

Media Statement



Steve Chadwick
MP for Rotorua

Open hearing on youth sexual and reproductive health

27 November 2006

An open hearing on 4 December will give ministries, NGOs and health professionals an opportunity to speak frankly to MPs about sexual and reproductive health issues for youth in New Zealand.

To be held at parliament, the hearing will run similar to a select committee hearing, with organisations working in the area of young people and sexual and reproductive health presenting submissions that focus on current practice and make recommendations for change.

The hearing is being held by the cross-party New Zealand Parliamentarians' Group on Population and Development (NZPPD). NZPPD Chair Steve Chadwick said the decision to hold the hearing was based on a need to look at this key area for young people, particularly in the context of New Zealand having some of the highest rates of unplanned pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in the OECD.

For every 1000 women aged 15 to 19 years old in New Zealand, there are 21 births. By comparison, Australia's rate is 13.

"For a number of complex reasons, many related to social and economic disadvantage, Maori have the highest teenage fertility rates, followed by Pacific women and then Pakeha women," Ms Chadwick said.

We know from research that a number of these teenage pregnancies are unplanned, and there is still much work to be done to address this, beginning with a whole of government approach and commitment to comprehensive sexuality education, open communication and access to health services."

Overseas experience shows that it is possible to put measures in place that lead to a drop in teenage pregnancy rates, Ms Chadwick said.

In the UK, a Teenage Pregnancy Strategy introduced in 1999 has been followed by a fall in the rate of teenage motherhood of 15 per cent for those under 16 years of age, and the fall in conception rates for those under 18 years is similar.

The Executive Director of the UK Family Planning Association, Anne Weyman, will attend the hearing to speak about the UK experience and to act as a resource person for MPs during the day.

Ms Chadwick said the UK strategy included the provision of better sex and relationships education and improving access to contraception and sexual health services; encouraging co-ordination between national and local sexual health agencies and social agencies; and better support for teenage parents and their children.

An ongoing national media awareness campaign for teenagers was an integral part of the strategy, together with high-level monitoring and evaluation, she said.

“Many of these approaches are included in New Zealand’s 2001 Sexual and Reproductive Health Strategy. We know what works, but the open hearing is an opportunity to build on that knowledge and make recommendations for future policy considerations on this and other issues related to youth sexual and reproductive health.”

ENDS

To attend the hearing or to arrange interviews with Steve Chadwick or Anne Weyman, please contact Karyn Ammundsen on 021 678 592