

Re: Inquiry into Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) Bill 2009 and two related Bills * *

I write to express my deep concern about the implications of the above Bills which will narrow women's birthing choices. 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. These are commendable changes in the main. Unfortunately, these two Bills will together increase the current obstacles for women choosing to safely give birth at home with the care of their chosen midwives.

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 and midwives are treated equally, with the same access to funding and the same insurance protection.

I was fortunate to have the support of two dedicated and caring professional midwives each time I gave birth in my home in 2001 and 2004. I felt safe and supported during pregnancy, while giving birth and in the early months of new motherhood. Every woman should have the right to choose just such an experience, just as they have the right to choose to give birth in a Birth Centre or in hospital with the support of their chosen team. My own choice – once I had researched the options – was to give birth naturally at home in a familiar, quiet and calm environment, with the support of my husband, doula and two midwives. Birth is a natural process, not a medical illness. Australian women are experiencing an increasing rate of often unnecessary medical interventions, even when giving birth in an established Birth Centre associated with a hospital.

I would choose again to give birth at home. Senator, I ask that you ensure the current amendments enable me and other women to make that informed choice in the future and also that you work to ensure professional indemnity premium support is available to Australia's committed midwives no matter where they are working.

Yours sincerely

Ceri Teather