

## Media Release

### Thousands of women use low cost treatment

There's been a surge in the number of women using low cost fertility treatment, the Victorian Assisted Reproductive Treatment Authority's 2019 annual report shows.

In 2018-19, 12,940 women received fertility treatment in Victoria. Of this number, 2,339 received treatment at low cost clinics – a 22 per cent increase from the previous year.

Data collected by VARTA also shows there were 1,393 treatment cycles to freeze eggs for medical or social reasons – up 31 per cent from 1,064 the previous year. And more women are returning to use frozen eggs to attempt a pregnancy. In 2018-19, 222 IVF cycles involved thawed eggs, up 36 per cent from 163 the previous year.

In 2017-18 (the most recent data for births), there were 20 babies born from the use of a woman's own thawed eggs following 166 cycles of treatment, and four babies born from the use of thawed donor eggs following 23 cycles of treatment.

"It's great to see more women accessing low cost fertility treatment because cost can be a barrier for some people," said VARTA CEO Louise Johnson.

"Victorians have a diverse range of clinics to choose from, including low cost providers which offer simpler treatments without extra options such as donor treatment."

Ms Johnson said fertility treatment can be expensive, particularly if people have multiple IVF cycles which is commonly needed. One IVF cycle includes stimulation of a woman's ovaries for about two weeks, surgical removal of her eggs, fertilisation of those eggs in a lab to create embryos, and then the transfer of any embryos into her uterus to attempt a pregnancy.

"National data from the Australia and New Zealand Assisted Reproduction Database (ANZARD) shows about 23 per cent of women have a baby after one IVF cycle," she said.

"The younger you are, the greater your chance of being part of this group. About one in three women aged under 30 have a baby after one cycle compared to 8 per cent of women aged 40-44."

VARTA's annual report shows that the number of people using egg, sperm and embryo donations was similar to the previous year. Single women continue to be the largest proportion of women treated with donor sperm (49 per cent), followed by women in same-sex relationships (32 per cent) and heterosexual relationships (17 per cent).

The number of sperm donors available for treatment decreased 24 per cent last year. At the start of 2017-18, there were 560 sperm donors available and by the start of 2018-19 there were 424

available. Clinics recruited 128 new donors in 2018-19 compared to 125 the previous year. Availability of sperm donors varies considerably from one clinic to another.

“This is consistent with advice from clinics that more sperm donors are needed with demand exceeding supply. From our work in managing the donor registers, we also know that many donors are valuing the opportunity, when asked, to connect with donor-conceived adults and parents of young children.”

Data supplied by clinics showed 66 per cent of IVF cycles used Intracytoplasmic Sperm Injection (ICSI) in 2018-19 – a decrease of 6 percentage points from the previous year. The national average was 62 per cent in 2017, according to the *Assisted Reproductive Technology in Australia and New Zealand 2017* report.

ICSI involves a single sperm being selected and injected into an egg to assist fertilisation. It costs patients more than a standard round of IVF where an egg and sperm are put together in a dish to fertilise like they would naturally within a woman’s body.

“The downturn in ICSI is an encouraging trend because research from Victorian data shows ICSI may not increase the chance of a baby if there is no diagnosis of male infertility,” Ms Johnson said.

“I am also pleased to see that 88 per cent of embryo transfers last year involved one embryo. This is positive, given that the transfer of more than one embryo increases the chance of multiple birth which is riskier for mothers and babies.”

A snapshot and a full copy of the annual report are available on the VARTA website.

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