

Submission to Senate Inquiry into National Registration and Accreditation Scheme for Doctors and Other Health Workers

My name is Kristy Ratcliffe. I am a mother of three children, the youngest of whom was born at home in a country town with the assistance of an independent midwife and a supporting team of loving friends. My husband and I are both well-educated and well-informed. After a great deal of reading and inquiry we made the choice to birth our baby at home because this was both the safest place to do so and the only place where we could keep our family together through the intimate experience. Our two older children were present and we were surrounded by a team who created the support we needed to have the empowering experience that is every family's right. We had to pay our midwife \$3,500 out of our own pockets, and it was worth every cent. Many of my friends have also experienced the joy and beauty of birthing in the safety and comfort of home through "hospital-in-home" programs. I know three people who have birthed their babies with **no** health care professional present.

I am writing today with great concern that the draft legislation to establish a National Registration and Accreditation Scheme for all Health Professionals by July 2010 presents a very serious infraction to the rights of women to make choices about their health care during pregnancy and birth. If private practice midwives are unable to register, making it illegal for them to attend homebirths, I believe that the human rights of women and babies are threatened. I see it as a possible contravention of the Convention of the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the United Nations Statement on the Rights of Women (1995), which states "***Women have the right to have control over, and decide freely and responsibly on all matters relating to their sexual and reproductive health***".

Denying indemnity insurance to private homebirth midwives represents an inequitable failure to protect a significant group of health consumers. It prevents many women accessing registered midwives. Hospital "in-the-home" programs that are available in some states are too restrictive to offer real choice to a significant number of women. These programs are limited to very small geographic areas and they are only available to people who are categorised as "low-risk", a categorisation that does not appear to be evidence-based. They may also require women to adhere to protocols that take some of their choices away. The federal government should step in to ensure that this is not the only option for homebirth in Australia.

Women must be able to access registered midwives no matter where they live. The federal government is responsible for protecting the rights of women and their families

to choose their health-care provider and to find someone who supports them to make informed decisions about what happens throughout their pregnancy and birth. Please do not remove women's rights to make choices about where and with whom they give birth. The Commonwealth must indemnify homebirth midwives until a private policy is found, to protect private midwifery and their consumers. Please do not force women who choose to give birth at home to do so without a registered midwife present.

Sincerely,

Kristy Ratcliffe