



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY  
12<sup>th</sup> Assembly

**Petition**

Registration No.	24
Title	Birth choices in Darwin
Presented on	17 October 2013
Presented by	Ms Fyles (Member for Nightcliff)
Referred to	Minister for Health (Hon Robyn Lambley MLA)
Date referred	17 October 2013
Response due	20 February 2014
Response received	6 December 2013
Response to be presented	11 February 2014

**Petition**

Petition for Birth Choices in Darwin

The signatories below support birth choices for women. We believe that woman should have the right to decide where, how and with whom their baby is born, and be supported in that choice.

We request the following issues to be addressed;

- that Community Health Home Birth Service operations and services include unimpeded provision of care to women wishing to VBAC at all levels and in all settings;
- the immediate reinstatement of Home Birth after Caesarean as an option for birthing women through the Community Health Home Birth Service;
- the commencement of access to VBAC at the Darwin Birth Centre through the Community Health Home Birth Service;
- that consumer groups be engaged and consulted as a matter of process regarding any future changes made to maternity care in the Northern Territory;
- that wherever infrastructure and services allow, women are guaranteed access to the same birth choices across the Northern Territory; and
- that current legislation is amended to allow midwives to practice privately across the Territory in line with legislation Australia wide.

## Response

The Department of Health (DoH) provides a range of maternity care and birthing services for Darwin women including midwifery led care, home birth, the Community Midwifery Program, Midwifery Group Practice, Antenatal Clinic and Obstetric Services through the Maternity Service at Royal Darwin Hospital (RDH). The determining factor for the appropriate service provider for women is based on which service can provide safe and optimal care for the woman and her baby.

DoH has supported women to have the option for home birth by establishing a public home birth service in both Darwin and Alice Springs. These programs employ experienced midwives.

The Home Birth Service provides a birthing choice for women in accordance with the criteria of the Australian College of Midwives National Midwifery Guidelines for Consultation and Referral 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (2013) and the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (RANZCOG) recommendations. DoH supports midwifery care provided by all maternity services including the Home Birth Service to be safe, respectful, personalised and kind to women, their partners and their families. The midwives are guided by the principle that birth is a normal, physiological process and a culturally significant social event. The woman and her family are provided with care that shows respect for individual privacy, dignity, religious, social and cultural beliefs.

The petition has raised a number of issues, please find the responses below.

*Community Health Home Birth Service operations and services include unimpeded provision of care to women wishing to VBAC at all levels and in all settings*

Women seeking to access the Home Birth Service are carefully assessed for the program to ensure that they meet the criteria for an anticipated normal pregnancy and delivery. The midwives are the primary care givers responsible for their professional decision making. If problems occur during the pregnancy, birth or postnatal period the midwife will consult and refer appropriately.

RANZCOG recommendations for Planned Vaginal Birth after Caesarean Section do not support Trial of Labour after caesarean section in the home birth situation and this is not the practice in any other publicly funded home birth service.

RANZCOG recommendations state that the trial of labour should be carried out under a controlled environment in a delivery suite where the woman has access to continuous monitoring, intravenous therapy and ready access to the operating theatre.

*Immediate reinstatement of Home Birth after Caesarean as an option for birthing women through the Community Health Home Birth Service*

The Darwin Home Birth Service has in the past supported a small number of women to have a trial of labour following caesarean section. This is no longer supported by DoH Obstetric team and in the interests of safe practice will no longer continue.

The Darwin Home Birth Service will work with the Obstetricians and Midwifery team at RDH to provide the women who request individual care from the home birth service to develop a collaborative care plan consistent with the RANZCOG recommendations, maximising the continuity of care model for the women and minimising risk to mothers and babies.

*Commencement of access to VBAC at the Darwin Birth Centre through the Community Health Home Birth Service*

The Birth Centre at RDH provides a birthing facility for low risk births. It is on the ground floor of RDH and therefore geographically distant to the Delivery Suite where there is direct access to medical support. Currently the Birth Centre policy does not include access for women with high risk pregnancies to birth in this environment. This policy has been developed in collaboration with the Obstetricians and takes into account safety issues for the mother and baby.

That consumer groups be engaged and consulted as a matter of process regarding any future changes made to maternity care in the Northern Territory.

DoH Maternity Services values the partnership with consumers and consumer advice and input. Decisions regarding clinical practice and safety are the responsibility of the Health Practitioners who are regulated to be accountable for clinical care and the protection of public safety. Hence at times decisions are made in the best interest of the health and safety of mothers and babies that may not meet with the agreement of advocacy groups.

DoH, as part of the new departmental structure of health services, is currently developing the clinical networks to provide the forum for stakeholder involvement in the services. Consumer representatives will be invited to participate in the Maternity and Newborn Services Clinical Network.

*Wherever infrastructure and services allow, women are guaranteed access to the same birth choices across the Northern Territory*

The new services framework for DoH facilitates the integration of Maternity Services in the Top End and Central Australia. The service focus is based on the underpinning principles and vision of the National Maternity Services Plan. "Maternity care will be woman centred, reflecting the needs of each woman within a safe and sustainable quality system". The new structure will provide a safe and sustainable quality framework for the maternity service with a focus on primary care and services close to where women live.

*Current legislation is amended to allow midwives to practice privately across the Northern Territory in line with legislation Australia wide.*

I have directed DoH to prepare documentation to progress proposed legislative changes to enable privately practising midwives to practice in the Northern Territory.

Thank you for your interest in this issue. DoH is working towards ensuring that continuity of care models are provided for all women accessing maternity services and in particular those with more complex needs.