

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 believe that womens' power to make choices regarding birth is already eroded in our current system as homebirth is not covered by private health insurance, making the cost prohibitive for many women. The option of birthing at home should be the right of a pregnant woman and, as is clear in comparative studies of other countries, is safe for low risk pregnancies and is the ideal way to introduce a baby into the world. I feel really strongly that women and families need to have choices about birth, including where they birth, to manage unnecessary intervention and the over-medicalisation of birth. Finally I fear the danger of outlawing homebirth will be an increase in 'freebirthing', that is homebirth without qualified midwives, which could endanger the lives of women and babies because complications may not be discovered in time.

Yours sincerely

Amy Atkinson