



FACT SHEET – Health Care Professionals – Presenting Prenatal Screening as a Choice



Informed consent is critical all the way through the prenatal screening process, and it is important that it is presented as a choice.

Informed decision-making is central to person-centred health care. It is a process which relies on two-way communication between a person and one or more health practitioners.

Informed decision-making reflects the principle that a person has the right to decide what is appropriate for them, taking into account their personal circumstances, beliefs and priorities. This includes the right to accept certain health care and to change that decision at any time. To exercise this right to decide, the person requires information that is relevant to them (Queensland Health, 2017).

All women should be advised of the availability of investigations for prenatal screening and diagnosis as early as possible in pregnancy to allow time to discuss the options available and facilitate an informed choice.

The context and manner in which prenatal screening is presented to prospective parents, including the language used, has the potential to enable or compromise free and fully informed choice



For example, use the terms ‘probability’ or ‘chance’, rather than the more value-laden term, ‘risk’.

Where a woman or pregnant person makes an informed decision to decline prenatal screening, that decision should be respected and recorded. If there are circumstances where a health care provider is required to revisit this choice, any conversation should note the previous decision and clarify the reason, for example new clinical information, why further discussion is deemed appropriate.

References

Down Syndrome Queensland. (2022). Practice Resource – Prenatal Screening for Chromosomal Conditions including Down syndrome.
<https://prenatalscreening.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Prenatal-Screening-Practice-Resource.pdf>

Queensland Health. (2017). Guide to Informed Decisionmaking in Health Care, Queensland Government.
https://www.health.qld.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0019/143074/ic-guide.pdf

Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and the Human Genetics Society of Australasia. (2015). Statement on Prenatal screening and diagnostic testing for fetal chromosome and genetic conditions.
<https://www.hgsa.org.au/documents/item/6110>