

Open Letter

Take IUD Pain Seriously: Make Methoxyflurane 'The Green Whistle' Free Across Australia



**SEXUAL AND
REPRODUCTIVE
HEALTH
AUSTRALIA**
Formerly Family Planning Alliance Australia



**MSI
AUSTRALIA**

We call on all state and territory governments to make methoxyflurane ('the green whistle') fully subsidised for IUD insertions to ensure that women and people with uteruses can access a pain-management option that aligns with their preferences and needs.

Context

Methoxyflurane, is an inhaled analgesic that has been used in Australia for nearly 50 years to manage acute pain. It is vaporised through a handheld green inhaler commonly referred to as 'the green whistle'. Historically, methoxyflurane has been administered by paramedics and emergency departments to manage pain associated with physical trauma. It is currently available as a special pharmaceutical product under section 100AA for supply as a Prescriber Bag item for emergency treatment.[1-2] Until recently, options for managing IUD insertion and removal pain were limited to oral analgesia, local anaesthesia, sedation, or general anaesthesia. Access to these options varies between providers and may involve additional costs ranging up to roughly \$500. [3]

Methoxyflurane is currently available at all twenty Women's Sexual and Reproductive Health Hubs in Victoria, where appointments are free, and methoxyflurane is provided at no additional cost for patients. [4] MSI Australia clinics across Australia provide a similar service, where methoxyflurane is available for an additional \$55. [5] South Australia's Labor Party has also committed to making the green whistle available at no extra cost for IUD insertions in public SA Health clinics. [6]

Victoria's commitment and full subsidisation of methoxyflurane for IUD insertions through their women's health hubs demonstrates its feasibility across Australia. However, access remains inconsistent across Australia, meaning that a person's ability to access pain relief that meets their needs and preferences can depend on their postcode and ability to pay.

Problem

IUD insertion can be a painful and distressing experience, yet the pain associated with the procedure is often minimised or underestimated. Recent research conducted by SHARE — a scoping review synthesising current evidence on service user experiences of IUD insertion in Australia — highlights significant differences between what people expect from IUD insertion and what they actually experience. [7,8,9] While some people report little more than mild discomfort, others experience moderate to severe pain. [7,8,9,10] Such an experience can be deeply distressing, traumatic or feel violating. [7]

When people are inadequately informed about the potential for significant pain, they may be less prepared for their experience and less able to make informed decisions about their care or advocate for appropriate pain relief. [7,8] This is part of a broader gendered pain gap, where

pain experienced by women has historically been underestimated and inadequately managed. The Victorian Inquiry into Women's Pain found that participants reported gender bias, stigma, and stereotyping as contributing to barriers to appropriate pain care, underscoring the need to ensure women's pain is taken seriously and appropriately managed. [11]

The consequences extend well beyond the procedure itself, with service users reporting impacts including an inability to return to work as expected, fear or discomfort around their own bodies, and reluctance to attend future gynaecological care such as cervical screening or IUD reinsertion [7] — consistent with broader findings that painful IUD insertion experiences can discourage women and girls from seeking necessary healthcare in the future. [11]

Access to pain relief, including the option of methoxyflurane where clinically appropriate, should be an important part of person-centred IUD care. People undergoing IUD insertion deserve clear and honest information about the potential range of experiences, as well as meaningful choices about how their pain will be managed.

No one should have to endure significant pain simply because it has been normalised as an unavoidable part of accessing contraception.

Recommendations

State/Territory

1. Provide incentives to encourage free provision of patient-controlled pain relief across all clinical settings.

- Expand the Victorian model across Australia so that patient-controlled inhaled pain relief is available at no additional cost for the patient for IUD insertion and removal where clinically appropriate.

2. Ensure consistent access to pain-management options.

- Develop state and territory-wide standards that ensure patients are informed about and offered appropriate pain-management options before IUD insertion, based on individual needs and preferences.

Federal

3. Expand access to methoxyflurane for all IUD insertions and removals

- By expanding the LARC Centres of Excellence model and enabling broader PBS subsidisation of methoxyflurane, Australia can ensure cost is not a barrier to accessing pain relief during IUD insertion and removal.

Health providers

4. Make pain-management conversations standard practice.

Healthcare providers should provide honest information about the potential for pain during IUD insertion and routinely discuss available pain-management options with patients.

5. Support patient choice.

Methoxyflurane should not replace other pain-management options. Local anaesthesia, oral analgesia, non-pharmacological approaches, sedation, or general anaesthesia should remain available and free.

Pain relief should not depend on your postcode or your bank balance.

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Statement Signatories



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Working with
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women's
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matters!



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