

Dear Minister,

I was recently informed of the new National Registration Scheme which will make it illegal for Australian midwives to provide natural homebirth services. Having had my first baby in a Sydney Hospital Birth Centre and my second one at home with an independent midwife, I can't believe our Government is trying to outlaw this invaluable option.

I'm not saying that homebirth is for everyone, but for those women with low-risk pregnancies who fully prepare physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually for a natural, drug-free birth, the choice should be available.

I realize that there is a perception of home births being more risky, however my experience has been the exact opposite. When I arrived at the Birth Centre for my first birth, after having notified them twice of the stages of my labour, I arrived in an empty hall. Being in the advanced stages of labour, I just entered a room while my husband went to look for help. Apparently the midwife on duty that day had called in sick and they had to find an emergency midwife from the public hospital to look after me. I was assisted by two midwives who didn't know anything about me, refused to listen to my husband who was trying to explain my birthplan to them, instead kept "bugging" me with questions and interventions. They also recommended me pain relief despite my clear written instructions not to do so unless I cry out for it. Now, there's a lot of research out there which proves that the best birthing process is one where the mother can give in to the total birthing experience !

and let her hormones and body do the work with as little intervention as possible. Clearly hospital midwives are trained differently.

With my second baby, I had a totally different experience. I selected a very qualified and experienced independent midwife who understood exactly how we wished to give birth and respected our choices. The prenatal meetings were always pleasant and informative and she also advised me to register at my hospital of choice to facilitate the process should there be a need for hospital transfer. At the day of birth, she arrived quietly as I was trying to relax into the contractions. She understood that I was handling things just fine, using gentle birthing techniques and breathing. Her competent, discrete presence was very reassuring and she was keeping a very close eye on my labour. When the time was right, she gently told my husband he could help me in the birthing pool which she ensured was at the exact right temperature. Our daughter was born an hour later and despite some little scare with the umbilical cord around her shoulders, the midwife handled things very professionally.

The post-birth examinations were done in the most gentle manner with me or my husband assisting and staying in close contact with our baby daughter. She hardly cried and took to breastfeeding very quickly. I had a little snooze with my baby while my mum prepared a lovely, nutritious meal. Afterwards my midwife visited me at home every day for a week and took all the time necessary to give me and my family her priceless advice. Surely such care can only contribute to a healthier, better prepared, more balanced mother and avoid much of the now so common post-natal complications and depressions.

To see this freedom of birthing choice being jeopardized by a number of misconceptions, including the belief that only a minority is interested, is very disturbing. If you would properly poll the public opinion, you may find out that more people are interested in home birthing than you think. Unfortunately the lack of Medicare funding and subsidy for professional indemnity insurance to private homebirth midwives, makes this option too costly for a lot of parents. The pool of midwives willing

to provide homebirth services under these conditions is also shrinking rapidly. In a society where health costs are soaring and our lifestyles are becoming more and more out of balance, I can't understand why a natural, healthy, cost-saving, informed choice about birth is being banned. Do we really want to move to a 100% cesarian rate?

Yours faithfully,

Alexandra Delien