

Additional Comments

By Senator Rachel Siewert, the Australian Greens

The Australian Greens broadly support the concepts of a national registration and a national accreditation scheme for medical practitioners introduced in this Bill. The Greens believe such a scheme would help ensure that patient safety and that the quality of patient care provided to all Australians is enhanced by the more efficient movement of registered practitioners across Australian jurisdictional boundaries. A nationally uniform set of policies and regulatory guidelines would signal an end to the reliance on mutual recognition of jurisdiction based registration.

Furthermore, the Australian Greens believe this scheme could have significant benefits for consumers in terms of increased access to midwifery care for women and babies, and for improving quality assurance for pregnant and birthing women and their families.

However the Australian Greens are concerned that this scheme fails to acknowledge the number of women in Australia who currently choose birth outside the hospital system.

It is the intention of this national accreditation scheme to make professional indemnity insurance mandatory for health care practitioners under national registration standards. At present there is no professional indemnity insurance product for independent midwives in Australia. This means that midwives in private practice cannot obtain insurance and currently practise uninsured.

The insurance requirements contained in this legislation are likely to prevent midwives from providing midwifery services for homebirths. The Greens share the concerns expressed in a number of submissions to this inquiry that this will result in some women who are unwilling to birth in hospital, choosing to birth at home without a professionally trained health care provider.

The Greens are concerned that this increases the risk that some women will experience unsupervised childbirth, possible events of malpractice and tragic outcomes.

The Australian Greens consider that all safe and appropriate birthing options for women should be properly supported. The inevitable consequence of the prerequisites for registration contained in this legislation will effectively exclude safe, supervised homebirthing from the birthing options of Australian women.

The Australian Greens therefore believe that the role of practising independent midwives to provide safe and low risk homebirths should be reconsidered and that in the interim an exemption should be made for this group while other alternatives reviewed.

Senator Rachel Siewert
Australian Greens

