

Media Release: For Immediate Release

Two young mothers go where Roxon fears to tread: A Report Card on local hospitals

Sydney NSW, 16 November 2009 Australian women are once more standing up for choice, and this time they're using cyberspace to do it. Last week, the Deputy Prime Minister announced the My Schools website to provide parents with information about their children's schools around Australia and the My Child website to provide information about the nation's child care centres. Today, two Aussie mums are launching My Birth, a website providing information about the birth services available to Australian women.

"Today two young mothers have done what the health professionals and the government don't seem able to do - they have given women easy access to statistics and information about their local maternity services. The government has promised to make school data transparent - now it is time to make hospital, doctor and midwife data transparent."
(Associate Professor Hannah Dahlen, Vice President, Australian College of Midwives)

My Birth, www.mybirth.com.au, provides crucial information for parents-to-be in deciding what birth service to use, including the birth service statistics of their local hospital, such as the percentage of births by caesarean or induction. Website founders Michelle Meares and Jennifer Brown state, "Women have a right to know what to expect when they choose a care provider and a place to birth their children. Sadly at present we are unable to provide the statistics for all States and Territories as they are not publicly released. We call on the Federal Government to release them for all Australian hospitals so women can make an informed choice."

(Justine Caines, maternity consumer advocate and mother of seven) "Maternity health professionals (in particular doctors) receive huge sums of public money, for their work and insurance subsidies, they must be required to furnish their statistics, otherwise what is being hidden?"

The legislation currently before the Senate, the *Medicare for Midwives Bill* will significantly restrict women's access to independent midwives. These are care providers with a proven record of improving outcomes for Australia's mothers and babies. As has consistently happened in the past, when choice becomes restricted, there are serious implications. Australia stands at risk of becoming an archaic centre for maternity health compared to other countries like the Netherlands, Canada and the UK. Decisions made by the Federal Government today will affect the birth choices available to our children tomorrow. We as a society do not want a union (the Australian Medical Association - AMA) having the ability to decide where and with whom an Australian woman can give birth. Midwives are a highly skilled profession in their own right with a significantly different set of skills to doctors and they must be recognised as such here in Australia. The legislation before the Senate fails to do this and instead provides doctors with more control over women's births. This, we believe, is a recipe for soaring statistics in the wrong direction. The My Birth website clearly shows why this is a very important women's rights issue for all women of Australia today.

If Australian parents have the right to know the performance statistics of where their child will be educated, then they must also have the right to know the statistics of where that child is born, and what alternatives are available to them.

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