

20 July 2009
Jan Deany

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.

I was first involved with homebirth during the 1970s as a Childbirth Educator and Homebirth Support Person (Doula). Having had the honour of being involved in more than one thousand hospital and home births, including four of my own grandchildren, and having had three natural births including one beautiful homebirth myself, I have witnessed firsthand what a safe, natural and empowering process birth can be when the woman birthing feels supported and nurtured by her Independent Midwife and other chosen caregivers.

I support a woman's right to make an educated decision about where she chooses to birth and with whom she chooses to birth. It is every woman's basic right to have this choice, and if the choice of where to give birth is taken away from women it creates a starting point for a process of eroding women's rights in all areas of birth. What will be next? Will it be mandatory induction? Mandatory augmentation of labour? Mandatory assisted birth and caesarian sections? Women will live with the shadow of 'big brother' looming if a woman's educated or instinctive chosen path contradicts the medical profession. Some states in the USA have legislation that involves welfare institutions being advised where families choose alternative birth and health care. This is a small step from mandating other medically advised procedures regardless of a woman's choice, and is a serious erosion of women's basic rights, and we in this country do not need to tread this path.

Obviously homebirth is not for everyone, but women birth best where they feel safest, and this legislation is simply denying a group of women a safe choice.

Apart from the proven physical, spiritual and emotional benefits, homebirth also promotes a sense of community, potentially involving family members, neighbours, friends and professionals, in a shared vital experience.

This legislation will undoubtedly impact upon the rights of Independent Midwives to achieve professional parity with hospital-employed colleagues.

Yours sincerely

Jan MacPherson