

Wednesday 8th August 2009
Lisa Thorneycroft

Ms Claire Moore
Chair
Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

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.

As a practicing, registered childbirth educator & attendant, I educate and support women during their pregnancy, labour, birth and in the post-natal period. Many of my clients choose to birth their babies at home with myself and an independent midwife in attendance.

I have had many calls recently from families concerned about their future birth options if this bill passes in it's present state. I have been asked if I will still attend if clients have a 'free birth' (this is birth without the support of a trained homebirth midwife), I have to tell my clients that I will not support them in this. Many of them feel that this will be the only option left to them as they feel very strongly about choosing where to give birth.

Statistics support that homebirth in a 'normal' pregnancy with a healthy mother and baby is as safe if not safer than birth in a hospital. The families, midwives and other support make the choice to homebirth after much investigation and research. Homebirth midwives are highly trained to detect any potential problems throughout the ante-natal period, labour and birth and if necessary transfer care.

The choice to give birth at home or in hospital is surely an individual one and should be supported fully by our government.

Yours sincerely

Lisa Thorneycroft