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**Minister for Health and Ageing**

**MEDIA RELEASE**

21 February 2009

**Maternity Services Report**

Better services for Australian mothers and their babies are one step closer with today's release of the Government's report into maternity services.

The report follows a review led by Chief Nurse and Midwifery Officer Rosemary Bryant and is a key step in developing a national plan for maternity services.

The report is available here:

<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/maternityservicesreview-report>

The report focuses on the need to improve the choices available to pregnant women, access to high quality maternity services, and support for the maternity services workforce.

Australia remains one of the safest countries in the world in which to give birth. The review emphasises that changes to maternity care need to take place within a framework which maintains our strong record of safety and quality, and this will be a priority for the Government.

Recommendations include:

- Improving choice for Australian women by supporting an expanded role for midwives
- Consideration of the expansion of access to Medicare and the PBS for midwives – but only if accompanied by stringent professional requirements for midwives
- Consideration of support for professional indemnity insurance for midwives
- The development of new national cross-professional guidelines to support collaborative multidisciplinary care in line with best practice
- Consideration of the establishment of a single integrated pregnancy-related telephone support line
- Improved data collection and analysis, and further research
- Providing increased support for the maternity workforce, particularly in rural Australia

The report considered Commonwealth funding for homebirths but did not recommend it at this time.

All Australian women should be able to access high quality, safe maternity services, from early pregnancy through to postnatal care.

In 2006, 277,436 women gave birth to 282,169 babies in Australia – the highest number of births since 1971. This just underlines the importance of this report.

One of the Government's concerns is that good maternity health outcomes are not consistent across the country.

By developing a national Maternity Services Plan, we want to ensure that Australian mothers, wherever they live, are provided with the choices and care that they need.

Over 60 per cent of births currently take place in State-run public hospitals. The Maternity Services Plan will be developed over the coming months, and will involve discussions with the States and Territories.

The Maternity Services Review was conducted by the Department of Health and Ageing and led by Chief Nurse and Midwifery Officer, Rosemary Bryant.

It attracted more than 900 submissions from a range of stakeholders including health professionals, researchers, non-government organisations, representative organisations and individuals.

I would like to thank all those who have taken the time to provide their views to the Maternity Services Review. The large number of submissions demonstrates the depth of interest and passion on this topic.

The Australian Government will carefully consider all the recommendations of the report in the development of a National Maternity Services Plan.

The Rudd Government is committed to improving services for mothers and babies. Already, the Government has committed to investing:

- \$64 billion in health and hospitals – a 50 per cent increase in funding
- \$55 million towards a national Perinatal Depression plan
- \$2.5 million funding to help establish a national breastfeeding hotline
- Over \$100 million to improved Indigenous child and maternal health services

The report will be made available on the Department of Health and Ageing's website later today.

**For all media inquiries, please contact Sean Kelly on 0417 108 362**