

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, or an exemption from the insurance requirements.

It is simply inconcievable to me that my autonomy to birth my children where I wish and with whomever I wish is under threat. For my first birth I trusted the "system". I ended up traumatised and cut open. I was lied to. Repeatedly and frequently lied to. For my second birth I took control of my decisions. I hired a trained and skilled midwife. I birthed my baby at home just three months ago. It was a wonderful birth and I had only the people there whom I wanted there. I was the decision-maker. I was autonomous, and I was supported by skilled midwives. My future births will be at home, with or without skilled midwives, depending on the law.

I choose to birth at home with independent midwives because that best supports my chances of birthing safely. Homebirth is a safe option. Research - studies such as the recent Netherlands study of 529,000 women - bears that out.

Midwives have been attending birthing women at home, with marvellous results, for years without insurance. Women who want to birth at home will continue to do so, even without financial assistance such as Medicare assistance. To try to eliminate the option of birthing at home by making it impossible for independent midwives to be registered will affect more people than just our independent midwives and their clients. Independent midwifery is vital to Australia.

Yours sincerely,  
Tanja Waterman.