

Natasha Shaw

Ms Claire Moore
Chair
Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

By E-mail: community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Senator Moore

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

I would like to express my concern regarding 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 will prevent homebirth midwives from being able to register with the national registration and accreditation of health professionals. It is important that Home Birth Midwives are included in this amendment and related bills to ensure that women and families are given the full range of birthing options available with all consumers treated equally, with the same access to funding and the same insurance protection.

As a mother, I believe that there are two vital elements for women to feel safe during the birthing process 1. Feeling comfortable with the physical environment where she will birth and 2. The opportunity to build a relationship with the health professional that will assist them at the birth of their child. Feeling safe allows the hormones of childbirth to do their work in as unhindered a fashion as possible and I believe contributes to fewer complications for mother and baby. Good outcomes use fewer resources, not more. Birthing options such as Midwifery based care at birth centres and at home facilitate these elements.

A collaborative and supportive relationship between families, Midwives, Obstetricians, General Practitioners and hospital staff needs to be fostered. Legislation that enables freedom of choice of where to birth will ensure a transparent medical relationship, allowing for the safe delivery of all babies in Australia.

Loss of private midwives for homebirth is a problem for safety and choice.

- Homebirth is a reasonable option for women - shown by current evidence to be safe for low-risk births, available as a normal funded option in other developed countries, low cost.
- State services cannot be expected to provide broadly accessible homebirth services in the foreseeable future.
- Women will not have the choice to birth at home with a registered caregiver.
- Some women will birth at home with an unregistered carer or no carer. Bad outcomes can be expected.
- Responsibility is not currently being accepted by either level of Government.
(reference: www.maternitycoalition.org.au)

We urge the Senate to ensure that professional indemnity insurance exists for homebirth care in Australia.

Yours sincerely

Natasha Shaw