

Dear Sir / Madam,

I believe midwife-assisted home birth must remain an option for women in the private sector.

Do we need to re-write Canadian history, where private home birth was made illegal, and it was not until the deaths of babies in home births that Government support for midwife-assisted home birth was recommended?

The intersection of the Commonwealth legislation to regulate and accredit all health professionals and that of Medicare access for Midwives, will eliminate the ability for a woman to contract a private registered midwife for homebirth. This is due to an inability to secure professional indemnity insurance and an unwillingness by Minister Roxon to provide homebirth midwives with the same protection as all other health professionals

Medical Indemnity is clearly a FEDERAL issue. Since 2001, approx \$1B taxpayer funds has supported medical indemnity premiums. Homebirth midwives have consistently been denied premium support. Women who choose homebirth are the only health consumers without the protection of indemnity insurance.

As a developed country, Australia is out of step with other nations such as Canada, UK, New Zealand and The Netherlands, which offer public funded homebirth with midwives providing either a public or private service. Making homebirth unlawful Australia places it on par with States of the U.S such as Alabama, where capital punishment still exists.

Many home birth and midwifery groups are demanding indemnity support for homebirth midwives and the protection of insurance to consumers. These include the Australian Private Midwives Association, Homebirth Australia and Maternity Coalition. It has been made clear in recent consultations regarding national registration that policy makers will no longer accept homebirth midwives practicing without indemnity insurance.

The Maternity Services Review Report, (forerunner to the Minister announcing Medicare for Midwives) stated:

“In recognising that, at the current time in Australia, homebirthing is a sensitive and controversial issue, the Review Team has formed the view that the relationship between maternity health care professionals is not such as to support homebirth as a mainstream Commonwealth-funded option (at least in the short term). The Review also considers that moving prematurely to a mainstream private model of care incorporating homebirthing risks polarising the professions rather than allowing the expansion of collaborative approaches to improving choice and services for Australian women and their babies.”

The Department of Health and Ageing and Minister Roxon¹'s office has tried to hand-ball homebirth to state governments to provide hospital in the home type programs. By offering Medicare funding for Midwives, the states have little incentive to offer homebirth services. The states that currently provide state funded homebirth services only do so within tight geographic locations to a limited number of women. They also operate under restrictive protocols, which are not necessarily based on evidence, but rather what is palatable to controlling interests. These programs are open to an absolute minority of women. This cannot be the only option for homebirth in Australia.

The rights of women to make choices about their health care are being seriously eroded. Homebirth Australia is seeking advice regarding human rights covenants that Australia are a signatory to, including CEDAW and the United Nations Statement on the Rights of Women (1995) that states, "Women have the right to have control over, and decide freely and responsibly on all matters relating to their sexual and reproductive health".

It is also unacceptable that through a lack of willingness to indemnify homebirth midwives, the result will prevent women from accessing registered midwives. State-based models will be unable to cover the same geography that community based homebirth midwives currently do. In fact, with Medicare funding, greater access could have been achieved, enabling more women homebirth with a registered midwife.

The legislation will place women in an untenable situation where they have to choose hospital or an unassisted home birth. Many women do not want to birth their babies in hospital, and indeed, see no

reason to do so since evidence proves that home birth is safe for low-risk and healthy women. However, the only “homebirth” option that will be open to them is that of an unassisted home birth. Why are we, in this current day, forcing women to birth their babies without professional care, something that the World Health Organisation (WHO) does not support? WHO recognises that one of the most positive influences on maternal and child health is access to skilled midwifery care for pregnancy and birth. Yet in our developed country, women are going to be denied this basic and essential care.

I demand that private home birth midwives be indemnified as a matter of priority and urgency. It is essential – for the health of our women and babies – that insurance be provided so that midwives are able to register come July 2010. The Maternity Services Review pointed to our excellent record of safety for women and babies – let’s ensure that this can continue.

Kind regards,
Melissa.

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