

# State law change to help children find donor parent

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Advocate: Donor-conceived Lauren Burns has met her biological father but believes the proposed law changes don't go far enough. *Photo: Eddie Jim*

Victorian laws will be changed to allow children of sperm and egg donors born before 1988 to find out the identity of their biological parents - but only if the donor consents.

The government's position, revealed in State Parliament on Tuesday night, falls short of a recommendation by a cross-parliamentary committee last year for children to have unfettered access to their biological information. Groups including the Australian Medical Association warned that such a step would jeopardise patient confidentiality and breach the privacy of donors previously guaranteed anonymity.

Under current Victorian law, several thousand children born before 1988 - when fertility treatment was unregulated - are not entitled to identifying information about their sperm or egg donor.

Those conceived between July 1, 1988 and the end of 1997 can access information if their donor consents, while those conceived after 1998 have unconditional access to information about their donors.

The change could help donor-conceived people such as Narelle Grech, who successfully sought the help of former premier Ted Baillieu to find her biological father Ray Tonna. She met Mr Tonna earlier this year, just months before passing away of bowel cancer aged 30.

Melbourne woman Lauren Burns, who was conceived with donor sperm, said she was disappointed the government had failed to put donor-conceived people's rights first. Ms Burns has met her biological father but said donors did not always consent to the release of their information, condemning their biological children to "a lifetime of uncertainty of never being able to answer questions about their genetic identity".

Changes could be years away, with the government saying the new arrangements would take effect a year after legislation is passed.

A cross-parliamentary committee found that children's rights should take precedence, following a lengthy inquiry.



Illustration: Matt Davidson.

But the government said the privacy of donors guaranteed anonymity before 1998 should be protected if they did not consent to their information being released.

It said evidence suggested most donors would consent to the release of identifying information where requested, but warned not all donor information would be "available, complete or accurate".

The government commissioned the Victorian Assisted Reproductive Treatment Authority to consult donors who would be directly affected by the committee's recommendations - those who donated eggs and sperm before 1998.

More than half the 42 donors who were interviewed rejected calls to provide all donor-conceived people with identifying information about their donors.

But a little less than half the donors supported the move, and said donor-conceived children needed to understand their genetic heritage. Some even suggested that donors should also have access to identifying details of their donor offspring.

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