



Known vs Unknown Donors - How to Decide

On 1 January 2010, the Assisted Reproductive Treatment Act 2008 (Vic) was amended and provided the opportunity for lesbian and single women (also known as “intended parents”) to access fertility services. Non-birth Mothers were also formally recognised as a parent of a child conceived within a relationship.

This meant that lesbian and single women were now able to access clinic-recruited donor sperm (also known as ‘unknown donors’) and the ability to use sperm from a donor known to the intended parent(s) (also known as ‘known donors’).

What is an unknown Donor?

An unknown donor is also known as a clinic-recruited donor. They donate to an IVF Clinic, are anonymous and not known to the intended parents. Prior to 2017, the only information that intended parents could obtain about unknown donors within Victoria, was limited and non-identifying. However, in an amendment to the Assisted Reproductive Treatment Act 2008 (Vic), donor-conceived children are now able to access identifying information about their Donor, and this applies retrospectively.

An unknown donor is health screened, counselled and they give their consent to the use of their sperm. However, their consent lapses after a maximum period of 10 years, and they can withdraw their consent at any time before an embryo has been formed. A maximum of 10 families can use a known Donor’s sperm, and lesbian partners are considered one family for these purposes. This has not always been the case but is a welcome amendment to the legislation. It is however important for a lesbian couple to ensure that if they seek to have further children using the same unknown donor, they reserve the sperm to ensure availability.

When selecting an unknown donor through a reproductive clinic, intended parents are provided with the following information:

- Personal characteristics such as height; weight; build; complexion; hair colour and texture and eye colour;
- Personal characteristics of the donor’s parents and the Donor’s other children (if any);
- Marital status;
- Country of birth;
- Occupation;
- Religion (if any);
- Sexual orientation;
- Smoking status;
- Ancestry/Ethnic origin; and
- Family Health and Medical history.

If you access a donor who is based overseas, the information provided in their profile, depending on which clinic you use, is generally more detailed and sometimes includes a photo of the donor.

What is a known Donor?

For some parents, using a known Donor is their preferred option and is based on them being able to connect with the unborn child and the child’s ability to meet and have a relationship with their donor or meet up with them later in life.

There is no right or wrong answer, but there are legal and social issues that you should consider when making decisions as to the status of a donor.

It is highly recommended that you seek advice from appropriately qualified professionals before making this decision, including legal advice as to how best to protect your role as parents.

Please see our fact sheet “Who is the parent of a donor-conceived child?” which provides a breakdown of the laws surrounding the legal status of a donor.

Donor Conception Registers

In Victoria, the Victorian Assisted Reproductive Treatment Authority (VARTA) has two registers that are used to facilitate donor linking. Donor linking is the exchange of information between, or meeting of, people connected via donor conception treatment.

The Central Register contains all existing donor conception records for Victoria, and the information contained on this Register is provided by the fertility clinics where the donor child was conceived. These records include the parent's full name(s); the child's full name; date and place of birth; and the donor's name, address and date of birth. The Central Register does not contain records for children conceived outside of a fertility clinic using a known donor.

The second register is the Voluntary Register. The information on this register will depend on previous applicants and not all donor-conceived children or Donors will be successful in finding a match, if this information has not been provided. The information contained in this register may include medical history, family tree and cultural background, interests, hobbies, physical features, photos, letters, videos etc.

The contact between intended parents, donor-conceived children and donors varies and is dependent on each individual circumstance. It can range from the provision of limited information to occasional communication, to ongoing contact.

The Voluntary Register is the only way that donor-conceived children from known Donors, their parents and their Donors can access information and donor linking.

For more information on donor conception, the donor conception registers, including accessing donor information, please visit www.varta.org.au.



Please recycle responsibly