

Dear Elton,

I am writing with much concern about the threat to homebirth remaining an option for Australian women in the future.

I have had three successful, empowering and safe births in the comfort of my own home attended by a skilled and capable midwife. I did not enter the decision to birth at home lightly. Rather, as most women who make this choice, I researched birthing issues thoroughly, and though the cost was prohibitive, decided to have a homebirth because it was the BEST possible option. Homebirth is sometimes referred to as the "Rolls Royce" of births, for good reason.

Within the hospital system, which I had been exposed to throughout the first and second trimesters of my first birth, I felt as if I were just another cow in the cattle yard. I felt powerless and that my body and my baby were in the hands of people who had no time for my questions, had little knowledge of nutritional or emotional issues surrounding birth, and whose schedules and protocols I would be forced to fit into come time to birth. I wished to avoid all the routine interventions that hospital-imposed time limits impose on birthing women often make necessary. I knew that the use of these "harmless" interventions often lead to unplanned c-sections. At home with a familiar midwife I was able to birth in the safety and comfort (and comparatively germ-free environment) of my own home, following no one's timetable but my own and my baby's.

Home birth MUST remain an option for all healthy pregnant women with low risk pregnancies. It is a safe and desirable choice which, if it were available more freely through subsidised private midwifery care, would be accessed by many more. This would reduce the current very heavy economic, social and emotional costs of Australia's shamefully high rate of caesarians.

There is a place for hospital births and surgical intervention but according to WHO recommendations this is much less than 10%, not the third of births we are currently experiencing. In the future I am confident that this high intervention rate will be reflected by even higher rates of post natal depression and even further down the track in maladjusted adults who were denied their right to a peaceful birth in their own time.

Women who are given all the time, space and privacy they need to birth, with the support and care of a trained midwife, are empowered in all aspects of their lives. I am passionate that this birthing choice remain an option for my younger sisters, my daughter and my potential grand daughters.

I urge you to ensure that privately practicing home birth midwives are supported and enabled to continue their much-valued practice. There will always be women who, like me, choose homebirth over the routines and interventions of the hospital system. By effectively criminalising it, by not covering our midwives' insurance, you will only force the practice underground creating a potentially very dangerous situation. Women need midwives but there are many who will risk birthing unattended at home if they perceive this as their only choice.

Yours very sincerely,

Edwina Shaw