



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, AGEING AND COMMUNITY
SERVICES Ms Bec Cody MLA (Chair), Mrs Vicki Dunne MLA (Deputy Chair)
Ms Caroline Le Couteur MLA

Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into Maternity Services in the ACT

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The Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Health, Ageing and Community Services,
Legislative Assembly for the ACT,
GPO Box 1020,
CANBERRA ACT 2601



Via e-mail: LACommitteeHACS@parliament.act.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretary,

Re: Submission to the Inquiry into Maternity Services

The Centre of Perinatal Excellence welcomes the Australian Capital Territory Inquiry into Maternity Services, particularly in light of the Commonwealth's withdrawal of funding under the National Perinatal Depression Initiative and the urgent need for an integrated, innovative and sustainable approach to perinatal mental health in Australia.

In response to the need for national leadership and momentum, the [Centre of Perinatal Excellence](#) (COPE) is a national not-for-profit organisation established in Victoria in July 2013, recognised as Australia's peak body in perinatal mental health.

Over the past four years, COPE has worked with our [Company membership](#), including peak bodies in maternity, postnatal and mental health, to develop a holistic and integrated solution to support the efficient implementation of perinatal mental health best practice.

This has led to the establishment of an innovative, inclusive and sustainable solution, which includes:

1. **New Perinatal Mental Health Guidelines:** As the peak body, COPE was funded by the Commonwealth Government to review Australia's National Clinical Practice Guideline for Perinatal Mental Health. The Guideline informs and guides best practice in the detection, management and treatment of perinatal mental health. Approved by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC), the [Guideline](#) underpins all areas of COPE's work to ensure compliance with best practice in the delivery of maternity and postnatal care.

COPE values the opportunity to work with maternity services to disseminate and implement the Guideline across the Australian Capital Territory (ACT).

2. **Online, accredited education to support best practice amongst health professionals:** To support Guideline implementation, COPE has developed a free, accredited online training program to inform and educate midwives and other health professionals in the screening and early detection of those at risk of or experiencing mental health problems in pregnancy and the postnatal period.

This online training resource provides the opportunity for all maternity care providers in the ACT to be educated and accredited in best practice surrounding antenatal mental health care.

3. **New Digital Screening Technology:** The National Guideline recommends that every pregnant woman and new mother is screened to assess her likelihood of developing and/or experiencing mental health problems in pregnancy and the first year following birth. To increase accuracy and efficiency in this screening, an innovative [digital screening platform](#), iCOPE, is being rolled out across a broad range of public and private maternity settings (maternity hospitals, private obstetricians), as well as postnatal care settings.

Currently available in twelve languages, the iCOPE system instantly generates clinical and patient reports to inform best practice regarding screening outcomes. Further, the automated collection of data in real time informs screening rates and outcomes across sites and services, whilst also meeting compliance for the collection and storage of patient data and claiming of Medicare Item numbers.

The implementation of the iCOPE platform across maternity services in the ACT would provide ACT Government with valuable data regarding screening outcomes which can ultimately inform service need across jurisdictions.

4. **Innovative and sustainable approaches to health education and promotion:** The National Perinatal Depression Initiative (NPDI) had previously funded the production and dissemination of hard copy booklets (currently only available in English) to inform and educate consumers about emotional and mental health. Such an approach is expensive and unsustainable. In response to the need to develop a more targeted, engaging and cost-effective solution, COPE has developed the [Ready to COPE Guide](#).

Ready to COPE is an easy-to-read, cost-effective e-newsletter that engages with women to provide ongoing information to expectant and new mothers across the 21-month period from conception to the end of the first year in early parenthood. This approach provides targeted, relevant information about emotional and mental health at each stage across the perinatal period, with direction to fact sheets and further information and guidance via the COPE website. The Commonwealth Government has supported its adaption for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women (2019), and translation into ten languages (2020-2021).

COPE welcomes the opportunity to promote the uptake of this valuable resource to all pregnant women and new mothers in the ACT. An equivalent Guide is also being developed for expectant and new fathers and will be freely available in early 2019.

5. **E-Mapping of perinatal mental health services:** One of the greatest challenges is the identification of timely, relevant referral pathways for those at risk of or experiencing perinatal mental health problems. Funded by the Commonwealth Government and in response to this clear and unmet need, the [e-COPE Directory](#) is under development to facilitate the identification of referral pathways for health professionals and consumer by postcode to support access to evidence-based treatments in the community.

Close collaboration with representatives and organisations across the ACT will support the population of the Directory with services in the Capital.

The development and integration of each of these solutions directly increases the efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability of the delivery of best practice solutions. These new approaches are inclusive of those from CALD (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse) backgrounds and can also be tailored to meet the needs of those in regional areas.

Together, these elements provide the ACT with the potential for an integrated, innovative and holistic system that identifies, supports and provides evidence-based treatments for women in the antenatal period. This has been detailed in a proposal made to the ACT Government in 2018 and can be provided on request.

We would greatly appreciate the opportunity to discuss this further with the Committee and look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Nicole Highet
Founder and Executive Director
Centre of Perinatal Excellence

