



Friday the 17th of July, 2009.

To the honourable Nicola Roxen,

I write to offer my support and express my concern in relation to the Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) Bill 2009, Midwife Professional Indemnity (Commonwealth Contribution) Scheme Bill 2009, and the Midwife Professional Indemnity (Run-off Cover Support Payment) Bill 2009.

The Bills are a welcome progression for midwifery, birthing and continuity of care for women in clinical-based hospital settings.

However, if these Bills were to be legislated in their current form, the proposed National registration scheme that requires healthcare professionals to hold indemnity insurance would see homebirth midwifery become illegal. Registered homebirth midwives will not be covered by, or able to purchase indemnity insurance and therefore can no longer be legally allowed to practice midwifery outside of the clinical-based hospital setting.

Criminalising homebirth midwifery is indeed problematic, as it essentially diminishes Australian women's birthing choices. If the Bills were to be passed unamended many women and their families who believe in the importance of birthing naturally at home with support will no longer have this opportunity.

Along with women from a diversity of backgrounds, this will have significant impacts on many Indigenous women who want to birth 'in country' because of their strong cultural connection with the land.

The affordability of home birthing is a further consideration needing review in the Bills, as at present it remains a service women experiencing socio-economic disadvantage are frequently unable to afford. This could be rectified under the Bills if Medicare subsidised insurance to cover clinical midwifery and homebirth midwifery.

If the Bills were to be legislated, women's right to make self-determined, autonomous choices in relation to a range of birth settings, will be curtailed. This in effect impacts of women's sexual and reproductive health rights.

For these reasons, I am opposed to the introduction of this legislation and I advise that an amendment be made to include an exemption for Independent Midwives who require indemnity insurance. Such an amendment is an essential component in safeguarding Australian women's rights to reproductive choice and the right to be supported in the choices they make.

Yours sincerely,

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