

Dear Senator Moore,

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

I am writing 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.

While Medicare funding for midwifery care in Australia is a great step forward, it is unacceptable that homebirth has been excluded from this funding and indemnity arrangement. By doing this Australia is totally out of step with countries 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. It is a women's right to choose where she births and whom her maternity health care provider will be and if homebirth is not included within the Health Legislation Amendment, the Federal Government will be depriving women of the ability to make a fundamental choice about their own bodies; the choice to birth in a non-medicalised environment.

My son was born at home as planned in 2008 and I am planning another home birth early 2010. My main reason for choosing to birth at home was because I did not want to become another birth intervention statistic. For low risk pregnancies, the evidence is clear - homebirth is safe, it has positive birth outcomes, and it provides a midwifery-led model of care that is supportive and intimate. Homebirth midwives are the gold standard of maternity care.

Since the middle of last century, maternity consumers have been trying to achieve a more natural approach to birth, but it seems that there is far too much influence and pressure from the medical system to achieve this. As a result women's confidence and trust in their ability to birth is completely undermined and they become passive patients with no control over their birth.

The World Health Organisation states:

By medicalising birth, i.e. separating a woman from her own environment and surrounding her with strange people using strange machines to do strange things to her in an effort to assist her, the woman's state of mind and body is so altered that her way of carrying through this intimate act must also be altered and the state of the baby born must equally be altered. The result is that it is no longer possible to know what births would have been like before these manipulations. Most health care providers no longer know what 'non-medicalised' birth is. The entire modern obstetric and neonatological literature is essentially based on observations of 'medicalised' birth.

(World Health Organization "Having a Baby in Europe", European Regional Office, 1985)

For me that statement sums up the reason why homebirth should be supported in Australia. It is not necessarily an option all women wish to take, but it allows birth to be humanised, to be about the birthing mother's choice - it keeps her in the centre and respects her as a human being, before and above the doctor, the obstetrician, the surgeon, the midwife. Homebirth allows other maternity professions to learn that birth is not primarily a medical event and encourages them to be better informed and gain a better understanding of the normal, human experience of birth outside the medical world.

I urge the Government to rescind its decision to remove homebirth as a choice for birthing women, and support independent midwives in their effort to obtain professional indemnity insurance so that all Australian women have the option of birthing at home if they so choose.

Kind regards,

Sam McCulloch