

Submission to the Senate Inquiry into Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) Bill 2009 and two related Bills

Australian women must retain the right to birth in the manner they choose. Beyond the simple liberal rights-based argument for this position, there are so many practical reasons that homebirth should remain a viable option for ALL Australian women.

Homebirth reduces the burden on our hospitals by removing births from the medicalised sphere except in case of complications (the uncomplicated birth of a healthy baby is NOT an illness). The relaxed state of mother and her birthing team often makes for a safer and more comfortable delivery. Most importantly, homebirths mean new mothers and fathers having a feeling of ownership, control and empowerment through their birthing experience – a brief scan of the birthing stories on Homebirth Australia's website reveals the deep validation of their femininity and close bond formed between mother and child in a successful homebirth, and this amazing experience should be available to all who desire it.

Homebirth is made possible thanks to the members of Australia's dedicated and experienced midwifery profession. They perform a vital function in our society that has been celebrated throughout the ages, yet with the creation of a requirement that they acquire professional indemnity insurance, Australia's midwives now face the extraordinary situation in which their continued assistance at homebirths will be illegal. This is an intolerable and inequitable imposition on a group of talented and selfless working women, and a blight on the human rights of every parent and unborn child in Australia, who deserve the option of a safe, comfortable and blissful homebirth.

Please ensure that any legislative controls of this process provide a bridging scheme to ensure that the activities of our blessed midwives are not criminalised. Whilst professional indemnity insurance is desirable for our midwives, they need to be supported in obtaining it at a cost which does not compromise their ability to practice their invaluable craft. They should be given access to the same benefits under the Medicare schedule as obstetricians and general practitioners. Homebirth should be funded under Medicare, not to do so impacts negatively on the rights of Australian parents to birth in a manner of their choosing

I thank you for taking these opinions into consideration in the formulation of your recommendations, and trust that you will make them in a manner that ensures Australia's midwives are able to support the free birthing choices of all Australian women, including assisting the amazing experience of homebirth.

Katherine Copsy