

Briefing Paper
Australian Health Ministers' Conference

5 August 2011

Agenda Item No.: 3.5

HOME BIRTH POLICY FOR INDEPENDENT PRIVATELY PRACTISING MIDWIVES
– DRAFT FINAL REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Outcome sought

That Ministers note the finalisation of the Position Statement and note that this has become part of the regulation standards for privately practising midwives.

Sponsoring Jurisdiction: The Australian Capital Territory.

Overall Strategy

- On 9 February 2011 at the Health Policy Priorities Committee (HPPPC), following concerns expressed by South Australia regarding the regulatory framework for privately practising midwives (PPMs) and at AHMAC's request for policy advice, the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (NMBA) was asked to develop a homebirth policy for PPMs.
- The Position Statement has been finalised and endorsed by NMBA to be part of regulation standards. HPPPC has now referred the Position Statement back for Ministers' final consideration.

Key Risks

- The provision of homebirth by PPMs remains contentious as there are concerns about the safety of the homebirth practice.
- The Homebirth Position Statement has been developed to address these concerns. However, it is unclear whether this will sufficiently address all of the concerns of the state and territory jurisdictions.

Speaking Points

- **The Position Statement now forms part of the overall regulatory framework by which all midwives must comply. The Position Statement defines the scope of practise for Privately Practising Midwives and outlines the necessary mechanisms for support and transfers for intervention should risk escalate.**
- **The Position Statement has been through a consultation process with state and territory jurisdictions and key stakeholder groups. Appropriate recommendations have been incorporated into the Position Statement to refine the final document.**

Background

- In 2010, the South Australian Health Minister, Minister Hill, raised concerns about a number of homebirths which had been considered by the South Australian Coroner. Minister Hill also raised more general concerns over the safety and risks associated with homebirth practice and asked the NMBA to develop a policy statement on homebirth.
 - Subsequently AHMAC referred the matter to HPPPC for advice. HPPPC requested that the NMBA develop a Position Statement for Homebirth, and sought clarification on the status of the Safety and Quality Framework. NMBA has now endorsed the Safety and Quality Framework and negotiated with the peak midwifery professional body, the Australian College of Midwives (ACM), to develop the Position Statement.
 - The Position Statement was developed under a Funding Agreement between the department and the ACM, which required the ACM to consult with jurisdictions and other key stakeholders including the NMBA and the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists. The Agreement also required that the ACM refined the Position Statement based on recommendations and suggestions that were underpinned by an evidence base.
 - Departmental Officers have been involved in teleconferences with state and territory jurisdictions where the draft Position Statement has been discussed. There was general support that the Position Statement would allay concerns regarding the safety framework for PPMs.
-
- At the HPPPC Meeting on 5 July 2011, the Committee noted that an update on the development of the Homebirth Policy was accepted at AHMAC. The Committee also noted that the issue of indemnity insurance remained and that there was some pressure for the exemption to continue.

Division: Health Workforce Division
 Contact Officer: Bernadette Walker
 Phone No.: 02 6289 5473
 Cleared by (FAS): Maria Jolly
 Date: 28 July 2011