



**National Council of  
Women of New Zealand**

Te Kaunihera  
Wahine O Aotearoa

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## **Submission to the National Screening Unit on the Primary HPV testing consultation**

The National Council of Women of New Zealand, Te Kaunihera Wahine o Aotearoa (NCWNZ) is an umbrella group representing 288 organisations affiliated at either the national level or to one of our 20 branches. In addition to our organisational membership, about 260 women are individual members of branches. NCWNZ's function is to represent and promote the interests of New Zealand women through research, discussion and action. This written feedback has been prepared by the Health Standing Committee.

NCWNZ welcomes the opportunity to participate in this consultation process. Our response is from the Health Standing Committee. Consultation with our wider membership has not been possible due to the short time frame allowed for responses.

NCWNZ has previously made submissions on the National Cervical Screening Programme (NCSP): 2000 submission to the Health Funding Authority on the Policy and Quality Standards for the National Cervical Screening Programme.

NCWNZ has been fully supportive of the NCSP since it was introduced in 1990. We wish to compliment the National Screening Unit on the success of the Cervical Screening Programme which has achieved a significant reduction in the number of cases of cervical cancer and the number of women who die from it in New Zealand since its establishment. It has proved to be one of the most successful programmes of its kind in the world.

NCWNZ supports the National Screening Unit's proposal to change the first step in the laboratory screening pathway from primary liquid based cytology screening to HPV testing which we understand is 60 – 70% more effective in detecting pre-cancerous lesions than cytology.

We believe an across the board education programme is essential. Women must understand why the change is being made, that cervical smear is still necessary, that the screening is effective for women who have had the HPV vaccine and for those who have not and that it is safe even though screening will be reduced (currently every three years screening will extend to every five years). The various

forms of modern technology, the media, visual and auditory tools must be used to capture the attention of women of all ages across the community as well as the health professionals.

Mobility will be the key to taking the message and the service to the women. The community has become accustomed to mobile health services over the last decade and are familiar with specially equipped caravans such as the mobile dental clinics, the blood donor service and the pink caravan promoting mammograms for breast cancer. The NCSP could provide a mobile service to educate and promote. By moving through the suburbs, going to marae and rural communities, having appropriately trained personnel involved “on the ground”, Māori, Pacific and other ethnicities would be captured and the uptake of the service would increase.

NCWNZ stresses the importance of reviewing and making changes to the programme from time to time in order to ensure that the quality of the service is maintained and the effectiveness of the programme improved. Voluntary HPV immunisation introduced in 2008 for women under 20 years of age was a big step forward. While we are pleased there is a reduction in harm for these young women, we also realise the vaccination does not offer complete protection. Therefore it is important that these women take part in cervical screening. The NCSP needs also to reach out to the many young women who have not been immunised.

NCWNZ supports the proposed option for self- sampling as a forward step towards an equitable outcome for all women. A diverse group of women which includes women with disabilities, rural women and women whose cultural / religious beliefs discourage them from taking part in the current programme, may be willing to self- sample if the option is offered to them. The move to self- sampling will require very careful and thorough planning to ensure a pathway is developed to ensure safety and hygiene standards are established and enforced.

NCWNZ works towards a gender equal New Zealand. Since the NCSP programme was introduced in 1990, it has focused only on women, yet some males are spreaders of the virus and can also be victims through the development of genital warts and anal cancer. The Ministry of Health should also be considering HPV vaccinations of men. We believe the promotion of HPV vaccinations and HPV swabbing and education should be targeted at both men and women.

Changes in laboratory testing will impact on the laboratory workforce. It will be important to ensure technical training is provided. The potential for career development for young women with an interest in sciences in laboratory work should be encouraged.

## Conclusion

NCWNZ is pleased to have the opportunity to contribute to the consultation about changing the primary laboratory test used in the Cervical Screening Programme from cytology to a test for human

papillomavirus (HPV). NCWNZ support the proposed change if it will help improve the quality, safety and effectiveness of the programme, while at the same time help to reduce the risk of developing cancer.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rae Duff' in a cursive style.

Rae Duff  
National President

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ailsa Stewart' in a cursive style, with 'Q.S.O.' written below it.

Ailsa Stewart  
Convener, Health Standing Committee