

## WWDA STATEMENT

### DEPRO PROVERA CLASS ACTION

**For many years, WWDA has expressed grave concern about the non-consensual and coerced administration of Depo-Provera and other forms of contraception to women and girls with disabilities. WWDA is deeply concerned about the recent allegations surrounding the contraceptive Depo-Provera and its potential links to meningioma brain tumours. Shine Lawyers' investigation into a potential class action against Pfizer highlights the urgent need for accountability and justice for those affected.**

#### Background

Recent investigations have raised serious concerns about the contraceptive Depo-Provera, manufactured by Pfizer, after studies linked long-term use of the drug to an increased risk of developing meningioma, a type of brain tumour. The British Medical Journal reported that women using Depo-Provera for more than a year face a five- to six-fold higher risk of these tumours compared to non-users. Shine Lawyers has launched a potential class action in Australia, alleging that Pfizer failed to adequately warn users of these risks.

#### Why is this important?

This prospective case underscores the critical importance of informed consent and patient safety in contraceptive use. The implications are especially concerning for women and gender-diverse people with disabilities, particularly those in group homes or under guardianship arrangements. In such settings, the use of Depo-Provera as a long-term contraceptive has frequently occurred without proper informed consent or oversight, reflecting broader systemic failures in upholding the sexual and reproductive rights of people with disabilities. For many years, WWDA has sought to raise awareness about forced menstrual suppression and contraceptive use as a violation of fundamental human rights.

The Disability Royal Commission (DRC) revealed accounts of women with disabilities being administered contraceptive injections, like Depo-Provera, under false pretences—such as being told the injection was a flu shot. The Commissioners recommended banning the sterilisation of people with disabilities without their informed consent, except where it is necessary to prevent a direct threat to life. However, the DRC did not make recommendations to prohibit other practices that violate sexual and reproductive rights, like the use of contraceptives without free and informed consent. This is despite the fact that forced

contraception and forced menstrual suppression have been recognised as forms of gender-based violence.

The lack of comprehensive action to address these practices heightens the risk of further violations of bodily autonomy and serious health concerns.

### **Call for accountability and reform**

The potential harm caused by Depo-Provera highlights the urgent need for systemic reforms to prevent further violations of sexual and reproductive rights. WWDA calls for:

1. **An end to forced sterilisation:** All Australian governments must act decisively to enact legislation that ensures sterilisation without informed consent is prohibited, except in life-threatening circumstances.
2. **An end to forced menstrual suppression and forced contraception:** Ensuring all medical treatments, including contraceptives, are administered with free, prior, and informed consent and support for decision-making.
3. **Improved oversight:** Implementing independent mechanisms to monitor medical practices in institutional and guardianship settings.
4. **Education and autonomy:** Providing accessible resources to support women with disabilities to make informed decisions about their health, and implementing supported-decision making frameworks and practices.

We urge the Commonwealth and all state and territory governments to prioritise the DRC's recommendation to ban forced sterilisation, and to take action to end other forced practices. This is a necessary step toward eliminating discriminatory practices and ensuring that women with disabilities can exercise their sexual and reproductive rights free from coercion or harm.

WWDA stands in solidarity with those affected by Depo-Provera and supports the Shine Lawyers class action as a step toward justice and redress. We urge policymakers, healthcare providers, and regulatory bodies to ensure transparency, accountability, and respect for the bodily autonomy of all women and gender-diverse people.

For more information or to join the Shine Lawyer's class action, please visit:

<https://www.shine.com.au/service/class-actions/depo-provera-class-action>