

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

I write to you asking you to reconsider the 3 new bills that have been introduced that will effect the ability of midwives to work independently providing care to women who chose to birth their babies at home.

Firstly I believe that it is a womans right to choose where to birth her babies and to take this option away from women is a major step backwards in the history of womens rights. Secondly homebirth has been shown to have better outcomes for women and babies and whilst many other countries in the world such as the UK, New Zealand and The Netherlands are moving towards increasing the availability of these options to women Australia is looking at removing it, except for a very few women that are able to access the few state funded programs that exist.

When I first heard that the maternity services review was to be conducted I was hopeful that this would mean forward thinking reforms would occur to enhance the role of the midwife in this country allowing them to work to their full potential as defined by the WHO, including working independently offering homebirth to women with access to Medicare funding, making this an option for the majority of women in Australia. I am very disappointed that we could be looking at a situation where homebirth attended by an independent midwife could become illegal and all because of a lack of availability of insurance. The government support many other healthcare professionals so why arent they coming forward to support independent midwives? To isolate a certain group of people is discriminatory and I am shocked that this could occur in a first world country.

I believe I am able to offer a rare understanding of this issue as I am a midwifery student and a homebirth mother. My experience of giving birth to my daughter recently with an independent midwife at home was safe, positive and empowering which is something that unfortunately is not common in our society where birth intervention is high. I feel that this positive birth experience has impacted on my experience of parenting which has been a natural transition and has been overwhelmingly positive, again something that is rare in our society. Birth is a major event in a womans life and has the potential to impact on many aspects of her life afterwards, such as physical and mental health and parenting abilities and this can be either in a positive or negative way. Homebirth offers a safe option for women to birth their babies with less intervention and improved breastfeeding rates, factors which improve the long-term health of both mother and child, reducing further costs to the health system. This issue is much deeper than just ensuring a safe birth.

Planning to give birth at home was a choice my husband and I made as we felt that it was right for us. We wanted to be able to welcome our baby into the world in the safety and comfort of our own home. The importance of the birth environment has been well researched and can impact on outcomes for both mother and baby. We were lucky to experience quality continuity of care throughout the pregnancy, labour and birth and for six weeks postnatally which is only possible with an independent midwife. It allowed us to develop a trusting relationship with our midwife that I feel was essential in order to allow labour and birth to occur smoothly and positively. It also allowed my husband to be very much involved in the whole process which has undoubtedly impacted on his involvement in parenting our daughter.

It may be argued that only a small percentage of women choose homebirth in Australia so why offer this service. This argument is weak, the option of homebirth through the public healthcare system is only available to a few women in this country and the only other option is to hire an independent midwife privately which is expensive and therefore not an option for everyone. In countries where homebirth is well established such as The Netherlands the rates are as high as 30 %. Surely this shows that it is an option women want.

Please reconsider these bills to include independent midwives to ensure that women have the freedom too choose where and with who they birth their babies, it is a womans right to choose!

Yours sincerely

Rachel Cracroft