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Minister for Health and Ageing

MEDIA RELEASE

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Historic Step Forward for Midwives and Nurse Practitioners

Today is a landmark day for Australia's nurses and midwives, with the introduction of legislation that will give them access to the Medical Benefits Schedule (MBS) and Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) for the first time. These changes will provide all Australians with greater choice about their healthcare via improved access to the skilled services of our nurses and midwives.

This legislation is a key plank of the Government's \$120.5 million maternity reform package, improving the choices for Australian women in accessing high quality, safe maternity care, as well as providing support for the maternity services workforce.

The legislation will also facilitate the Government's \$59.7 million budget commitment to expand the role of nurse practitioners in Australia. Nurse practitioners will now be supported to work to their full potential and provide care in the most appropriate settings, such as aged care facilities, primary care settings or people's homes.

The legislation will also establish a new Government-supported professional indemnity scheme for eligible midwives.

These reforms are long overdue recognition of our highly skilled and capable nurse and midwifery workforce.

Removing barriers to the provision of care will lead to improved access and choice to services for the community.

Under the new arrangements, nurse practitioners and midwives wishing to provide treatment under Medicare and prescribe certain medicines under the PBS will need to demonstrate that they meet the eligibility requirements and that they have collaborative arrangements in place, including appropriate referral pathways with hospitals and doctors to ensure that patients receive co-ordinated care and the appropriate expertise and treatment as the clinical need arises.

The details of new Medicare items will be finalised in consultation with professions and specified in delegated legislation. The Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee will be consulted about the range of medicines that each group will be able to prescribe and the circumstances under which medicines can be prescribed. Advice will also be sought from clinical experts and health professionals practising in

the relevant clinical fields. Prescribing will be in accordance with State and Territory legislation.

In line with the Maternity Services Review Report, Medicare benefits and PBS prescribing will not be approved for deliveries outside clinical settings, and the Commonwealth-supported professional indemnity cover will not respond to claims relating to homebirths.

The new professional indemnity scheme for eligible midwives will be available from 1 July 2010 and the new Medicare and PBS arrangements will be available from 1 November 2010.

In addition to the Government's moves to improve choice in Maternity services in Australia without jeopardising our excellent record of safety and quality, \$6.6 million has been provided for research on maternity issues and to improve the maternity related data collected nationally.

In addition to that funding, \$800,000 has today been provided from the National Health Research Medical Council for the Australian Maternity Outcomes Surveillance System (AMOSS) for a national surveillance system to help us understand why serious illness occurs as a result of pregnancy or childbirth.

For all media inquiries, please contact the Minister's Office on 02 6277 7220.