

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

We are writing to express our deep concern about the above bills. We 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. We 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.

We support a system where all consumers are treated equally, with the same access to funding and the same insurance protection.

Recent research and many studies over time have shown that homebirth is both safe and in many cases better for both mother and baby. It is a fact of our society that many women do not feel safe in the hands of doctors and hospitals and are in fear of their safety and health and the welfare of their babies in these situations.

For hundreds of years, midwives have been assisting women to birth their babies, giving them a secure way to birth, a safe environment and a connection with family. Many well-known authors and childbirth experts: such a Shiela Kitzinger, Michel Odent, and Australia's own Dr Sarah Buckley, attest to the safety and effectiveness of homebirth.

Something that must also be taken into account is the amount of money that homebirthing families save our government. All homebirthing families pay their midwives fees without any rebate from Medicare or even most private health funds. We are not waiting in queues and waiting rooms of hospitals and doctors offices around the country, allowing the people who need to be seen the time and space to be seen. The same could be said of hospital beds.

For many homebirthing families who employ the services of a private midwife, she becomes more than a service provider and a friend. From our own personal experience, we had our second baby at home and our midwife has been constantly in his life, she has assisted us with many other minor medical problems and our oldest daughter trusts her far more than any doctors. She was, naturally, one of the first people who knew of our 3rd baby and also assisted in his birth at home. We see her every week as a friend and she is a huge part of our lives and the lives of so many others.

We are greatly disappointed, saddened and feel cheated by this choice to birth our babies at home taken away from us as a family. It would be such a shame to see us return to the times when midwives were actively sought out and burned at the stake for witchcraft, or when thousands of women and babies died from childbed fever from the incompetence and uncompromising of doctors, or even as far back as when midwives in Egypt were asked to commit the terrible crime of killing all the male Hebrew babies.

Please don't allow so many Australian families to be put in the position of feeling the need to free-birth without the assistance of a qualified midwife, or to feel bullied and pressured into a hospital situation which may do both physical and psychological harm to mothers and babies, or even to have their right to motherhood put in question because they do not feel that they can afford to get pregnant again without the option of homebirth.

Yours sincerely

Nathaniel and Marae Staples