

Submission in relation to Public Health (Exclusion of Unvaccinated Children from Child Care) Amendment Bill 2013

There is an expectation within a democracy that we retain the right to chose medical interventions. The introduction of this bill, without the option to lodge a conscientious objection flies in the face of this presumption.

The response of Australian citizens in relation to the issue of vaccination is a mixed one. The position appears to have been summarised as a dichotomy of those who will vaccinate and those who won't. However, further review of attitudes reveals that it is more of a spectrum of positions.

Responses range from accepting the full schedule of childhood vaccinations, those who take a modified schedule on timing or particular vaccines and those that chose not to use the vaccinations available. A recent national survey conducted by the SBS 'Jabbed' program reported that 53% of Australians had concerns in relation to vaccination.

For parents facing the issues of vaccination there is many questions to address. The mainstream position appears to be that of a one size fits all approach and anything that deviates from this is bad.

However, a one size fits all approach is not appropriate for all people. This bill will discriminate against people who do not choose this one size fits all.

Worldwide there is many who question various aspects of the vaccination. A review of the information by all sides reveals that there are many questions in relation to the schedule, safety, timing, risks from vaccination and level of risks from diseases.

Below are some of these issues for parents to consider. This is not an inclusive list but demonstrative of the idea that a one size fits all approach, a crowded vaccination schedule and mandatory actions are not supportive of parents' decisions.

1. Rota virus vaccine is administered to prevent a diarrhoea virus which can be serious in young babies should they become dehydrated. Fully Breastfeed babies are less likely to contract diarrhoea due to the composition of breastmilk and less likely to suffer serious effects as unlike formula, feeding can continue to keep rehydrated. Thus the risk of side effects of this vaccine may outweigh product insert listed side effects of this vaccine. A parent not utilising this vaccine would be discriminated under the proposed bill.
2. In 2009 in Australia, the Flu vaccine was offered on the vaccine schedule. This vaccine resulted in severe vaccine damage to little Saba. In the weeks leading up to Saba's reaction, other babies had reactions. For some parents the risks of the virus is less than the benefits that may be offered by a recently released vaccine. In this case parents could be discriminated under the proposed bill.

3. Currently Vioxx has been in the news as a recent example of a pharmaceutical drug safety failure with severe side effects resulting in the drug being withdrawn. This is the latest in these occurrences. Previous examples include Pfizer being fined for excluding side effects relating to increase risk of heart attack of Avandia (diabetic drug) and US Government legal actions against Merck in relation false claims of Mumps vaccine efficiency. Given this some parents may wish to delay using a new vaccine in some circumstances.
4. Currently Japan has suspended the HPV vaccine due to the amount of reported adverse reactions.
5. Review of the Australian Bureau of Statistics has vaccination rates in Australia in the 1990's between 85-89%. During the 2000's, vaccination rates have been in excess of 92% and there have been outbreaks of diseases like whooping cough. Fully vaccinated people have represented a large number of these cases. This is an example that the risk of a particular vaccine may outweigh benefits in certain circumstances.
6. Some Parents question the need for Hep B at birth when a baby does not fit into a high risk group. This vaccine is also expected to lose effectiveness within 10 years. The higher risk from this disease would be heading into adulthood.
7. Early in the history of vaccines it was considered that vaccination was for life. However, there is now evidence that this is not the case. This means that for many decades we have had a large population without vaccine protection and no major epidemics of diseases.
8. Both the US & UK provide compensation schemes for vaccine damage which indemnifies vaccine manufacturers from this responsibility. This provides little incentive to seek the safest option for vaccines. It took a considerable lobbying of the US Government to move from the whole cell polio vaccine to the acellular alternative.
9. The current vaccination schedule includes 3 times as many vaccinations as the schedule in 1980.

Given some of the questions raised above, parents may choose the option of a more customised response to vaccination. This bill will potentially exclude any parent who chooses not to accept the full vaccination schedule offered or the exact timing of the vaccination schedule. It will also discriminate against parents not accepting future vaccines added to the schedule.

Penalising parents and children in this way is undemocratic. As a citizen in Queensland I would like the democratic freedom to choose from the medicines on offer as appropriate to me and my children's circumstances without prejudice.

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