

Minister for Foreign Affairs  
Minister for Women  
Senator the Hon Marise Payne

Minister for International Development and the Pacific  
Assistant Defence Minister  
Hon Alex Hawke MP

**Via email:** [foreign.minister@dfat.gov.au](mailto:foreign.minister@dfat.gov.au)

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### **Request for support and meeting**

Dear Senators,

Thank you for your support to Australia's international development program. As a critical tool of Australia's foreign policy, the international development program is well equipped to support the Pacific to be resilient and sustainable.

Family Planning NSW is the state's leading expert and provider of sexual and reproductive clinical and education services. We have been operating for over 90 years, working with communities across NSW and Australia. Internationally, we operate as Family Planning Australia and are accredited by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade through the Australian NGO Cooperation Programme (ANCP). We work across nine countries in the Pacific, implementing sexual and reproductive health, contraception access, gender equality and comprehensive sexuality education, disability inclusiveness, and cervical cancer prevention programmes.

Family Planning NSW works closely with Pacific governments and civil society organisations to advance the human rights, in particular the sexual and reproductive health and rights, of women and girls in the Pacific. We urge the need for ongoing support and funding to ensure that the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and girls in the Pacific are met, particularly within the current context of the COVID-19 pandemic. This support avoids a rise in maternal and newborn mortality, reduces unmet need for contraception, and decreases the number of unsafe abortions and sexually transmitted infections.

We would welcome the opportunity for a meeting to expand further on how the work we do through the international development program is in Australia's national interest.

Yours sincerely,



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ACFID Family Planning Australia is a member of the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) and adheres to ACFID Code of Conduct  
MEMBER which defines minimum standards of governance, management and accountability of development in non-government organisations.



## **Submission of Family Planning NSW Budgetary pressures on NGO partnerships with the Australian Government**

### **1. We believe the vital partnership between our organisation and the Australian Government has brought significant strengths to the global fight against COVID-19.**

It is crucial that leaders recognise the central role of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) in health emergencies and the need for robust health systems to save lives. In this context, sexual and reproductive health services are essential.

COVID-19 has resulted in the need to 'pivot' existing development programs under Australia's aid program. This has included development programs administered under the ANCP. So far, with the support and flexibility of DFAT, Family Planning NSW have re-focused three quarters of our projects under the ANCP to COVID-19 response and recovery.

Early in the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, Pacific countries closed their borders to contain the virus that would cripple already fragile health systems if an outbreak occurred. Due to limitations on travel, Family Planning Australia with our partners in the Pacific, including organisations providing essential sexual and reproductive health services, was able to reallocate funding towards supporting these organisations to remain operational and provide essential services to women.

Already, Family Planning Australia's partners have seen incredible results with the reallocated funding. In Fiji, for example, our partner the Reproductive and Family Health Association of Fiji (RFHAF), who provide sexual and reproductive health services, have used the funding to purchase pregnancy test kits, emergency contraceptive pills, and extra medical equipment. Additional nurses have been employed casually to increase the capacity and number of outreach teams, and they have printed information, education and communications materials that are displayed in their Suva clinic.

As a result, RFHAF have seen a significant increase in clients accessing services. Family Planning Australia's partners in Papua New Guinea and Timor-Leste have also described that despite lockdowns and social distancing, they have been able to use the reallocated funding to maintain the provision of essential family planning services.

Sexual and reproductive health care is essential during a crisis, and must continue to be accessible across the Pacific, even during unprecedented events such as these. Although Family Planning Australia has been unable to implement its programs on the ground, collaboration with DFAT and local partners has meant that family planning clinics and services have continued operating. Our project partners in Fiji, Papua New Guinea and Timor-Leste are a testament to the positive outcomes of using aid funding efficiently to support women and girls.

**2. We believe that at this time of unprecedented need, the importance of protecting these partnerships has never been greater.** However, we are concerned by reports that resourcing for efforts between the Australian Government and international development charities may be reduced.

**3. We are well placed to work with Government to be part of Australia's response and recovery efforts to COVID-19, because:**

**i. our partnerships are with organisations in the Pacific.** Civil society groups, including family planning services in the Pacific, play a crucial role in advancing the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and girls through enabling access to health care, contraception, education, and support for domestic, family and sexual violence. These groups have in-depth knowledge and understanding of the sexual and reproductive health needs of women and girls and facilitate sustainable community engagement and participation with family planning services. Family Planning services, led by civil society groups, are often seen as 'safe zones' and have a vital role in bridging the unmet need for family

planning in the Pacific while also offering health services, such as cervical cancer screening and comprehensive sexuality education.

**ii. our work is spread across the Pacific.** With the support of the ANCP, we are able to work with in-country organisations to provide sexual and reproductive clinical services, peer education networks and offer links to other referral services.

Family Planning Australia has developed the capacity of many of these organisations to deliver contraception, cervical cancer and comprehensive sexuality education services over the past 12 years. With our support, over 14,000 women and girls benefit each year from these organisations' services, ensuring they have control over and decide freely on all matters related to their sexual and reproductive health throughout their life.

Family Planning Australia works closely with many civil society organisations in the Pacific to address the human rights of women and girls, including in Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and Kiribati.

**iii. our programs are key to universal health coverage.** The Australian Government should prioritise supporting countries in the Pacific to ensure access to healthcare equality, including family planning services. Australian investment in the Pacific to increase healthcare access can ensure the sustainability of development programs and increase the resilience of communities.

**iv. we have the chance to bring our supporters and the public with you to support Australia's response.** We must coordinate our efforts in this global health crisis. We encourage the Government to support our Pacific neighbours, and to commit to universal access to health care. Australia can be proud of our support for the Pacific.

**4. particularly in a time of crisis we have an opportunity to invest in these partnerships and to strengthen our presence and relationships across the region.**

Continued support is required for our nearest neighbours in the Pacific as a COVID-19 outbreak would have wide-ranging impacts for their health systems and health and development outcomes. Further, the economic impact on the Pacific from the closing down of critical industries such as tourism presents significant social challenges that amplify the need for sexual and reproductive health services.

**5. we are seeking your support for the partnership we have with the Australian Government and that the funding is assured for the next financial year.** We welcome the multilateral efforts towards a coherent and global response to COVID-19. The Australian Government can play a vital role in ensuring an effective response and assurance of the continuation of essential health services.