



## Petition

Registration No:	10
Title:	Closure of Ward 2 Birthing Services – Gove District Hospital
Presented on:	28 April 2009
Presented by:	Ms Walker
Referred to:	Health (Vatskalis)
Date referred:	28 April 2009
Response due:	13 August 2009
Response received:	13 August 2009
Response presented:	17 August 2009

### Petition

February 11 2009, Gove District Hospital announced the closure of Ward 2 at end of March due to an inability to retain and recruit Medical staff, GP proceduralists. **We, the residents of Nhulunbuy and East Arnhem Land are gravely concerned that our Maternity Services are closing.** Those who have accessed the service know it is second to none. The implications are dramatic. We acknowledge that a national shortage of skilled doctors exist and that GDH is in crisis but is enough being done? How long is it envisaged that the local service may be unavailable? We want transparency and to know what the outcome will be if the recruitment drive fails? What is the worst outcome? We have a wonderful team of Midwives here who provide high quality clinical care that we don't want to lose. A township comprised of mostly young families the service is essential to the tight-knit mining community of Nhulunbuy and its surrounding indigenous communities of East Arnhem Land. **It affects us all. Families are anxious, fearful and angered about the fore-closure.** We are concerned about the lack of options available under the proposed plan, the out of pocket expenses to families; loss of income, extra requirements for Annual Leave and Sick leave, staff shortages in the workplace, family separation, lack of family and social supports, logistics of travel and accommodation and the lack of continuity of care. We are concerned for reduced birthing options and rights and poor post birth support from fragmented services leading to a stressed family unit, reduced breastfeeding success rates and an increased risk for post natal depression. The Department for Health and Families (DHF) has not implemented the recommendations made by the Maternity Services Review for continuity of care and carer along with choice of birthplace as close to home as possible. We want the DHF to fulfil its promises of a single maternity service spanning antenatal, birthing services and postnatal care, and continuity of care and carer. We are being denied access to information about options for care to be able to make informed choices about the provider and the location of care. We want consumer consultation and participation. **We, the undersigned are calling on the NT Government and DHF to take action, we want GDH's Ward 2 birthing service to continue. The community of Nhulunbuy does not want to be severely compromised by losing its current service and having to fly to Darwin or Katherine Hospitals. It is not the only course of action.**

## Response

On 11 February 2009, Gove District Hospital announced that it could no longer provide a birthing service from 31 March 2009, due to an inability to recruit suitable qualified doctors with obstetrical skills. Although Gove District Hospital had no intention to close the maternity service, it was acutely aware of the national and international shortage of suitably qualified doctors.

This announcement was made early so that it could prepare the women in East Arnhem for a smooth transfer to the nearest centre should Gove District Hospital not be able to recruit doctors in time.

The closure of maternity services for the birthing of women in East Arnhem resulted in enormous pressure on the pregnant women, their partners and families, and resulted in some financial and social hardship. Gove District Hospital acknowledges and understands the strong cultural aspects of birthing and has worked extremely hard to restore birthing services in Nhulunbuy, focussing on the short and long-term goals.

It was unfortunate that Gove District Hospital was unable to avoid a temporary closure from 1 April to 4 May 2009. The hospital has now been able secure long-term locum cover until November 2009 and is looking to extend this to January 2010, in order that it can finalise a more permanent solution to the provision of maternity services for East Arnhemland.

Given that the only reason for closure of maternity services has been a recruitment/retention issue, there has not been any community consultation about alternative models of care with the community.