

Dear <MINISTER>,

Being able to choose where and with whom to give birth are basic human rights. In Australia, AHPRA registration standards require all health care professionals to have Professional Indemnity Insurance (PII) for all aspects of their practice, and for Privately Practising Midwives (PPMs) this includes intrapartum (labour and birth) care, which is often provided at the family's home. There is currently no such PII product available for PPMs in Australia.

To combat this, an exemption was put in place in 2009, which was extended in 2013, 2016, and again in 2019, with the most recent extension due to expire in December 2021. Once this exemption runs out at the end of this year, PPMs will no longer legally be able to attend women to birth at home in Australia. Accordingly, women who have become pregnant from March 2021 have no guarantee that they will be able to birth at home with a registered PPM. These families deserve certainty about their birthing options.

The benefits of homebirth and continuity of midwifery carer are well established.^{1,2} Homebirth is an option that increasingly more women are seeking due to high numbers of women being left emotionally and physically traumatised from their birth experiences in hospitals, with approximately 1/3 of women experiencing birth trauma³, and between 1/5 and 1/8 of women experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder.^{4,5} Not only does homebirth offer better outcomes for mothers and babies, it is also highly cost effective⁶⁻⁸, providing saving opportunities for the government.

We are aware that there have been discussions in the past two years between the Australian College of Midwives and the federal government regarding a potential insurance product. Whilst we are glad to hear that this process has commenced, to our knowledge, there has been no consumer involvement in this process and no wider consultation process with PPMs. As a result, there is increasing anxiety among maternity consumers about the future of homebirth in Australia. Consultation with all stakeholders is crucial to ensure that the insurance product meets the needs of those who will be directly impacted by it.

If a suitable insurance product is not found, it is likely that this will result in more women choosing freebirth (birthing at home with no registered medical professionals present) which is known to hold unnecessary risks for mothers and babies.

We are writing to you to request the following:

1. for our organisations to be immediately included in the process of finding a suitable PII product
2. another extension to the insurance exemption, to give consumers and PPMs peace of mind until an insurance product has been found

We look forward to your prompt reply.

Co-signed by:

Yours faithfully,

Kristyn Begnell

Coordinator
Homebirth Australia

