



a healthier world through
sonographer expertise

28 May 2024

Parliamentary Officer
Select Committee on Endometriosis
GPO Box 572
Adelaide SA 5001

By email: scendo@parliament.sa.gov.au

Dear Committee Members,

Parliament of South Australia - Select Committee on Endometriosis

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission into the Parliament of South Australia, Select Committee on Endometriosis. We recognise that this is a national issue, and acknowledge the work being undertaken in South Australia to advance this important discussion.

Sonographers play a vital role in the diagnosis and management of this complex condition, and with support, can play an increasing role to ensure women receive accessible, timely, and quality care.

The Australasian Sonographers Association (ASA) is the professional organisation for Australasian sonographers, who are the experts in ultrasound. With over 7,000 members, and representing more than 70% of Australasia's sonographers, the ASA's purpose is to foster a sonography profession that delivers high quality ultrasound with a vision to create a healthier world through sonographer expertise.

Endometriosis affects 1 in 7 women, can take many years to diagnose, and has no cure¹. While progress is being made in terms of research, funding, and awareness, there is a lot of work still to be done.

Historically, diagnosis of endometriosis has largely occurred via key-hole surgery. However technological advances mean international guidelines now recommend an endometriosis ultrasound to support the diagnosis^{2 3}. In some cases, it can replace the need for surgery altogether.

Sonographers are the experts in ultrasound. Sonographers appropriately trained in endometriosis pelvic ultrasound examinations can greatly assist in earlier diagnosis, and enable appropriate preparation for complex surgical cases. The benefits of this are significant for patients, but also enable improved efficiency and potential cost savings across the healthcare system.

Specialist endometriosis ultrasound exams, which are distinct from routine pelvic ultrasound exams, are relatively new and require specific skills. Undertaking one is considered an advanced scope of practice. While around 11% of sonographers identify obstetrics and gynaecology as their primary area

¹ Endometriosis Australia. About Endometriosis. (Internet). Cited 21 May 2024. Available from: <https://endometriosisaustralia.org/about-endometriosis/>

² Deslandes A. and Condous. G. A Prof. Can you be diagnosed with endometriosis from an ultrasound? (Internet). Endometriosis Australia. Cited 21 May 2024. Available from: <https://endometriosisaustralia.org/diagnosed-endometriosis-ultrasound/>

³ Deslandes A., Panuccio, C., Avery, J., Condous, G., Leonardi, M., Knox, S., Chen, H., Hull, M. Are sonographers the future 'gold standard' in the diagnosis of endometriosis? (Internet). Sonography. 2024 Jan. Available from: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/sono.12402>



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of ultrasound practice⁴, there are currently only a limited number who are confident performing these exams; most of whom work in private specialist imaging clinics. As such, most of these exams are currently undertaken in private, specialty clinics; few are performed in public hospitals or clinics.

Nationally, we welcome the Commonwealth Government's plans⁵ to invest in women's health, including; Medicare rebates for longer specialist consultations for complex gynaecological conditions, specialist Endometriosis and Pelvic Pain clinics, guidelines for best practice, funding to improve community awareness, and a review of the MBS and PBS items to support the diagnosis and treatment of endometriosis. We recommend that this extends to ensuring Medicare funding for diagnostic imaging reflects the longer time needed to undertake an endometriosis pelvic ultrasound exam.

We understand that there are a number of barriers that currently hinder women from accessing and receiving endometriosis diagnosis and support. These include:

- A lack of sonographers with the required advanced skills and experience to undertake endometriosis ultrasound exams. These shortages are widespread, but particularly prominent in the public system, and in rural and remote communities.
- A lack of clinical mentors to support sonographers undertaking self-directed learning, which is currently the primary training option.
- A lack of awareness among the public and some health care professionals about complex gynaecological conditions such as endometriosis, and available diagnosis and treatment options.
- A lack of awareness among some health practitioners of the capabilities of advancing ultrasound technologies to assist with endometriosis diagnosis and management; and lack of awareness of the appearance of endometriosis on ultrasound scans to accurately report the condition.
- A lack of Medicare funding for diagnostic imaging to reflect the longer time needed to undertake an endometriosis exam, compared to a routine pelvic exam, creating financial barriers for private providers to offer this service.

To support the improved care and outcomes for patients, we recommend:

- Expanding training and support for sonographers to undertake endometriosis pelvic ultrasound exams.
- Increasing funding and support for training in the public sector to upskill sonographers and other relevant health care practitioners to better understand and utilise ultrasound to support non-invasive diagnosis and improved triaging of necessary surgeries.
- Additional training for radiologists and referring GPs to understand the advancing capabilities of ultrasound, to ensure efficient referring and accurate reporting to support timely diagnosis and management for patients.
- Ongoing education for the public regarding the role of specialist endometriosis ultrasound examinations in diagnosis and management.
- Advocating to Federal Government the importance of ensuring Medicare funding recognises that endometriosis ultrasound exams are distinct from, and take significantly longer than, a routine

⁴ Australasian Sonographers Association. Australasian Sonographer Employment and Salary Industry Report. 2022.

⁵ Hon Mark Butler MP. Media Release: Historic Medicare changes for women battling endometriosis. 10 May 2024. (Internet). Available from: <https://www.health.gov.au/ministers/the-hon-mark-butler-mp/media/historic-medicare-changes-for-women-battling-endometriosis?language=en>



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pelvic exam. Doing so would provide incentive to private practices to upskill staff and schedule sufficient time for sonographers to undertake this extended exam, improving access for patients.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this important discussion. We look forward to hearing the outcome of the Committee's work.

If you wish to discuss any aspect of our submission, please contact Elissa Campbell, General Manager Policy and Advocacy, at elissa.campbell@sonographers.org.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tony Coles', is written over a thin horizontal line.

Tony Coles
Chief Executive Officer