Down Syndrome Australia responds to the 60 Minutes Story on prenatal screening

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The story broadcast on 60 Minutes tonight highlights the need for better information and support for families who receive a high probability result of Down syndrome during their pregnancy. It is disappointing that many families do not receive good information at the time of screening or are pressured to consider termination.

The new non-invasive prenatal screening provides an important new approach to screening and has the potential to minimise the need for more invasive testing for some families. However, prenatal screening must be accompanied by appropriate information to support families in making informed decisions about screening and how to respond to the results. Providing a screening test without ensuring informed consent, adequate support and up-to-date information regarding the results is unethical.

Down Syndrome Australia is proactively engaged in advocating to government, relevant medical organisations and professional bodies to promote better information and support for families with regards to prenatal testing. We have provided an evidenced based submission to the Medical Services Advisory Committee as part of their consideration of listing the non-invasive prenatal testing on MBS.

As the national voice for people with Down syndrome, we will continue to work collaboratively with the sector to achieve better support for families.

Down Syndrome Australia recommends that the Government support a national training program for GPs and midwives who are providing pre-and post-screening counselling to ensure that they are skilled at providing informed consent and appropriate post screening counselling.

More information about the work of Down Syndrome Australia and the contact details for local support and services can be found at www.downsyndrome.org.au.

A fact sheet on prenatal testing can be found here: http://www.downsyndrome.org.au/documents/DSC_prenatal_resource_201408.pdf

A resource for new parents is available here: http://www.downsyndrome.org.au/parentresource.html

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