

12 February 2020

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade  
[development.submissions@dfat.gov.au](mailto:development.submissions@dfat.gov.au)

Dear Minister Payne, Minister Hawke,

### **International Development Policy – Eradicate Cervical Cancer in the Pacific by 2030**

Thank you for the opportunity to input into the new International Development Policy. This will be an important document for organisations working in international development, and we welcome your leadership.

Family Planning NSW is a DFAT accredited NGO, delivering sexual and reproductive health, contraception, gender, disability and cervical cancer projects in the Pacific Islands, Papua New Guinea and Timor Leste. We operate overseas as Family Planning Australia. Domestically, we have over 90 years of experience supporting communities by delivering services, educating health professionals, promoting healthy lives and conducting research.

In developing this submission, we are aligned with the Australian Government's policy agenda to support the security, stability, prosperity and resilience of Indo-Pacific countries.

This submission should also be read alongside the *International Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Consortium* submission which focused on the need to increase development focus and investment in sexual and reproductive health services, for which Family Planning NSW is a co-signatory. In addition to specific focus on the elimination of cervical cancer set out below, it is imperative that international development core priorities include promoting access to contraception and reducing unsafe sex and sexually transmitted infections through education and services, increasing access to safe abortion, reducing sexual and gender-based violence, promoting gender equity and the empowerment of women and girls.

#### **Elimination of cervical cancer in the Pacific**

We recommend that the new International Development Policy has as a key outcome the "elimination of cervical cancer in the Pacific". To achieve this, the Policy should mandate DFAT to take strategic leadership in managing a \$20 million annual budget allocation with the clear outcome of eliminating cervical cancer in the Pacific.

Family Planning Australia | 328-336 Liverpool Rd, Ashfield 2131 Australia  
t +612 8752 4311 | f +612 8752 4396 | ABN 75 000 026 335

[www.fpnsw.org.au](http://www.fpnsw.org.au) | [international@fpnsw.org.au](mailto:international@fpnsw.org.au)

clinical services & information | education & training | research | international development



ACFID Family Planning Australia is a member of the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) and adheres to ACFID Code of Conduct MEMBER which defines minimum standards of governance, management and accountability of development in non-government organisations.



Australia is a recognised world leader in cervical cancer prevention. The HPV Vaccination, which prevents cervical cancer, was an Australian scientific discovery<sup>1</sup>, and Australia is on track to become the first country in the world to eliminate cervical cancer through our rigorous screening program.<sup>2</sup>

The statistics in our region, however, provide a different perspective. Cervical cancer is the most common cancer for women in the Pacific<sup>3</sup>, with women 13 times more likely than those in Australia to contract the disease and unacceptably very high rates of mortality. The epidemic proportions of this disease mean that women are unlikely to achieve their potential, increasing poverty for members of the community often left out of inclusive growth.

### **Defining elimination**

The World Health Organisation (WHO) in its global strategy defines success in eliminating cervical cancer as 90-70-90 where -

- 90% of girls are fully vaccinated with the HPV vaccine by age 15
- 70% of women are screened with a high-performance test by 35 and 45 years of age and
- 90% of women identified with cervical disease receive treatment<sup>4</sup>

To achieve elimination, funding is required to improve community awareness, expand workforce capacity, bulk purchase vaccines, and accelerate the introduction of affordable technology for screening and treatment.

Investing in the interventions to meet the 90-70-90 targets offers immense economic and societal benefits. An estimated US\$3.20 will be returned to the economy for every dollar invested through 2050, owing to increases in women's workforce participation, rising to US\$26 when societal benefits are incorporated.<sup>5</sup>

### **A proven model for cervical cancer prevention**

Australia's development funding can eliminate cervical cancer from the Pacific by investing in Pacific countries capacity to provide routine screening, vaccinations and public awareness campaigns. The standards for these interventions have already been established by the World Health Organisation, and Family Planning Australia has spent the past 10 years piloting and trialing models of delivery for cervical cancer screening and treatment, including published research.<sup>6</sup> We are now in a position to scale up to reach all women and girls across the Pacific.

The Pacific itself supports this initiative, with the Pacific Island Forum committing in 2016 to scale up cervical cancer prevention programmes.<sup>3</sup> While some HPV vaccinations and cervical cancer screening programs are now being delivered in the Pacific, there is currently a lack of resources and coordination to allow this disease to be eliminated in any foreseeable timeframe. This intervention would leverage efforts by others in the region, including the Asian Development Bank, UNICEF and local NGOs such as the International Planned Parenthood Federation member associations, who are currently implementing vaccination, screening and treatment projects in some Pacific countries.

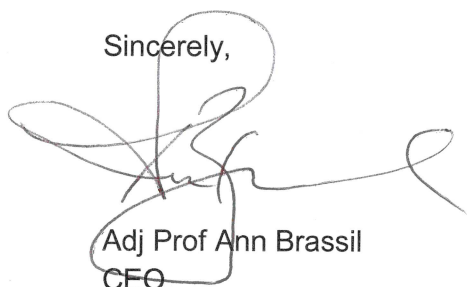
## Next steps

Australia has an opportunity in the International Development Policy to take proactive leadership in the Pacific, utilising our well-deserved international reputation to eliminate cervical cancer in the Pacific. As noted by the WHO, “half-measures and incremental approaches will not suffice. It is time to implement at scale. A disease that now stands as one of the world’s greatest public health failures can be eliminated<sup>4</sup>.”

This investment is cost-effective, would reduce stress on the health system, and has positive flow-on impacts on other development outcomes. It is in our national interest to increase the capacity of Pacific countries to eliminate this most common, yet preventable, cancer.

With coordination from DFAT, and a budget of \$20 million a year leveraged with other regional funding, Australia could proudly lead the elimination of cervical cancer in the Pacific. This would be a public relations win for Australia, and more importantly set up countries to tackle other serious development, economic and environmental challenges that are impediments to security, stability, prosperity and resilience in the Pacific.

Sincerely,



Adj Prof Ann Brassil

CEO

Family Planning NSW

---

<sup>1</sup> Australian Government, Vaccine protects millions from cancer, [accessed 2 February 2020]

[www.pmc.gov.au/government/its-honour/honoured-australians/vaccine-protects-millions-cancer](http://www.pmc.gov.au/government/its-honour/honoured-australians/vaccine-protects-millions-cancer)

<sup>2</sup> Cancer Council, Australia set to eliminate cervical cancer by 2035, [updated 16 April, 2019, accessed 2 February 2020] [www.cancer.org.au/news/media-releases/australia-set-to-eliminate-cervical-cancer-by-2035.html](http://www.cancer.org.au/news/media-releases/australia-set-to-eliminate-cervical-cancer-by-2035.html)

<sup>3</sup> Dame Meg Taylor, Cervical cancer at alarming rates in Pacific, 21 July 2017, [accessed 2 February 2020]

[www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/335544/cervical-cancer-at-alarming-rates-in-pacific](http://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/335544/cervical-cancer-at-alarming-rates-in-pacific)

<sup>4</sup> Draft: Global strategy towards eliminating cervical cancer as a public health problem. 16 December 2019 [accessed 2 February 2020] [www.who.int/docs/default-source/cervical-cancer/cerv-cancer-elimn-strategy-16dec-12pm.pdf](http://www.who.int/docs/default-source/cervical-cancer/cerv-cancer-elimn-strategy-16dec-12pm.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Bertram et al. The investment case of the cervical cancer elimination strategy in low and lower middle income countries, in publication

<sup>6</sup> Family Planning Australia, Stop Cervical Cancer, [accessed 2 February 2020]

[www.fpnsw.org.au/international/cervicalcancer](http://www.fpnsw.org.au/international/cervicalcancer)