

20 July 2009

Bianca Koops

Ms Claire Moore
Chair
Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

By E-mail: community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

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.

In 2006, the GP who confirmed my pregnancy gave me only one recommendation: care by an obstetrician. I was not satisfied with the level of care or information given to me during the obstetrician's very short, expensive antenatal visits. Despite reading as much as I could about pregnancy and birth, I still felt bewildered about what I was about to go through. I wanted a care provider who would listen to my concerns and who would support me during the labour and the birth. At 20 weeks I found that my obstetrician was going to be deregistered by the time of my birth. This forced me to look at my options – realizing that another obstetrician was unlikely to take me on at such an advanced date – and almost by accident I discovered that it was possible to engage the service of a private midwife. I was annoyed that the GP had not even mentioned this option.

It was a difficult process to find a midwife who was available, and suitable for our family. We were very fortunate to meet our midwife, and I immediately felt relieved, knowing that I now had the support that I needed. It was not a cheap exercise – we paid over \$4000, none of which was claimable on my health insurance, and my midwife made it clear that she had no access to insurance – but I was very happy with the long antenatal consultations in our home, which equipped me with the knowledge I needed for the birth.

My midwife stayed with me during my 40 hour labour (napping on the lounge when we slept) and helped me decide whether or not I wanted to transfer to hospital, as my labour was not

progressing, and I was exhausted. She came with us in the car and stayed with me for another eight or so hours, and helped us negotiate with the hospital staff. This was a big help – my biggest dislike about being in hospital was not feeling protected or cared for during my labour. After the birth, my midwife helped me at home with breastfeeding (which has continued for two years) and recovering my health. Whenever I saw her, I could ask about any concerns, no matter how small. I cannot picture my birth without a midwife who I felt connected to, who gave me continuous care and so much of her time and knowledge.

I hope to fall pregnant within the next few months and engage the services of a midwife again. I very much want to have a birth in my home where I feel safe. If this baby was to be born after July 2010, can you please tell me – what will happen to us and our midwife? Will we be fined or imprisoned? I do not want to be forced to birth in hospital, since I am entitled to choose where I give birth; so is my only option to give birth without a midwife at home?

Please provide professional indemnity insurance for homebirth care, with Commonwealth assistance. In the meantime, please immediately allow a temporary exemption under national regulation laws to allow homebirth care by eligible midwives until this insurance can be sourced.

Yours sincerely

Bianca Koops