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Important win secured with revised screening guidelines

Saving Downs has secured a number of important and welcome changes to the national screening programme for Down syndrome.

Last week new guidelines were formally issued by the National Screening Unit. These were revised following the upholding of our complaint to the Health and Disability Commissioner in 2010.

Saving Downs considers that the new documents are a significant improvement and an important win in the journey towards realising social justice for the Down syndrome community.

Spokesman Mike Sullivan explained that "The overarching change in these documents is a new emphasis towards the help and guidance available for mothers and their pregnancies throughout the screening pathway. There is a noticeable shift away from the offensive prominence of the disability selective termination option in the original documents."

One of the most welcome changes is the policy move away from the routine offering of screening to all pregnant women to simply advising them of the availability of screening. "That's an important distinction as the onus is now on parents to request participation as a choice, rather than it being a matter of routine pregnancy care" Mr Sullivan explained.

Mr Sullivan also observed that although the new documents are welcome, Saving Downs remains committed to ensuring that antenatal screening is limited to providing life affirming care. New Zealand law currently provides a lesser degree of protection of life before birth based on disability, which is discrimination. Saving Downs will continue to work to repeal this law, a process that is now underway in the UK with a Parliamentary inquiry into abortion on the grounds of disability. Saving Downs have accepted an invitation to participate in that inquiry.

Mr Sullivan hopes that with the new guidelines, more pregnant women who are faced with an unexpected diagnosis will receive the loving and life affirming support to continue their pregnancy that they deserve.

[Further reaction to the new guidelines is discussed in this blog.](#)

For more information contact:

Mike Sullivan mike.b.sullivan@xtra.co.nz

09 436 1498, 021 406 266