

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 a welcome amendment. It is confounding, however, to find midwives assisting at homebirth have been excluded from this funding and indemnity arrangement. This arrangement puts Australia totally out of step with other progressive, developed nations such as the United Kingdom, Canada, The Netherlands and New Zealand.

These nations uphold the right of women to choose homebirth, supported by a qualified and competent midwife, who is funded 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, and thus outlaw homebirth practice. I believe this to be an unintended consequence of the proposed legislation, 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 have had a beautiful homebirth myself, and have attended as a midwife with a number of homebirthing families. I also work in a hospital midwifery unit and there is a vast difference between the two models of care. Continuity of carer has been demonstrated time and again to be the gold standard in maternity care - yet this is very often not possible in a hospital setting due to staffing ratios and changes of shift.

Traumatic and caesarian births are on the rise - as is the incidence of Post Natal Depression. We must look at our current birthing practices to try to throw light on why this is happening. Giving birth has not changed over the millennia, but obstetric practices have and increased

levels of intervention and surgical birth leave many families devastated instead of elated following their birth experience.

Birthing at home ensures continuity of care and carer and non-separation of family after the birth. The solid unit that is built within family flows on to help create solid communities. I, for one, would be devastated to imagine that this safe and wonderful opportunity was no longer available.

Women deserve the right to chose the place where they wish to birth their baby, especially when they know that their peers in other countries have the same access to homebirth midwifery care as women choosing hospital birth.

Excluding homebirth as a legitimate and legal option will drive women and their caretakers underground resulting in unsafe practice for all. Current transfer to hospital arrangements will cease to exist. Prohibition has been shown to drive people underground. This would lead to a dangerous situation as women and midwives would be denied access to collaborative care with their colleagues for fear of prosecution.

The Australian Government led the world in the 1980s with the introduction of the Harm Minimization policy in response to HIV/ AIDS. I believe that I live in a progressive and enlightened society with a well developed sense of social justice.

Please amend this Bill and acknowledge that women have a right to chose place of birth.

Yours sincerely

Kate Allardice