

17/07/2009 03:38 PM

Mrs Ruth Stevenson
Queensland

Dear Australian Health Workforce Ministerial Council

Re: Inquiry into Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) Bill 2009 and two related Bills

I write to express my concern about the above Bills. I understand that these Bills will enable Medicare funding, access to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and professional indemnity premium support for midwives providing care for women who give birth in hospital, but not for midwives providing homebirth care.

Medicare funding for private midwifery care is long overdue. It is not acceptable however to exclude homebirth from this funding and indemnity arrangement, thereby restricting birth choices for the women of Australia. By doing this Australia is completely out of step with nations such as the United Kingdom, Canada, The Netherlands and New Zealand.

These other nations support the rights of women to choose homebirth and fund registered midwives through their national health scheme. In New Zealand, and the U.K, women have a legislative right to choose homebirth.

The intersection of the proposed legislation with the national registration and accreditation of health professionals will prevent homebirth midwives from registering. I believe this to be an unintended consequence and ask that you take steps to include provision for homebirth within the Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) and related Bills.

I feel passionately that, regardless of the number of women who would choose to birth at home, this is an issue about CHOICE and a women's right to choose her birth setting and birth carer.

I am fortunate enough to live in an area that has a birth centre and was able to receive pregnancy and birth care for both of my children in a safe and calm environment with a known midwife. Unfortunately, if the proposed legislation comes into force in July 2010, the only option for birth in localities that do not have a birth centre will be in a hospital.

I was born in the U.K. and know many women who have birthed both at hospital and at home. Without exception, all the women I know preferred their birth experience at home (all with a known midwife) to their hospital birth experience. All those women enjoyed good outcomes: the safe, joyous arrival of a healthy baby in their chosen environment.

The Federal Government's maternity reform package promises to improve women's access to choice in maternity care. But, the proposed Bills would have the exact opposite effect and would restrict women's choices.

I urge you to ensure provision for homebirth care in the proposed Bills in order to support ALL birth choices in Australia.

Yours sincerely

Ruth Stevenson