

ISS Australia Position Statement

Donor conception

Core Position

1. It is a fundamental right of all children born through donor conception to be informed about the circumstances of their conception and all donor conceived persons to have the right to access information and records regarding their donors. Such records should be kept in perpetuity.
2. ISS Australia believes that a donor conceived person's right to donor information should take precedence over the donor's right for their details to remain private or anonymous; while noting donors may still choose not to have contact with the donor conceived person.
3. All donor conception practices need to embrace a spirit of openness, where donor conceived children and adults are aware of their status, are able to ask questions about their origins and be supported to be in contact and/or build a relationship with their donor if they wish to do so.
4. Anonymous donations are not in the best interests of donor conceived people.
5. Donor conceived people should be able to access specialised support services and counselling when they wish to access their records and connect with their donors.

Background

6. As ISS Australia may work with clients impacted by donor conception in our international social work it is important that we have a policy in this area.

7. Australia's first IVF baby was born in Melbourne in 1980. Through the development of assisted reproductive technology (ART), parenthood by means of using donated sperm, eggs or embryos has continued to grow. It is estimated that at least 60,000 donor conceived people are living in Australia and this number will continue to grow.
8. The majority of donor conceived people in Australia have been conceived without guiding government legislation or at a time when donor anonymity was practised in fertility clinics. It is also probable a substantial number of donor conceived people have no knowledge of their donor conceived status and are growing up believing they are biologically related to both their parents.

Statements of Principles

9. We call on policy makers to ensure the voices of people with lived experience and particularly people born through donor conception are fully included in policy development. For instance, a group of people with lived experience recently developed *Making Humans: International Principles for Donor Conception and Surrogacy* which offers comprehensive and detailed policy advice in this area.
10. In Victoria, the *Infertility (Medical Procedures) Act 1984* was the first legislation in the world to regulate IVF and associated human embryo research. The *Victorian Assisted Reproductive Treatment Amendment Act 2016* allows all donor conceived people, no matter when they were born, the right to know their genetic history. Moreover, donors no longer have the ability to veto the release of their identifying information to their donor off-spring but they can determine how or if they have contact.
11. Donor conception practices need to keep detailed records of the donors in perpetuity and end the practice of anonymous sperm and embryo donation. Moreover, it is imperative that families ensure their child grows up with the knowledge of their donor conceived status and with access to information about their donor.
12. Information about their donor such as ethnicity, physical characteristics, personality, and family history will assist with future identity issues and enable donor conceived people to create a sense of 'who they are'.
13. It is a fundamental right for donor conceived people to have access to information concerning a biological parent's medical history. This medical information is crucial for donor conceived people, especially as it relates to their inherited medical conditions, as well as to their identities. It is also important for their own children, in order to gather accurate medical history and be aware of any genetic medical issues that may arise.

14. ISS Australia encourages those involved in donor conception (including fertility clinics, professionals, donors and the parents of donor conceived people) to understand the implications of secrecy and its life-long impact, and the human need common to all people to understand their origins and identity. Lessons can be learned from other practices, such as previous adoption practices, where secrecy, misinformation and restricted access to information impacted negatively on children and adults subject to these practices.
15. ISS Australia believes when a child is aware they are donor conceived from an early age, they are more likely to grow up well-adjusted and happy. Openness alleviates any distress caused by family secrets and future feelings of betrayal and increases the likelihood that a child develops a healthy identity and positive family relationships. Where possible, ISS Australia supports donor conceived children and adults being able to make contact and/or build a relationship with their donor if they wish to do so.
16. Parents of donor conceived people should be supported to assist their child's journey to better understand their donor conceived status. Additionally, it is important to know that donor conceived people's desire to learn about their biological origins is separate to their existing relationships and how much they have been loved, cared for and nurtured. Appropriate support and counselling services should be provided to donor conceived people during this journey.
17. ISS Australia recommends that Victoria's *Assisted Reproductive Treatment Amendment Act 2016* be a model for other state and territories yet to implement regulations that prioritise the rights of donor conceived people.
18. ISS Australia believes that the concept and practice of anonymous donors should not be accepted nor allowed in Australia.

Approved by ISS Australia Board – December 2020.