

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 the wife of a doctor and mother of two boys born at home contemplating a third child, I would be most disappointed not to be able to access the services of midwives I previously birthed with, due to reasons regarding lack of indemnity insurance.

Being an older, educated, privately insured, affluent woman I was able to carefully research and assert my birthing options seven years ago during my first pregnancy. Many women do not have access to these resources to enable them to determine the best care for their pregnancies. After initially seeing three obstetricians it became clear to me that if I wished for minimum intervention during labour it would be wisest to remain out of hospital and under the continual care of a midwife.

I feel most fortunate to have been able participate in the WA Community Midwifery Program. At the time only 150 women per year were able to do this. Attached is a photo of our home prepared for the birth of our first son. There is a tub set up for filling with warm water which was wonderful for pain relief. The majority of birthing women are unable to access this simple and most effective birthing tool though most have heard about it.

My birth stories are positive, up-lifting, empowering ones. These types of stories are sadly few and far between. My labours were quick and uncomplicated. I felt invigorated and delighted in the experience. I was lucky. In my initial Cottesloe mother's group only two out of twelve of us had natural births without medical intervention. The rate of delivery by caesarean was far higher. I rarely meet someone who has the same attitude and experience regarding birthing their children as I do and yet in many ways our homebirths were the most natural and straight forward events. Birthing outside the medical paradigm undoubtedly changed my life, my husband's life and the life of our family. There is nothing more beautiful and wholesome than birthing with family and trusted midwifery care in one's own home knowing that medical risk has been taken into account and that unexpected or unforeseen complications are adequately and responsibly covered.

I acknowledge that homebirth is one option that may suit a minority of women in contemporary Australian society and that other more medicalised options might be more suitable for women in the mainstream, however preventing private midwives from practicing because they are unable to get indemnity insurance is a backwards step for all Australian women. Australian women will be done a great disservice if their options to birth in the security and support of their own home are limited or prevented any more than they are.

Please support women's capacity to access midwifery care, including privately practicing midwives, by promoting indemnity insurance cover for all practitioners who provide services to pregnant, labouring and lactating women.

*Sincere regards,
Mrs Joanna Fellows-Smith*