

Senate Inquiry Submission Guide

Senate Community Affairs References Committee on Number of women in Australia who have had transvaginal mesh implants and related matters inquiry.

Any person or organisation can make a submission to this inquiry. Submissions do not have to be long documents and a submission of 1 or 2 pages is perfectly acceptable.

Your submission should include:

Introductory Information

It is important to make it clear to the committee why your views are important and relevant to the inquiry.

For individual women and their family members

Include a brief statement in the first paragraph that you have personal experience of the effects of transvaginal mesh implants.

For groups and organisations

The committee may not be aware of your organisation or group so it is useful to provide some information about your organisation and who you represent, detailing your connection with women affected by transvaginal mesh implants. Include a sentence as to why your group's views are important to the inquiry.

Contact Details

It is important to provide your name and contact details. Organisations should provide details of a contact person. In most cases contact details will be removed from submissions before they are published.

Confidentiality

Submissions to parliamentary inquiries are usually published on the inquiry's website.

If you do not want your submission to be publicly available you can ask it remain confidential.

To this you need to:

- include the word **confidential** clearly on the front of your submission and provide a reason why you do not want your submission to be published
- make sure that your name and contact details are on a separate page and not in the main part of your submission.

Confidential submissions will only read by members of the committee and the secretariat.

Committees will usually not publish submissions from individuals who request confidentiality. The committee does however have the authority to publish or not publish any submission. The committee secretary can provide you with more information about confidentiality.

Address the Terms of Reference

The terms of reference describe the subject of the inquiry and what it can and cannot investigate. You need to ensure that your submission is relevant to these terms. Some people find it useful to structure their submission by responding to each item in the terms of reference, while others find it useful to write a story about their experience that covers as many terms of reference as possible. You do not need to include something about every item in the terms of reference, only about those that are relevant to you.

Think about what are most important problems and priorities about transvaginal mesh implants that you would like to see addressed and include these in your submission.

The terms of reference are over the page (in red). You do not have to address every item.

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Terms of Reference

1. **The number of women in Australia:**
 - a. who have had transvaginal mesh implants;
 - b. who have had transvaginal mesh implants who have experienced adverse side effects; and
 - c. who have made attempts to have the mesh removed in Australia or elsewhere.
 - These numbers are not known and are difficult to find. You do not need to answer this other than to advise if you or a family member has had an implant
 - Do you know of anywhere (in Australia or internationally) that does a good job of collecting this information?
 - If you have any suggestions or recommendations about changes to laws, policy and practices you can list them here.
2. **Information provided to women prior to surgery about possible complications and side effects.**
 - What information was given to you prior to your surgery?
 - Do you have any suggestions or recommendations as to what information you think women should receive?
3. **Information provided to doctors regarding transvaginal mesh implants and possible complications and side effects.**
 - What is your experience of doctors' knowledge of transvaginal mesh implants, complications and side effects?
 - Have you found information about transvaginal mesh including complications and side effects that your doctor (GP or specialists) were not aware of?
 - Do you have any suggestions or recommendations about what information you think doctors should be provided with?
 - How could women adversely affected by transvaginal mesh implants tell their stories to doctors?
4. **Any financial or other incentives provided to medical practitioners to use or promote transvaginal mesh implants.**
 - Do you know of or have evidence of incentives provided to medical practitioners to use or promote by transvaginal mesh implants?
 - Do you have any suggestions or recommendations about the provision of incentives to medical practitioners about using or promoting transvaginal mesh implants?
5. **The types and incidence of health problems experienced by women with transvaginal mesh implants and the impact these health problems have had on women's lives.**
 - This is probably the most important item in the terms of reference for women affected by transvaginal mesh implant.
 - This is the opportunity to tell your story about how transvaginal mesh implants have affected you and your family. You do not have to limit yourself here just to health issues but also to issues around relationships, finances, employment or any other part of your life that has been affected.
6. **The Therapeutic Goods Association's:**
 - a. role in investigating the suitability of the implants for use in Australia;
 - b. role in ongoing monitoring of the suitability of the implants; and
 - c. knowledge of women suffering with health problems after having transvaginal mesh implants.
 - What experience have you had with the Therapeutic Goods Association (TGA)?
 - What do you think of the current work the TGA in this area?
 - What is needed to improve the work of the TGA in this area?

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Terms of Reference (Continued)

- Are there other government agencies (apart from the TGA) who could or should have a role in this?
- Is there anywhere (in Australia or internationally) that does a good job in these areas?
- Do you have any recommendations about changes that might be needed to laws, policy and practices in relation to regulation of medical devices?

7. Options available to women to have transvaginal mesh removed.

- What is your experience of trying to have transvaginal mesh removed?
- Do you know of anywhere (in Australia or internationally) where it is easier for women to have mesh removed?
- Do you have any recommendations or suggestions about what would make it easier for women seeking to have mesh removed in Australia?

Witness

Inquiries take evidence from both written submission and from people directly. This is called being a *witness* to the enquiry and what you have to say when you are there is called your *evidence* to the inquiry.

If you would like to talk to the Committee directly about your experiences and recommendations then include a statement to in your submission saying you would be happy to appear as a witness. Members of the public are usually able to attend most committee hearings (but only witnesses are allowed to speak and answer questions). If you would like to give evidence to the committee in private than you can ask to do so in your submission.

More information about public hearings and being a witness can be found on the Parliament of Australia's website:

http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Attending_a_public_hearing

Suggestions and Recommendations

The committee will want to know what you think should be done to address the problem. Try to identify solutions or ways you think the issue could be dealt with better. If you have made a lot of recommendations in your submission then you might want to include a list of them all in the summary.

Summary

If your submission is long and includes a number of recommendations then it can be helpful to include a brief summary.

Adapted from *A Quick Guide to Writing Submissions*, from the NSW Legislative Council, and *Making a Submission* from the Parliament of Australia website:

http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Making_a_submission

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