

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 fear that lack of access to independent midwives for homebirth will be detrimental to the safety of some women (myself included) and their babies. Despite changes to the law (Health Practitioner Regulation Law 2009) homebirth will remain an option to those women who hold philosophical views incongruent with inpatient hospital birthing services. The option to homebirth will be without the safety of suitably qualified health practitioners who specialise in normal birth, midwives. I have employed independent midwives for the latter two of my three pregnancies and planned homebirths with them. I relied on these midwives to monitor my own and my baby's progress and safety during labour, a role falling onto myself, partner and unqualified attendants in future pregnancies from mid 2010. It was on our independent midwives advice we transferred to hospital to deliver our youngest daughter nine months ago, a decision based on their combined specialist knowledge. I find it abhorrent I could risk penalties for inciting unprofessional conduct, or my midwives for professional misconduct by getting an independent midwife involved in a natural bodily process they are qualified specialists in, normal birth in any setting.

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

Yours sincerely

Gabrielle Shine

Registered Nurse and mother of 3