

8th July 2009

The Secretary
Senate Community Affairs Committee

Re: Inquiry into the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme for Doctors and Other Health Workers

I am a consumer of maternity health care, who is concerned that the currently proposed legislation for the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme will mean women's birth choices are being restricted. Specifically, the requirement in the current legislation for all health professionals to have private indemnity insurance will impact on privately practising midwives, meaning it will be illegal for them to attend home births. This in turn means the vast majority of women will not have the choice to select having a trained, registered, professional at births in their own home. Instead women who wish to birth at home will be forced to do so with no trained help; an option which I do not feel is safe or appropriate care from the health sector.

At the current time, privately practising midwives cannot gain access to private indemnity insurance, as since 2001 no insurer has been willing to cover them because of the small pool of privately practising midwives. Yet without this insurance, professionals who have the same midwifery skill set, experience and love for their jobs as their hospital based peers will be denied being able to work as they choose if they wish to privately attend woman at home during pregnancy and labour. And most women during pregnancy and labour will be forced into a hospital-based care even if they would wish one-on-one care to birth at home with a registered midwife. An extremely small number of women will have the option of being part of a hospital-based home birthing program, but most will have no choice due to the small number of these programs and the localised area they can work over.

In order to ensure that choices for women and midwives are not denied, I believe it is vitally important that either some means of ensuring private indemnity insurance is available to midwives at all times, or that this requirement is not necessary as a part of registration. It seems absurd to me that women home birthing without qualified assistance is to be preferred over providing an option where women who choose to home birth have professional care available.

Sincerely,

Melanie Stopic