

To the Senate Enquiry,

**Re: Proposed Amendment to the Health Legislation (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) Bill And The Midwife Professional Indemnity (Commonwealth Contribution) Scheme Bill. November 5th.**

We write to express our concern regarding the amendment proposed by Nicola Roxon on the 5th November 2009 as above. As consumers who wish to protect the rights of women to choose where and with whom they birth, Birthrites: Healing After Caesarean Inc. are opposed to the introduction of this amendment.

We are concerned that the proposed “collaborative arrangements with medical practitioners” for midwives to “access the new arrangements” may make it difficult for midwives to practice woman centered care. They will be required to be ‘signed off’ by a doctor in order to practice, thus women's choices will essentially be determined by doctors, rather than the women themselves.

**Australian women deserve the right to choose a midwife as their primary carer and choose their model of care.** They deserve to choose their birthplace also; home, hospital or birthcentre. But as currently in Australia the only chance of receiving genuine one to one midwifery care is at home, our choices are dismally limited already. On top of that Birthcentres are so few and far between, and many are based on a medical model and are so prohibitive that many women cannot choose to birth there. For example women who have had a previous caesarean, and are planning a vaginal birth.

Sadly many hospital policies and Doctors practices appear to be paternalistic and fear based, rather than based on evidence, holistic care and respect for a woman and their family to make sound informed decisions about their care. The current medical based birthing options are not providing the best possible care and support for birthing women and their families. Here in WA we have caesarean rate in excess of 35%, and many women suffering infections, depression, and difficulty adjusting post birth. We need to provide more birthing options for women to birth with a known midwife, not less.

True collaborative care for women between midwives and doctors, and other health workers such as physiotherapists or psychologists as required would be wonderful. But it should not allow for one care provider to have the opportunity for dominating the system. Informed parents who have actively chosen this model of care and highly trained and skilled midwives can engage in a safe, responsible and fulfilling partnership. **This should not require the permission of a doctor.** A woman can choose to support her midwifery care by seeing a doctor if she wishes, and her midwife can recommend she see a doctor if in her professional capacity considers it appropriate or necessary.

Midwives in private practice currently do have collaborative arrangements in place (eg. with the back-up hospital when planning a homebirth), these relationships are to be fostered through mutual trust and respect. Many women who employ an independent midwife also seek the services of a GP or obstetrician **if they can find one whom they**

**trust and who will support them.** Others have suffered negative experiences through birthing in the hospital or medical system, and chose for their only medical contact to be their single hospital appointment (to register in case of transfer).

Women who have had a previous caesarean, like those in our organization, have further limited birth choices. Despite evidence in the literature that a vaginal birth after caesarean (VBAC) is better for the health of mother and baby, than another caesarean (especially for women planning 3 or more children), it can be very difficult for women to find an Obstetrician or Doctor who will support them in having a natural birth. If they do find a supportive doctor they may be restricted to strict limits on their gestation, length of labour etc. And they may need to be monitored which interrupts the natural labour process. For these women the extra care, faith and support and individualized care they receive from a midwife is cannot be measured.

Women should be at the centre of birthing! We are the ones who birth. It effects us and our families for life! The decision should be ours to make, not based on a doctors practice. Please do not allow further erosion of our birth choices!

Sincerely,

Rosemary Rees

Vice-Convenor

Birthrites: Healing After Caesarean Inc.