

Dear Senator Moore

Re: Inquiry into Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) Bill 2009 and two related Bills

I write to express my concern about the above bills. I understand that these bills will enable Medicare funding, access to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and professional indemnity premium support for midwives providing care for women to give birth in hospital.

Medicare funding for midwifery care is long overdue. It is not acceptable however to exclude homebirth from this funding and indemnity arrangement. By doing this Australia is totally out of step with nations such as the United Kingdom, Canada, The Netherlands and New Zealand.

These nations support the rights of women to choose homebirth and fund a registered midwife through their national health scheme. In New Zealand and the U.K women have a legislative right to choose homebirth.

The intersection of this legislation with the national registration and accreditation of health professionals will prevent homebirth midwives from registering. I believe this to be an unintended consequence and ask that you take steps to include homebirth within the Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) and related Bills.

I support a system where all consumers are treated equally, with the same access to funding and the same insurance protection.

I have birthed three children and experienced first the public system, then private, then a carefully planned homebirth. Although my two hospital births were relatively uneventful, by far the homebirth experience is my greatest achievement to date. The simple conveniences of labouring at home (no mad driving or organising care for older siblings), the comfort of familiar surroundings, the wonderful quiet, the support and presence of my older children and husband, the freedom to move, relax and all in the privacy of my own home, and the quality of rest and recovery. We had certainly considered our options should complications arise, and were prepared to accept the consequences and responsibility for such a plan. For us this process was no different with our hospital births, where complications arise and interventions too often dictated by tight schedules and shift changes. My homebirth experience was incredibly empowering for me, allowing me to connect with my body's ability to birth, rather than a doctor or obstetrician 'delivering' my child. We did not burden the health system, only claiming what we were entitled to through private health insurance. Birthing at home is not some new, irresponsible fad, but a revival of a long devalued and professionally dismissed ability within all healthy women. It is a human right to birth as nature intended, with doulas and midwives an integral part of the process. Supporting midwives, supports homebirth, and in turn supports the empowerment of women to experience birth as an ordinary part of family life.

Yours sincerely

Roxanne Iwinski