



**THE HON NICOLA ROXON MP**  
**Minister for Health and Ageing**

**THE HON TANYA PLIBERSEK MP**  
**Minister for Status of Women**

**MEDIA RELEASE**

**Towards a New National Women's Health Policy**

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The development of a new National Women's Health Policy moved a step closer today with the Rudd Government's release of a paper outlining the aims of the policy.

It has been almost 20 years since the last National Women's Health Policy was developed.

The National Women's Health Policy is about ensuring that the planning and delivery of health services better meet the needs of Australian women – both today and in the future.

The new National Women's Health Policy – a Federal Labor election commitment – will emphasise prevention, health inequalities in Australian society, and the social determinants of these inequalities.

It will address the varied needs of all women at all ages, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women; women in rural and remote areas; women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, including refugees; and women from disadvantaged backgrounds.

It is time to revisit the issues and concerns Australian women have about their health. We need a new approach to improving the health and wellbeing of all women in Australia, especially those with the highest risk of poor health.

While the good news is that life expectancy for Australian women is increasing and now ranks equal second in the world, the bad news is the worrying levels of risk factors causing chronic illness, injury and premature death. These include overweight and obesity, physical inactivity, poor diet, stress, smoking and alcohol consumption.

The Government will consult widely in developing the National Women's Health Policy.

It will undertake consultations with consumers, the community, health service providers, and state and territory governments to make sure the new policy builds on the successes of the previous one. The consultation process will start in early 2009 with a roundtable. To download a copy of Setting the Scene, visit [www.health.gov.au/womenshealthpolicy](http://www.health.gov.au/womenshealthpolicy)

### **Funding for Women's Health Research**

The Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health, which has been tracking the health of Australian women since 1995, will receive almost \$5 million from the Australian Government to continue for the next three-and-a-half years.

The study involves 40,000 women, with more than 60 per cent from rural or remote areas. About 12,000 women are surveyed every three years. They were selected to be representative of women nationally.

This funding will ensure that the excellent work of the University of Queensland and the University of Newcastle will continue.

The women in the study have now been surveyed at least four times over the past 12 years – providing a large amount of data on women's lifestyles, use of health services and health outcomes.

Released today, this year's report, *Use and costs of medications and other health care resources: Findings from the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health*, draws on Pharmaceutical Benefits Schedule (PBS) and Medicare data.

The Longitudinal Study on Women's Health was announced by former Prime Minister Paul Keating in 1993 and was intended to run for 20 years, with a major report produced each year exploring a different aspect of women's health.

The study explores social, behavioural and economic factors and their relationship to health outcomes and use of health and related services, and how they influence lifestyle choices around family and workforce participation at key points in women's lives.

It advances understanding of the factors that enhance or inhibit good health in women.

Over the next three-and-a-half years the study will investigate women, health and ageing, and rural, regional and remote health differences. The 2009 report will look at women and reproductive health.

A copy of *Use and costs of medications and other health care resources: Findings from the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health* is available from [www.alsw.org.au](http://www.alsw.org.au)

The Rudd Government is also in the process of developing a National Men's Health Policy that will focus on reducing barriers men experience in accessing health services, tackling widespread reticence to seek treatment, and raising awareness of preventable health problems that affect men – further information can be found at <http://www.health.gov.au/menshealthpolicy>

**For media enquiries to Ms Roxon please contact the Minister's Office on 02 6277 7220**

**For media enquiries to Ms Plibersek please contact Darrin Barnett 0428 119 703**