

20<sup>th</sup> July 2009  
Ian Adams

Ms Claire Moore  
Chair  
Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

By E-mail: [community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au](mailto:community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au)

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 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.

I strongly disagree with making it illegal for independent midwives to practice without insurance without providing also providing adequate insurance to cover them.

Homebirth, with the option of hospital transfer only if necessary, is proven to be statistically safe for both mothers and newborn infants. In fact home birth has lower intervention rates than hospital births. Lower intervention rates mean less scars, both physical and emotional for the new mother from the birth experience. In Australia, there is a small but significant group of families who choose home birth backed up by the support of competent midwives. These are educated families, whose research has informed them of what their choices are, and of how to get an optimal experience of the birthing process. These are people who would prefer not to turn up at a hospital and be dealt with 'efficiently', in what often turns out to be a traumatic and impersonal system.

Many women find the culture of birthing in hospitals impersonal and a bit frightening, not the ideal conditions for a successful birth. The psychology of birth can be compared to sex. No man would be able to 'perform' in a room where shifts of strangers are wandering in and out threatening interventions and surgery for those who fail to meet standardised expectations. Yet we expect our women to be comfortable and to 'perform' birthing in this environment.

This poorly drafted legislation looks like it could be illegal for women to make any other choice, such as getting competent care from a trusted private midwife at home.

I have a very high opinion of independent midwives, who in my experience practice with a high degree of professionalism, and who have successfully supported the delivery of my two children. If this legislation is intentionally outlawing non-hospital births then this is simply anti-competitive behavior. There is no clear medical argument for handing a monopoly on births to the hospitals. I can understand why hospital based obstetricians would like to see home birth outlawed, it would remove an element of genuine competition from the market, increasing their power and prestige. This should not be allowed in a free market economy.

Yours sincerely

Ian Adams