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Australia focuses on preventing severe mitochondrial disease in children

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The government is committed to preventing future children in Australia suffering from severe mitochondrial disease, a devastating genetic disorder and is calling on the public to share their views through the release of a consultation paper outlining the proposed approach.

By harnessing new technologies such as mitochondrial donation, there is potential to change the lives of parents and their children and reduce the burden of mitochondrial disease for future generations.

Severe mitochondrial disease can have a devastating effect on families, including the premature death of children, painful debilitating and disabling suffering, long-term ill health and poor quality of life.

In Australia, approximately one child each week is born with a severe form of the disease, often with a life expectancy of less than five years. Mitochondrial donation provides an option for some women who carry a mitochondrial genetic defect to have a biological child free from this devastating disease.

The government recognises that the introduction of this technology in Australia is complex and it will require an appropriate regulatory framework, medical safeguards and, in the longer term, the support of state and territory governments.

For these reasons, the government has sought expert advice to ensure that Australia's approach to implementing mitochondrial donation is undertaken safely and cautiously.

The government is proposing to introduce this technology through a two stage process, which would see mitochondrial donation legalised for use in research settings and through an initial pilot clinic, before permitting it in clinical practice more broadly, after success has been demonstrated over a number of years.