

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 The NSW Cervical Screening Program

The NSW Cervical Screening Program is a joint Commonwealth and State initiative to implement an organised approach to cervical screening in NSW in line with the National Cervical Screening Policy. The organised approach encompasses:

- encouraging women at risk (aged 18 - 70, who have ever been sexually active) to have biennial Pap tests;
- improving the reliability and accessibility of services for taking Pap tests;
- optimising the management of women with screen detected abnormalities; and
- improving monitoring and evaluation.

The Program has been managed by the Western Sydney Area Health Service since July 1996 through a funding and performance agreement with NSW Health.

The overarching goal of the Program is to reduce the incidence of morbidity and mortality of cervical cancer at an acceptable cost to the community and it has identified the following 5 key challenges which must be addressed if it is to succeed in achieving its goal. These are:-

- engaging stakeholder collaboration;
- recruiting women at risk;
- supporting compliance with national standards for laboratories processing Pap tests;
- ensuring best clinical practice; and
- undertaking operations oriented research, monitoring and evaluation.

Initiatives to address these challenges include:

- The establishment of a network of Screening Co-ordinators in each Area Health Service in NSW.
- The establishment of a number of Task Forces to advise the Program and to enable stakeholder collaboration.
- Implementation of a range of recruitment strategies, including media campaigns and the production of promotional and educational resources, to encourage women at risk to screen regularly.
- Provision of data type information to facilitate the laboratory's ability to

comply with national accreditation guidelines.

- Implementation of a number of projects in collaboration with Divisions of General Practice, including a Continuous Medical Education (CME) program for general practitioners.
- Production of Quarterly statistical reports to enable ongoing monitoring and evaluation of performance.
- Analysis of data to inform the conduct of operations oriented research.

In keeping with its commitment to ongoing monitoring and provision of accurate data to all relevant stakeholders along the screening pathway, the Program works closely with the NSW Pap Test Register to report on key performance outcome measures. Statistical data from the NSW Pap Test Register facilitates the Program's ability to monitor screening rates and patterns of cervical abnormalities, essential to planning and evaluation.

## **1.2 The NSW Pap Test Register**

The NSW Pap Test Register was established following amendments to the Public Health Act and started on 29 July 1996. It is managed by the NSW Cancer Council and is an important component of the Commonwealth and State funded NSW Cervical Screening Program. The Register aims to help achieve the goal of reducing the incidence of and mortality from cervical cancer at an acceptable cost to the community.

The Register is a central and confidential record of NSW women's Pap test and cervical biopsy test results. During 1998 this test information was processed by 55 pathology laboratories, which are located across five states and territories. The target population for the NSW Pap Test Register is 1,716,854 NSW women aged 20 - 69 years.

The functions of the Register are to:

- send a reminder letter to women whose next Pap test is overdue;
- help ensure that significant abnormalities have been followed-up;
- provide health practitioners with a woman's previous cervical history (when requested) to assist them in determining when her next test is due;
- provide laboratories with woman's previous cervical history at the time her current test is being interpreted;
- assist laboratories in quality assurance programs;
- provide data on screening rates and trends in abnormalities to assist program planning and improve the understanding of cervical abnormalities.

### **1.3 Objectives**

The purpose of this report is to provide information on agreed Performance Measures derived from the 24 and 36 months operation of the NSW PTR. These measures are of interest to State and Commonwealth Health Departments, Area Health Services, non-government organisations, universities and other research and teaching institutes, as well as health care professionals, community groups and individuals.

### **1.4 Under-enumeration**

There are numerous caveats which should be borne in mind when interpreting the data contained in this report. These are dealt with in detail in the Appendices. An important consideration is that some regions of NSW are affected by under-enumeration of Pap tests mainly because of laboratory reporting or in some areas, failure in allocation of women in certain post codes to local government areas.

The screening rate in NSW as a whole is affected by the proportion of women who have elected to opt-off the NSW Pap Test Register, and by women whose age is not recorded.

The under-enumeration of Pap tests are being investigated and resolved by the NSW PTR. Considerable progress has been made on these issues.

