



The Royal Australasian
College of Physicians

Media Release

Young people need better access to sexual health care

13 November 2015

The Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP) is today calling for change to improve access for young people in Australia and New Zealand to sexual and reproductive care.

Today, the RACP launched its [Sexual and Reproductive Health Care for Young People Position Statement](#), outlining the need for information, education and clinical care that supports healthy sexual development and informed choices.

RACP Paediatrics and Child Health Division President Dr Nicki Murdock said appropriate access to sexual and reproductive care will improve health care outcomes for all young people. This includes young people who are Indigenous, gender diverse, same-sex attracted or who live with disabilities or long-term conditions.

“Almost one quarter of Australian Year 10 students and half of Year 12 students surveyed in 2013 were sexually activeⁱ,” Dr Murdock said.

Sexual Health Physician Dr Sarah Martin said sexually transmitted infections, unplanned pregnancy, abuse and bullying in relation to sexuality and gender identity, and domestic and sexual violence remain significant concerns for the health and wellbeing of many young people in Australia and New Zealand.

“Accessible, timely and targeted sexual and reproductive health care is essential, and it is imperative that relationships and safe sex are discussed in relation to same-sex as well as heterosexual intimacy,” Dr Martin said.

In 2014, one fifth of all chlamydia diagnoses were in 15 to 19 year olds, and it is likely that many more young people have undiagnosed infectionⁱⁱ.

Rates of chlamydia, gonorrhoea and syphilis are higher still in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, with a recent outbreak of syphilis in northern Australia which is particularly affecting young people.

“Getting the right knowledge about sexuality, relationships and the right health care is essential for young people to be able to make appropriate and healthy decisions that will affect their adult lives.”

In 2013, 50 per cent of young people were dissatisfied with their sex education at schools based on irrelevant material, a lack of relationship advice and a lack of discussion of same-sex issuesⁱⁱⁱ.

The RACP is calling on Australasian governments, health professionals and health services to act on the College’s recommendations. Policy and legislative change has also been proposed.

RACP recommendations include:

- Promoting young people’s right to confidential and non-judgemental sexual and reproductive health care
- Ensuring physically and financially feasible access to sexual and reproductive health care, with options for free health care
- Specific services for young people who may face increased discrimination or vulnerability
- Including the needs of young people in planning, service delivery and guideline development
- Sexuality and relationships education curricula are accurate and evidence-based

Ends

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About The Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP): The RACP trains, educates and advocates on behalf of more than 14,950 physicians – often referred to as medical specialists – and 6,530 Trainee members across Australia and New Zealand. The College represents more than 34 medical specialties including paediatrics & child health, cardiology, respiratory medicine, neurology, oncology and public health medicine, occupational & environmental medicine, palliative medicine, sexual health medicine, rehabilitation medicine and addiction medicine. Beyond the drive for medical excellence, the RACP is committed to developing health and social policies which bring vital improvements to the wellbeing of patients. www.racp.edu.au

ⁱ Mitchell A, Patrick K, Heywood W, Blackman P, Pitts M 2014. 5th National survey of Australian secondary students and sexual health 2013. ARCSHS Monograph Series No. 97. Melbourne: Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University. Available from: www.latrobe.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/576554/31631-ARCSHS_NSASSSH_FINAL-A-3.pdf

ⁱⁱ The Kirby Institute 2015. HIV, viral hepatitis and sexually transmissible infections in Australia: Annual surveillance report 2015. Sydney: The Kirby Institute, UNSW. Available from: www.kirby.unsw.edu.au/surveillance/2015-annual-surveillance-report-hiv-viral-hepatitis-stis

ⁱⁱⁱ Mitchell A, Patrick K, Heywood W, Blackman P, Pitts M 2014. 5th National survey of Australian secondary students and sexual health 2013. ARCSHS Monograph Series No. 97. Melbourne: Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University. Available from: www.latrobe.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/576554/31631-ARCSHS_NSASSSH_FINAL-A-3.pdf