are concerned that not enough is being done to ensure women have access to high quality, collaborative models of care," Dr Gannon said.

"Despite this, the consultation undertaken to develop the NFMS has neglected to actively engage specialist medical practitioners who are at the centre of care for mothers and babies.

“The draft Framework, which was released for public comment in March 2017, lacked substance and provided no guidance for public hospital maternity services about what high quality care should look like.

“The NFMS is shaping up as a lost opportunity to achieve the best possible maternity care for mothers and babies in Australia.

“GPs not only routinely offer obstetric services in outer metropolitan, rural, and regional areas, but deliver antenatal and postnatal care to thousands of Australian women. There was not a single GP representative appointed.

“Further, there is no acknowledgement that best practice care of mothers involves anaesthetists, obstetric physicians, psychiatrists, pathologists, and haematologists, none of whom were invited to assist in the development and drafting of the NFMS.

“The AMA wants to see a strong NFMS.

“It must be developed in genuine partnership with the medical profession and its peak bodies.

“These are the medical professionals who deal with maternity services, day in and day out.

“They’ve seen what works, and they know where the system is not working well.

“Their experiences and views should have been at the table, from the beginning.

“Inviting them to a consultation a month before completion of the draft NFMS does not seem a genuine attempt to listen to experts at the coalface of maternity services.

“The AMA is calling on COAG, AHMAC, and the NFMS Working Group to formally and genuinely engage with the medical profession – obstetricians in particular – before there is any further policy development or public reporting on the Framework.

“The health of mothers and their babies deserves a thorough and professional Framework to ensure the best possible care,” Dr Gannon said.

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