

## **Sorry is a Good First Step**

Peak consumer health groups around Australia have welcomed Health Minister Greg Hunt's apology to women whose lives have been severely impacted by trans vaginal mesh implants.

"We congratulate the Minister for recognising that these women have waited too long for validation from a system that treated them as unreliable witnesses to their own pain and suffering."

"But 'sorry' is just a good first step. It doesn't in itself deliver a happy ending."

While the government has supported 12 of the 13 recommendations of the Senate's Inquiry into TVM, half of these are supported in principle rather than in substance.

In fact the only tangible initiative is the announcement of a Clinical Quality Register for urogynaecological procedures and even that commitment is capped at "considering the feasibility" of establishing such a register. Glaringly absent is any new funding to resource integrated care pathways for affected women.

"We are concerned that State and territory support for mesh affected women has to date been inconsistent and patchy with attempts at meaningful co-design of care pathways happening only in a small number of states.

"These women must be central to the design of appropriately resourced and compassionate, multidisciplinary care that includes access to removal by skilled clinicians, pain management and psychological support. We call upon COAG to direct the states and territories to work together to ensure a nationally consistent service response to women's healthcare needs.

"While the federal Health Minister has kicked the mesh can down the road to the States he is also calling for system reform through institutional self-regulation. Expecting the various bodies that failed their duty of care to pick up their game without addressing their accountability is a forlorn expectation."

"Further expecting the TGA to improve its adverse event reporting is at odds with the fact that they have registered 364 events to date compared with the 1,000 women who are parties to class action and the 2,400 women who have reported their experiences directly to consumer health groups.

"The Minister needs to act decisively on the question of credentialing surgeons and on mandating informed consent (70% of affected women did not give informed prior consent to their procedure).

While we applaud the few substantive initiatives announced in this response, a reliance on non-binding guidelines and self-regulation by bodies that have failed to self-regulate will not wish the problems of mesh away.

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