

Parliamentary Friends of
Population and Development

30 Years of Impact:

STILL ADVOCATING FOR RIGHTS, EQUITY, AND ACCESS



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Acknowledgements

Material featured in this booklet has been sourced from the collections of the National Library of Australia, including:

Various Records of the Australian Reproductive Health Alliance (Manuscript Collection MS Acc11.135)

Papers of Margaret Reynolds, 1973–2005 [manuscript] (<https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-420222474>)

Additional resources were accessed through the Parliamentary Library of Australia, supporting the documentation of the group's legacy.

We gratefully acknowledge all former and current members of the Parliamentary Group on Population and Development for their engagement and commitment to advancing and sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Special thanks to former Senator Margaret Reynolds AC, former Senator Claire Moore and former MP Hon Dr Sharman Stone AM for their assistance in preparing for the 30th anniversary and generously providing their insights and additional documents to bring the history of the group to life.

Front cover photograph is by Steven Nowakowski, originally featured in the 2006 exhibition Common Ground: Visions Shared, which explored the intersection of population, environment, and development in Timor-Leste and Papua New Guinea.

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This booklet written by Meg Connor, APGPD Secretariat, Family Planning Australia.
Designed by Family Planning Australia, October 2025.

Introduction

Parliamentary groups on population and development (PGPDs) exist in many countries around the world. ***But what do they do and why does it matter?***

These groups play a vital role in shaping national and international policy on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), gender equality, and sustainable development.

They bring together parliamentarians across party lines to advocate for inclusive, rights-based approaches to development.

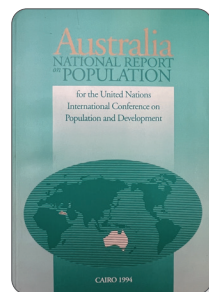
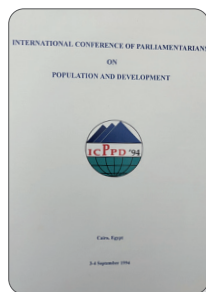
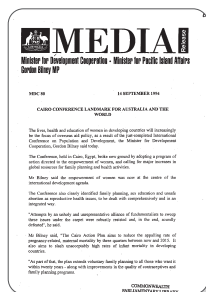


The origins of PGPDs trace back to the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in Cairo in 1994.

This landmark conference marked a major shift in global development thinking from demographic targets to a people-centred approach that prioritised women's reproductive health and rights and gender equality.

Australia was one of 179 governments that adopted the ICPD Programme of Action, committing to:

- Universal access to reproductive health services
- Family planning and contraception
- Safe childbirth
- Prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted infections (STIs)



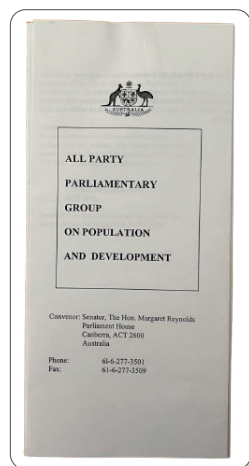
The Programme also called on governments to allocate resources to achieve these goals, leading to the formation of PDPGs to help drive political will and accountability.

Implementing the Cairo Agenda: The Birth of the APGPD

Following their participation in the landmark 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), Australian parliamentarians Gordon Bilney, Dr Andrew Theophanous, and Senator Margaret Reynolds voiced strong support for the conference's outcomes. In 1995, the All Party Group on Population and Development was established as a bipartisan group of federal parliamentarians committed to advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), gender equality, and sustainable development through parliamentary advocacy.



Founding member former senator Margaret Reynolds. Photo credit: Chris Kidd, The Australian



To support public engagement and policy dialogue, the Australian Reproductive Health Alliance (ARHA) was also established in 1995. ARHA aimed to promote women's health and reproductive rights and served as the initial secretariat for the APGPD, helping to connect parliamentary efforts with civil society and international partners.



Sometimes the times aren't changing

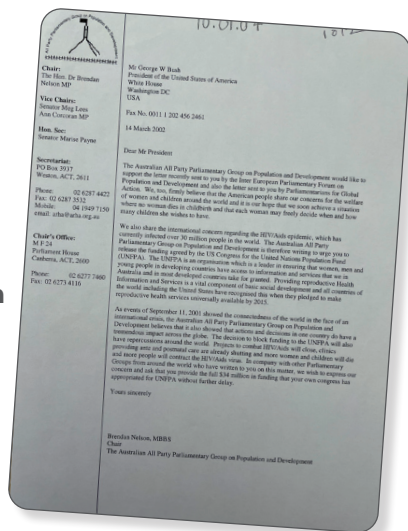
In 2002, Dr Brendan Nelson MP, Chair of the Australian All Party Parliamentary Group on Population and Development, wrote to US President George W. Bush urging the release of \$34 million in funding for the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

Nelson warned that withholding funding would shutter clinics, halt HIV/AIDS prevention programs, and cost lives, particularly among women and children in developing countries.

The Bush Administration's reply acknowledged the President's concern for maternal and child health and his leadership in launching the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria. Yet despite support in Congress, UNFPA funding remained blocked, marking a moment when political ideology overrode global consensus on reproductive health.

Nelson's letter, the Bush Administration's reply, and the legacy of the Global Gag Rule—reveal the fragility of progress in reproductive health. They show how decisions made in Washington reverberate globally, shaping the lives of women and families far beyond U.S. borders. Despite decades of advocacy, the struggle for reproductive rights remains vulnerable to political tides.

Over two decades later, we continue to face challenges in development funding and in upholding sexual and reproductive rights, undermining global SRHR efforts and endangering lives. Increasing efforts of some governments, networks and individuals are working to roll back, restrict, or undermine internationally recognised human rights related to SRHR, gender equality and LGBTQIA+ rights. Global advocacy across party lines has therefore never been more important to uphold rights and retain a focus on SRHR in Australia's development assistance.



Millennium Development Goals in the Australian Aid Program

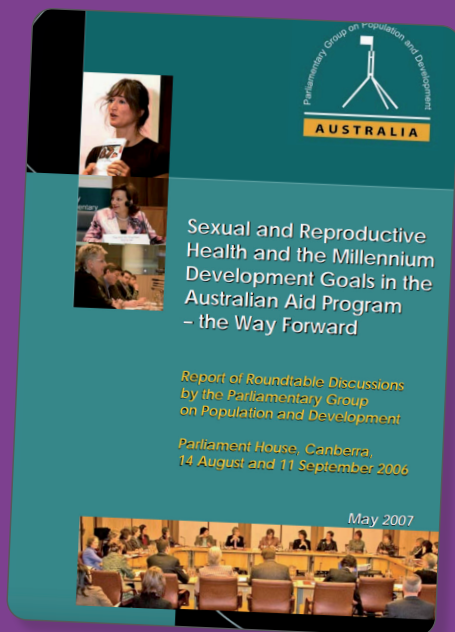
In 2006, the APGPD hosted two roundtable discussions at Parliament House to examine the role of sexual and reproductive health (SRH) in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Chaired by Dr Mal Washer MP and Dr Sharman Stone MP, the roundtables brought together parliamentarians, experts, and civil society to explore how Australia's aid program could better support SRHR in the Asia-Pacific region.

The discussions highlighted the decline in global and Australian funding for family planning, the impact of unsafe abortion on maternal mortality, and the urgent need to integrate SRH with HIV/AIDS responses.

Presenters emphasised that SRHR is central to poverty reduction, gender equality, education, and environmental sustainability. Key recommendations included abolishing AusAID's restrictive Family Planning Guidelines, increasing investment in SRH services, and ensuring SRHR is embedded in Australia's aid strategy.

The roundtables reinforced PGPD's commitment to advancing SRHR as a cornerstone of sustainable development and regional health equity.



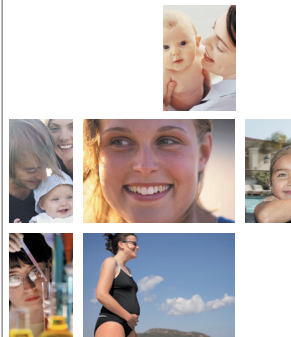
Making Change Happen: The RU486 Debate and Reform

In 2006, a historic cross-party alliance of four women Senators, Claire Mowore (Labor), Lyn Allison (Australian Democrats), Judith Troeth (Liberals), and Fiona Nash (Nationals), co-sponsored the Therapeutic Goods Amendment Bill to lift the ministerial veto on RU486 (mifepristone), a medication used for early medical abortion. This was the first time in Australian history that a bill was jointly sponsored by members of all four major parties, and all were women.

The bill overturned a 1996 amendment introduced by Senator Brian Harradine, which had required the personal approval of the Health Minister for the importation of RU486. This restriction had effectively blocked access to the drug for a decade, despite its listing by the World Health Organization as an essential medicine. The passage of the bill was a landmark moment for gender equity in policymaking.

RU 486/ Mifepristone

A factual guide to the issues in the Australian Debate



Three of the four co-sponsoring Senators were members of the APGPD, and the group provided a trusted, cross-party platform for dialogue on sensitive issues like reproductive health. As Marian Sawyer noted, “it was the networking and trust created through the Parliamentary Group that paved the way for further cross-party work.

As Secretariat to the APGPD, the Australian Reproductive Health Alliance (ARHA)

provided parliamentarians with regular updates, evidence-based resources, and media briefings, helping counter misinformation and build support. The APGPD created a trusted space for dialogue and action, enabling parliamentarians to unite across party lines on a critical health issue.

Making change happen

How the RU486 debate was won



AUSTRALIAN
REPRODUCTIVE
HEALTH
ALLIANCE

The role of the
Australian Reproductive Health Alliance
PO Box 41, Deakin West VIC 3086, AUSTRALIA
+612 6282 8922 www.arha.org.au arha@arha.org.au

In 2007 and 2008, the APGPD led renewed efforts to repeal these restrictions: In June 2008, the group issued a media release urging the government to “put compassion and humanity first” and align aid policy with WHO protocols and the ICPD Programme of Action.

Following hearings held in August and September last year, the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Population and Development (PGPD), today issued a report recommending abolition of the AusAID family planning guidelines.

The PGPD Chair, Dr Mal Washer, launched the report, *Sexual and Reproductive Health and the Millennium Development Goals in the Australian Aid Program – the Way Forward*, at Parliament House.

Dr Washer strongly supported the report's central recommendation that Australia's international aid agency should follow the accepted family planning protocols of most other nations, rather than having to observe a special set of guidelines.

The guidelines, a legacy of former Senator Brian Harcourt, effectively ban the use of aid funds for some birth control services and for information and services about abortion.

The report said the guidelines were "cruel and illogical" and had the effect of encouraging unsafe (illegal) abortions, which are responsible for 13 per cent of all maternal deaths globally, many in our region.

Dr Wamser said that as a supporter of the UN's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) Australia had committed to improving maternal health (MDG 5).

"Far from helping to achieve this goal, the Harradine guidelines actually increase the likelihood that more women will die," Dr Washer said.

The PGPD report said the guidelines also contravened Australia's commitment to the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo in 1994, which stated that "in circumstances where abortion is not against the law, health systems should train and equip health service providers and should take other measures to ensure that abortion is safe and accessible", as it is in Australia.

Dr Washer said the reproductive health guidelines of the World Health Organization were good enough for the vast majority of donor nations, and there was no reason why Australia needed extra restrictions.

The report also recommended that family planning, contraception and sexual and reproductive health services be integrated with HIV/AIDS programs, and that the proportion of Australia overseas aid budget devoted to sexual and reproductive health be increased to at least 10 per cent.

Further information: Dr Mal Washer, 6277 2114
Tom Gosling, 6282 8922 or 0418 29 43 42

NOTE FOR MEDIA: the report will be launched at **4pm on Wednesday 30 May in Committee Room 1R6 of the House of Representatives**. All media representatives are welcome to attend. Embargoed copies can be made available beforehand.

Chair: Dr Mal Washer
Vice Chairs: Senator Claire Moore, Senator Lyn Allison
Honorary Secretary: Senator Marise Payne

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30 May

30 May 2007

FOR more than a decade Labor and Coalition governments have provided over a foreign aid policy that has condemned millions of families to poverty

and contributed to the deaths of 60,000 women a year.

To combat the tide of consumerism, Christian leaders both inside and outside the abortion industry launched programs to help the poor. In the 1960s, the poor caught the attention of the public, and the number of children they had to feed increased.

In 1961 the Kennedy government passed the Economic Opportunity Act, which encouraged the poor to help themselves. The program was the first time the federal government spent on family planning programs.

In 1965 the Kennedy Government banned aid workers from providing many contraceptives to the poor. The government's advice on unsafe abortions.

These hungry mouths condemned them to poverty.

Now, 130 years on, women are still not getting what they want and how to space them. Thanks to the pill and the new forms of contraception, they can put off child rearing until after they have finished their education and found a career.

Because they can now choose the size of their family, they can afford to offer the children they choose to bring into the world a better life.

It introduced such strict restrictions on abortion that by planning aid most agencies have upending it.

But the Supreme Court's vote of anti-abortion, anti-contraceptive independent Labor. On many occasions the Supreme Court has ruled in favor of the pro-life side, and it is needed his support to get legislation through the Senate.

In 2004 and the Howard Government now controls the Senate. The Howard Government's legacy lives on. A 16% of the world's population, some 200 million people, live on the same day every day — according to the United Nations. The United Nations estimates that 200 million abortions.

While food and water remain priorities, reproductive care is among the crucial elements that give refugees basic welfare and dignity that is their right," says the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

But our governments have been turning an almost deaf ear to this advice that could help them out of never-ending poverty.

We're saying that it's okay for Australian women to have safe contraception and abortions, but poor people don't deserve the same rights.

There are 2.6 million people in the Asia Pacific who live on less than \$2 a day.

Marie Stopes International, a group that does provide family planning aid, told a parliamentary committee there were 7 million unintended pregnancies a year in the developing world. Each year 19 million abortions are carried out under unsanitary conditions resulting in 68,000 deaths.

These guidelines were backed ward looking when they were introduced. Today there is no longer even a political excuse for them.

Establishing PNG's Parliamentary Group on Population and Development

As part of its regional leadership, the APGPD played a pivotal role in supporting the establishment of the Papua New Guinea Parliamentary Group on Population and Development (PGPD) in May 2009.

The founding meeting was attended by 14 PNG parliamentarians and Senator Claire Moore, then Chair of APGPD, attended the meeting to share Australia's experience in parliamentary advocacy and foster regional collaboration.

Following the launch, the PNG Group hosted a parliamentary briefing at Parliament House and participated in a media and advocacy training workshop in November 2009. These activities equipped members with tools to communicate effectively on sexual and reproductive health and development issues.

Australia's leadership extended to Timor-Leste, where ARHA conducted a scoping visit in August 2009 to support the formation of a PGPD, recognising the need for strengthened parliamentary engagement on SRHR and population issues.



Top Left: PNG Parliamentarians and Senator Claire Moore.

Bottom left: Journalist Sue Ahearn providing media training on TV interviews.

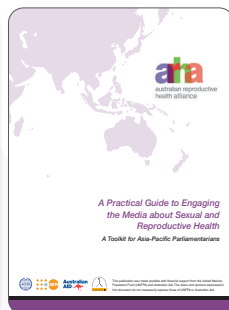
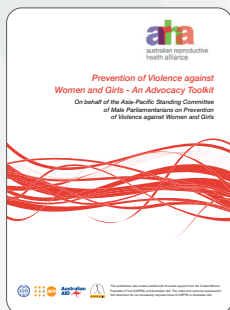
Bottom right: Visiting Marie Stopes clinic in PNG

Mobilising Male Parliamentarians to End Violence Against Women

In 2010, the APGPD helped establish the Male Parliamentarians for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, a national sub-committee co-convened by Dr Mal Washer MP and Rob Oakeshott MP. This initiative aimed to mobilise male leaders to address gender-based violence, promote sexual and reproductive health, and support women's empowerment across the Asia-Pacific region.

Building on this momentum, APGPD convened a Parliamentary Roundtable on Ending Gender-Based Violence in 2011. The event brought together parliamentarians from across the region, along with representatives from civil society, academia, and government departments. The Roundtable explored effective practices and community-led responses to gender-based violence (GBV), and examined its intersections with human rights, gender equality, health, legislation, and policy. The event culminated in a communiqué sent to then-Foreign Minister Hon. Kevin Rudd, proposing it serve as a foundation for policy dialogue between Australia, the United States, and the World Bank.

To support ongoing engagement, the Australian Reproductive Health Alliance (ARHA) developed two practical toolkits. The first, designed for male parliamentarians, encourages leadership in eliminating violence against women and provides adaptable advocacy tools for use in local contexts. The second offers guidance on engaging the media effectively on sexual and reproductive health, equipping parliamentarians with strategies to craft impactful messages and navigate media environments.



Members You Might Know

Over the years, the APGPD has included a number of prominent Australian parliamentarians from across the political spectrum. Check out some of the names below—you might recognise a few.

I would like to join the All Party Parliamentary Group on Population and Development

Name Senator Penny Wong

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Fax Number 02-6277 3105

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Member for Farrer

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ACT

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I would like to join the All Party Parliamentary Group on Population and Development

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I would like to join the All Party Parliamentary Group on Population and Development

Name CATHERINE KINE
Member for Ballarat

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Room Number R 188

Phone Number 4230

Fax Number 02-6277 8428

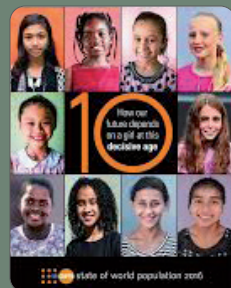
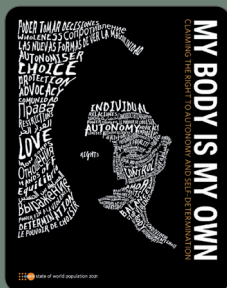
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APGPD: Bringing the State of World Population to Parliament

The APGPD has long hosted the launch of UNFPA's flagship State of World Population Report at Parliament House in Canberra. These events bring global insights on reproductive health, gender equality, and population dynamics directly into national policy conversations.

By convening parliamentarians, UN experts, and civil society, the APGPD fosters bipartisan dialogue and reinforces Australia's leadership in rights-based development. Hosting the report elevates SRHR within parliamentary discourse, connects international evidence to domestic policy, and promotes accountability for global commitments like the ICPD Programme of Action. The report's themes—ranging from bodily autonomy to demographic resilience—have consistently shaped parliamentary understanding and advocacy.



State of the World Population Report launches

2023 and 2024 report launches featured presentations by UNFPA Asia Pacific Regional Directors and delegates. Co-chairs and members engaged with stakeholders including the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade’s Global Health team and NGOs from the International SRHR Consortium, which has provided briefings on sexual and reproductive health and rights issues to the group since 2012.



Recognition for Human Rights Leadership

In 2012, the Australian Parliamentary Group on Population and Development (APGPD) was honoured with the Sir Ronald Wilson Human Rights Award by the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID).

The award recognised APGPD's outstanding contribution to advancing human rights through its sustained leadership in international engagement since its establishment following the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo.

It acknowledged the group's dedication of time and energy to promoting gender equality, reproductive rights, and inclusive development across the Asia-Pacific region.



AUSTRALIAN
COUNCIL
FOR
INTERNATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT

Looking Forward

In our 30th anniversary year, the APGPD continues to inform and mobilise parliamentarians in line with the goals of the ICPD, to ensure universal access to information and services and keep gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights on the agenda across party lines.



Message from former Senator Margaret Reynolds, founding member of the APGPD....

My apologies that I cannot celebrate this occasion with you personally. However, I would like to convey some memories of 'preparing for the landmark 'Population and Development Conference' in Cairo in 1994, which led to us forming the Inter Parliamentary Group in the Australian Parliament the following year.

It is probably hard to visualize the global environment of the early 1990s when our slogan "Women's Rights are Human Rights " was still fresh and under challenge, particularly when we included "Reproductive Rights."

As women prepared for the landmark conference in Cairo the debate and demands were loud and challenging in many countries around the world.

In Brazil the women of San Paolo launched their campaign for reproductive rights under the banner "The Fight for a Free Womb" – the term directly describing a 19th century law granting freedom to the children of black women slaves.

In Mexico, where church and government policy denied women's right to choose , women responded by preparing "Voluntary Motherhood " legislative proposals that included legalization of abortion Bangladesh women denounced government corruption in population control which ignored their basic human rights.

Women living under Muslim law pointed to the disparities in reproductive policies and warned of the manipulation of laws affecting women said to be in the name of religion.

Northern American women demanded government recognition of the links between violence against women and reproductive rights.

In Australia we were battling to retrieve \$30 million Federal Government overseas aid ,which was suspended pending a "study" that had been demanded by an independent senator opposed to family planning policies. And in my home state of Queensland abortion was still part of that state's criminal code with devastating impact on so many women over decades.

If I am painting a grim picture, it is only to describe the challenges we faced as we set forth to Cairo. I was fortunate to be able to attend both the official governments led conference as well as that run by civil society.

It will not surprise you to be reminded that the official conference was dominated by men, but the civil society event was refreshingly managed by women.

There were many hours of frustration during the official conference as delicate negotiations continued about the language that should be used and of course "women's rights" alone was unacceptable let alone realistic efforts to prevent the devastating death toll of unsafe abortion practices worldwide.

We returned to Australia inspired and determined to work for reform and so the Inter Parliamentary Population Group was formed.

Thank you for continuing those efforts to protect women's reproductive rights. Thirty years on there is still so much to be done.

Parliamentary Friends of Population and Development

Formerly Australian Parliamentary Group on Population and Development (APGPD)

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