

## **Newsletter 28: Vaccination and the Removal of Religious Exemption**

**1<sup>st</sup> July 2013**

Vaccination is a human rights issue because governments are using this medical procedure in public health policies for healthy people. Vaccination requires the injection of substances into the human body that the public is not being informed about. Whilst vaccination in Australia is stated to be 'not compulsory' there are work places in Australia that are requiring health students and clinicians to have the recommended vaccines for employment. This has occurred even though 'there is no legislation or regulation in Australia to compel any individual to use vaccines'. Therefore the current health act is not protecting our fundamental right to decide what we inject into our own healthy bodies in public health policies.

This is particularly the case for new parents who have relied on religious exemption to ensure they can claim their \$2100 in welfare benefits to refuse any of the 11 vaccines that are now required in newborn babies before 1 year of age. Vaccines against 3 new diseases were added to the schedule in July 2012 and the schedule continues to expand.

The Australian government is currently amending the Human Rights and anti-Discrimination bill and clause 27 'Exemptions to Unlawful Discrimination' applies to the Commonwealth Health Act of 1953 which covers public health policy.

There are many of us who are concerned about vaccination policy and protecting our right to choose vaccination in this draft human rights bill. On the 20th May 2013 the Human Rights Commission informed the community that 'it is the Government's intention to proceed with the Bill only after his Department has given further consideration to issues raised in submissions and in the report of the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee on the Bill.'

However, the government did not give further consideration to the "report of the Senate Committee" and on 30th May 2013 (the last week of sitting) when it tabled one amendment to this bill in the lower house of parliament. This was an amendment to the Sex and Discrimination Act and it was tabled before the discussion of the Senate inquiry report that was scheduled for 17th June 2013.

The amendment that was passed in the lower house at this time was the inclusion of sexual orientation and gender identity as protected attributes from non-discrimination. However, when this bill went to the Senate another amendment was tacked onto it without any publicity. This amendment was the removal of religious exemption. Religious exemptions are provided to protect freedom of thought and conscience - they are the most basic of all freedoms - and the current government has removed this exemption (from aged-care facilities) without a discussion of the issue in the lower house and without public knowledge or input into the amendment.

Whilst the amendment referred specifically to 'religious exemption for aged-care facilities' the anti-discrimination push has made it clear that it wants to get rid of all religious exemptions in relation to all employment, even in hospitals where the problems of conscience are obvious. This information can be found in the **Weekend Australian (29th-30th June) 'Distracted MP's destroy religious freedoms'**.

In summary:

- 1) The Human Rights Commission told the public on 20th May that vaccination policy was not covered in the scope of this draft HR bill yet the Commonwealth Health Act of 1953 is covered in the bill and religious exemptions are required to refuse vaccines in Australia because coercive strategies are being used in this policy.
- 2) The government told the public that the Senate inquiry report (re public submissions) would be discussed before amendments to this bill were tabled in the lower house.
- 2) The amendment to religious exemption was not discussed in the lower house before it went to the Senate. The bill was passed in the lower house without any knowledge that the religious exemption clause would be added to the bill in the Senate.

Is this proper procedure for governments who are protecting the public interest?

It is up to the public to make this government accountable for its policies. The public needs to act if we are to protect ourselves from policies that include medical procedures for the entire population. More and more vaccines are being used and the government is not

providing adequate evidence for their safety and efficacy.

Whilst the Human Rights Commission has told the public 'vaccination policies are outside the scope of this draft bill' this is clearly untrue. The public must protect our rights by ensuring that Clause 27 of this bill does not include 'exemptions to discrimination involving medical procedures'. Currently the clause states that 'exceptions to unlawful discrimination' are allowed if the conduct is described in the Health Act of 1953. This can be addressed simply by stating that 'exceptions to unlawful discrimination are allowed for conduct that does not include a medical procedure'.

If you would like to support this change to the current draft bill please sign the following petition and write to the Human Rights Commission for a simple change to clause 27. Whilst the petition below requests the addition of a new clause this would not be necessary unless a new bill of rights is required:

My Body/My choice

[http://www.avaaz.org/en/petition/My\\_Body\\_My\\_Choice/?cDZEidb](http://www.avaaz.org/en/petition/My_Body_My_Choice/?cDZEidb)

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