

Media Release

The Hon Daniel Andrews MP
Premier



Wednesday, 16 November 2022

TAKING WOMEN'S HEALTH SERIOUSLY

Women and girls make up more than half of our population. And yet, their health is somehow seen as a 'niche issue'.

For millions of women across the country, the unfair reality of getting sick is that they face a long journey just to get a diagnosis – let alone treatment – because they are not always taken seriously or listened to by doctors or other health professionals.

After centuries of modern medicine and incredible advancements in medical research, we still understand less about how many health issues affect women compared to men – and too often women's symptoms are ignored, or their health issues are minimised or disregarded entirely.

Women are more likely to die of cardiovascular disease than men. Why? Because the treatment protocols for cardiovascular disease are based on men.

Three quarters of people diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in Australia are women.

Women are three times more likely to develop rheumatoid arthritis than men and four times more likely to develop osteoporosis.

Two thirds of people affected by Alzheimers' disease are women.

For too long, the taboo around talking about women's health has meant women have suffered silently with pain and medical conditions for which they should have received support and treatment.

Labor has already opened Victoria's first clinic focused on women's heart health and we're boosting research capabilities at the multi-billion expansion to the Royal Women's Hospital.

We've announced we'll create 20 women's health clinics across the state and an Aboriginal-led clinic, but we know there is always more to do to provide women with the best health information, advice and treatment.

That's why a re-elected Andrews Labor Government will invest \$5 million to support the creation of a Women's Health Research Institute, to help us find new ways to identify and treat diseases such as endometriosis.

The new institute will help address the gender gap in medical research, where conditions unique to women don't get enough funding and women aren't meaningfully included in clinical trials.

Modelled on the highly successful Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre, it will bring together education, research and treatment.

Our investment will support planning to find a location for the institute, how it will be run and how it will partner with universities – and we'll work with the Commonwealth and research bodies to deliver the project in full.

Labor will also invest \$64.8 million to double the number of surgeries for endometriosis and associated conditions – that's around 10,800 extra laparoscopies over the next four years.

Delays in diagnosis, treatment and surgery can lead to fertility complications and can lengthen women's pain and the harmful effects on their health.

Media contact: Jamila Fontana 0409 741 279 | Jamila.Fontana@vic.alp.org.au

The additional laparoscopies will be for public patients and allow for more referrals from the Women's Health Clinics to be treated.

Even as we increase our understanding of women's health, we need to do more work to make sure they are listened to when issues arise. We've listened to the experiences of women who have felt ignored and unsupported by the medical system.

We know it's common for women not to be listened to, or told that heavy and painful periods are 'normal' or that they will 'grow out of them' – and sadly many women can wait years before receiving a diagnosis.

So we'll invest \$3 million to establish an inquiry into women's pain management – to examine systemic issues and find solutions.

The inquiry will be chaired by a panel of experts who will hear directly from women from a range of backgrounds and their experience accessing treatment.

And we'll invest \$4 million for research support services, so lessons learned at our new Women's Health Clinics can be fed into the inquiry and used to improve patient care.

We'll also invest \$2 million to establish support groups and mental health programs for women tackling challenging health issues like endometriosis and chronic pain from periods or menopause.

The initiative will enable women – including those from multicultural backgrounds – to benefit from shared experience and give them access to the mental health support they need.

Matthew Guy's Liberals have already said they would cut the major expansion of the Royal Women's Hospital's new Arden campus and the vital women's health services it would deliver.

They cut \$1 billion from health funding when they were last in government, hatching a secret plan to sack nurses – and if they're given the chance, they'll do it again.

Only Labor is doing what matters – acknowledging the health issues women face and providing the best care possible, close to home.

Quotes attributable to Premier Daniel Andrews

"For too long, women have had to fight too hard to have their pain recognised and acknowledged and to be believed about their own experiences – it's fundamentally wrong."

"Labor is doing what matters – ensuring Victorian women and their health are given the focus, funding and respect they deserve."

Quote attributable to Deputy Premier Jacinta Allan

"For too long, serious health issues that affect half the population have been stigmatised and women shamed into silence. This package is about making sure every Victorian woman knows she will be listened to – and believed."

Quote attributable to Minister for Medical Research Jaala Pulford

"Our strong support for women's health – and vital research about women's health conditions – is in stark contrast to Matthew Guy's Liberals, who want to slash services and cut the expansion of the Royal Women's Hospital."