



SOUTH AUSTRALIA

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Children's Protection Act: proposed changes

The AMA(SA) has responded to the State Government's proposed amendments to the Children's Protection Act with support for the intention of the proposed legislation but concern that the potential bureaucratic load it could place on medical practices could mean less time for doctors to spend looking after their patients.

'The AMA(SA) supports any measures that go toward improving child safety,' said AMA(SA) President Dr Andrew Lavender. 'The proposed amendments to the Children's Protection Act will, however, impose significant bureaucratic burdens on medical practitioners, and the AMA(SA) will seek discussions with the State Government to make this Act workable.'

The proposed amendments will apply to all 'health organisations' and, for the purpose of the Act, this includes all medical practices. Organisations will need to obtain a police check on an employee and then conduct a Criminal History Assessment. Any person who is working with children, including those who have access to sensitive records, is included. The employer must decide whether this access to children or their records should continue. This effectively covers receptionists, administrative staff, practice nurses and other employees of a medical practice.

AMA(SA) President Dr Andrew Lavender said that doctors should not be placed in the situation of having to review police checks for staff and then having to act as judge and jury in deciding what in someone's past is relevant and whether that person is no longer suitable to be employed.

Health organisations must also lodge a statement of their 'child-safe environment policies and procedures' with the Department of Families and Communities. All of these requirements add up to an administrative burden that further reduces the time a doctor has to spend with his or her patients.

'The AMA(SA) believes that everyone who has contact with children should meet requirements which are relevant, and supports the intention of the proposed legislation,' said Dr Lavender.

'The AMA(SA) will seek discussions with the Government, and will seek administrative support to make this legislation workable. Doctors will always support initiatives that enhance child protection and health, but children and their families will not benefit if doctors have less time to spend with their patients while they meet bureaucratic requirements,' he stated.

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