

The Fertility Society of Australia and New Zealand

Media Statement in response to ABC Four Corners

Response from the Fertility Society of Australia and New Zealand (FSANZ)

As the leading authority and industry regulator in assisted reproductive technology (ART) in Australia and New Zealand, the Fertility Society of Australia and New Zealand (FSANZ) is committed to maintaining the highest standards of care, transparency, and accountability within the fertility industry. We understand the profound impact that adverse events can have on individuals and families involved in ART and are dedicated to addressing these issues with the utmost seriousness and sensitivity.

Continuous Improvement:

FSANZ has initiated a comprehensive review of governance and standards within the ART and IVF sector across Australia and New Zealand. This review will culminate in the development of a detailed 10-year roadmap aimed at establishing uniform national legislation for ART and IVF providers in Australia, while continuing to align with New Zealand's principles of the Human Assisted Reproductive Technology Act 2004. The review and strategic plan are focused on enhancing accessibility to safe and effective fertility treatments for families across Australia and New Zealand. While these nations already boast one of the world's safest and most successful IVF sectors, factors such as the increasing median age for women giving birth and advancements in technologies like genetic carrier screening through the Australian publicly funded Mackenzie's Mission program are expected to significantly increase the number of children born by ART and IVF over the next decade. Leading this pivotal initiative will be Professor the Honourable Greg Hunt, former Health Minister of Australia and Dr Rachel Swift, an embryologist and public health expert. FSANZ will collaborate with Government entities, the Commonwealth, States and Territories, providers, clinicians, researchers, and families to integrate these valuable inputs. The goal is to secure an agreed National Fertility Plan through the National Health Minister's meeting and establish uniform national legislation to replace the over 30 current different pieces of legislation currently governing ART and IVF practices across Australia. In New Zealand, this will involve aligning with the principles of the Human Assisted Reproductive Technology Act 2004

RTAC's Role and Actions:

The Reproductive Technology Accreditation Committee (RTAC) primary role is to set standards for ART through an audited Code of Practice and to grant licenses to practice ART within Australia and New Zealand. Consistent with that purpose, the audit process focuses on current practices and compliance with the Code of Practice.

RTAC has not conducted its own investigation into the Gunns' concerns about historical practices of Queensland Fertility Group (QFG), as the matter is currently before the courts and has been investigated by the Queensland Office of Health Ombudsman (QOHO).

In the ART/IVF sector, the laws and regulations relating to donor conception have evolved over the last decade. IVF providers are bound by laws that allow the disclosure of medical information to donor recipient parents and their donor-conceived children only in specific circumstances, such as saving someone's life or notifying them of genetic or heritable conditions. Determining whether new health information is life-threatening or poses a genetic risk involves a comprehensive risk assessment. This assessment is conducted by a multi-disciplinary team of experts, including fertility specialists, geneticists, and psychologists. When necessary, external experts such as oncologists and psychiatrists are also consulted.

The decision to contact donor parents and donor-conceived individuals about new medical information regarding a donor, and the extent of that contact, is based on the risk level determined by clinical experts. The ART/IVF industry recognizes the distress that can arise when a donor-conceived child receives information about health concerns related to their donor or donor-conceived siblings. Where appropriate, RTAC encourages IVF units to offer donor-conceived individuals support medical specialists to ensure they receive personalised care.

RTAC's Effectiveness as an Industry Regulator:

RTAC recognises the criticisms regarding its effectiveness as an industry regulator. It is important to note that many issues raised pertain to historical cases predating the modern Code of Practice (COP). Since the COP's implementation, RTAC has driven significant improvements in identification and storage methods, greatly reducing the risk of misidentification. RTAC mandates open disclosure, aligning with the Australian Open Disclosure Framework, to promote honesty, transparency, and accountability. This approach fosters trust and continuous improvement within healthcare organizations. Our commitment to patient-centred care and transparent complaint management is crucial in maintaining the integrity of the fertility industry.

About FSANZ:

Australia and New Zealand have one of the safest and most successful Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART) and IVF sectors in the world. The Fertility Society of Australia and New Zealand (FSANZ) has been instrumental in promoting both safe and affordable services for individuals seeking fertility treatments. A critical initiative in this regard was the establishment of the Reproductive Technology Accreditation Committee (RTAC) by FSANZ. RTAC was formed to create and uphold standards for fertility clinics, including that all accredited units maintain high levels of safety and efficacy in their treatments. This self-regulatory framework has promoted high-quality and ethical practices within the industry without the need for costly government oversight. One of RTAC's significant achievements was establishing a reliable national data collection system for IVF outcomes, positioning Australia as a world leader in this domain. This initiative allowed for meticulous recording and analysis of various IVF procedures and outcomes, providing invaluable data that informed clinical practices and improved patient care globally. The Fertility Society of Australia was pivotal in establishing the Australia and New Zealand Assisted Reproduction Database (ANZARD). This centralized database collects comprehensive data on all ART treatments performed in both countries. ANZARD provides critical insights into ART outcomes, enabling continuous improvements in clinical practices and

contributing to the global body of knowledge in reproductive medicine. The latest ANZARD report shows that 20,690 babies were born in Australia and New Zealand through ART/IVF in 2021. In Australia and New Zealand, FSANZ has been instrumental in promoting IVF services that are both safe and affordable. The society's efforts in standardizing practices through RTAC require that clinics adhere to stringent guidelines, promoting patient safety and improving success rates. Additionally, FSANZ has advocated for policies that support affordable access to fertility treatments, including lobbying for government subsidies and insurance coverage, significantly reducing the financial burden on patients. Through these initiatives, FSANZ has helped make advanced reproductive technologies accessible to a broader population, enabling many individuals and couples to achieve their dream of parenthood