



Home Birth
*Aotearoa*TRUST

Home Birth Aotearoa Trust
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NEW ZEALAND

Senator Claire Moore
Chair
Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs Legislation

Thursday 10th December 2009

Dear Senator,

Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs Inquiry into Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) Bill 2009 and two related bills

On behalf of our citizens living and birthing abroad, and indeed on behalf of all birthing women in Australia, we urge the committee to recommend against the proposed amendment regarding collaborative arrangements that has been made to the Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) Bill 2009, the Midwives Professional Indemnity (Commonwealth Contribution) Scheme Bill 2009 and the Midwives Professional Indemnity (Runoff Cover Support Payment) Bill 2009, which are currently the subject of an Inquiry by the Committee on Community Affairs.

Home Birth Aotearoa is a national consumer based organisation that represents the regional network of home birth associations throughout Aotearoa New Zealand. In Aotearoa New Zealand midwives work in a partnership model of care with women where each woman and her midwife work together to ensure that the woman has the care that best meets her individual needs. New Zealand women and their families and whanau have access to personal, practical and professional care from midwives from early pregnancy right through until four to six weeks after the baby's birth. This care is free and is available to all women throughout Aotearoa New Zealand who meet the Ministry of Health eligibility criteria. Over 75% of women and their families choose a midwife as their LMC (from www.midwife.org.nz Dec 2009).

It is well known, and supported by research, that women are most likely to labour best in a place where they feel free, safe and private, with skilled birth attendants whom they know and trust. For most women this will be at home or in a birthing centre where they can be in control of who is there and what happens. Only a few women actually need to give birth in hospital because of complications and home is one of the safest places to give birth [1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6].

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Aotearoa New Zealand has benefited from a midwifery model of care for the past 20 years, over which time it has been shown that this model of care results in less chance of complications, fewer interventions, and healthier births for women and their babies. Women who experience this type of midwifery care report feelings of great satisfaction and empowerment.

While we support a truly collaborative arrangement between health care professionals, we believe that the current amendment is not in the best interests of birthing women and their families in Australia.

We are concerned that the effect of the amendment will be to put at risk the health and safety of birthing women and their babies by making women's care a fight between health care professionals, rather than an informed choice made by women, our families and our chosen caregivers.

Women must be able to freely choose a health care professional that is most appropriate to our own personal circumstances. These amendments remove that choice from maternity consumers.

The amendments put the ability of midwives to practice in the hands of doctors rather than an independent registration and licensing body. Midwives are independent registered health care professionals who practice in accordance with well developed protocols and professional codes of conduct. They must maintain the capacity to exercise their own judgement for the benefit of the women in their care.

As women who have received care from professional midwives, we are also concerned that these amendments seek to impose a 'collaborative arrangement' that is not transparent for consumers. This requirement should be clearly detailed in the legislation rather than enshrined in rules where it may be formed and altered without the scrutiny of the Parliament.

These amendments remove choice for women and will make it impossible for a woman to choose private practice, midwife-led, continuity of care in Australia. As women who have experienced the benefits of such care, we urge the committee to recommend against these amendments.

Yours sincerely

The Families and Whanau of Home Birth Aotearoa Trust

References

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