

Comments on draft legislation for the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme (Bill B)

Monique Seymour  
To NRAIP 17/7/09 09:50AM

I write to express my grave concerns about the above bill, specifically the issue of independent midwives requiring compulsory professional indemnity insurance to receive practitioner registration.

The repercussions of this legislation will mean that independent midwives will not be able to practice. This is a huge step backwards for maternity care in Australia, which will result in less choice for child-bearing women, and may put some women and their babies at greater risk as those seeking homebirth will be forced to find care that doesn't adequately meet their needs.

Every woman in Australia (as they do in many other countries of the world) should have the right to make her own informed decisions about her pregnancy and birth, including where and with whom she will give birth. Homebirth with a skilled midwife should be an option to all women of child-bearing age. New Zealand and the UK both acknowledge the role that homebirth can play in maternity care, as a safe, cost-effective model of care, with excellent outcomes for mothers and babies.

Under the proposed legislation, women will not be able to access independent midwives and therefore it will become impossible for many women to receive continuity of care throughout their pregnancy, during labour and post-natally, as they are forced to seek care in hospitals where continuity of care is rarely achieved. Continuity of care throughout pregnancy is crucial in achieving good outcomes for mothers and babies.

I am also concerned that some women who would prefer to birth at home, will feel they have no choice but to 'free-birth' (birth at home without professional assistance/supervision) which has a high risk of poor outcomes and possibly even deaths of mothers or babies. This situation is unacceptable.

Independent midwives should have access to subsidies for professional indemnity insurance so they can protect themselves and their families, however, registration and accreditation as an independent midwife should not be contingent on obtaining this insurance. Independent midwives have a right to be able to work with their clients safely and legally, without the threat of penalties for offering their highly skilled services.

Independent midwives also need Medicare Provider numbers, so that women who choose to birth at home have equal treatment to those that choose to birth in hospital. I find it outrageous that a woman can choose to completely by-pass the natural process of birth by electing for a caesarean, and that decision is covered financially by Medicare, yet a woman that chooses to birth at home must cover all of her own expenses, while the public system saves thousands of dollars through her choice. This disparity is unacceptable.

I strongly urge you to remove the sections of this Bill that will make practitioner registration contingent on obtaining professional indemnity insurance.

Thank you for your consideration of these matters.

Yours sincerely,  
Monique Seymour