

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 have had the benefit of experiencing both an uncomplicated hospital birth and an uncomplicated homebirth in Canberra. For my husband and I it was a considered mature and sensible decision to prepare for a homebirth of our first and my second daughter in December 1988. We carefully researched and prepared ourselves and had immense trust in and respect for our midwife Jane Reid. In contrast to the birth of my first child, the homebirth allowed us to welcome our daughter in a most respectful and calm environment.

I would never encourage women to birth at home unless this was their considered preference – just because some of us find homebirth far superior does not mean that it is suited to all. I am also very concerned at being considered in the same category as those who make unsafe decisions to birth at home either without the right support or incredibly when there are risks associated that mean that a hospital birth is indicated for medical reasons.

Yours sincerely

Robyn Frencham and Brian Harris