



Guidance for midwives regarding Homebirth Services

This Guidance should be read in conjunction with the *Australian College of Midwives' Position Statement on Homebirth Services 2011*.

The Guidance provides a number of practice points which midwives involved in the provision of homebirth services should follow.

The Guidance also provides an explanation of the professional accountability of midwives providing homebirth services and the responsibilities of local maternity services. Finally, details about the type and scope of information provided to women choosing to give birth at home are outlined along with the relevant guiding documents that govern and/or guide midwifery practice and maternity service provision in Australia.

A flowchart, adapted from one developed by the Australian College of Midwives in 2009 in consultation with key stakeholders, outlines a decision-making pathway for midwives when providing homebirth services (Flowchart 1).

Practice points

- Midwifery care will be provided in accordance with *National Competency Standards for the Midwife* (ANMC, 2006). The competency standards are the means by which the skills, knowledge and attributes of midwives are assessed.
- Midwives should use the *Australian College of Midwives National Midwifery Guidelines for Consultation and Referral* ('the Guidelines') in discussions with women, including the choice of place of birth.
- Consultation and referral will be recommended in accordance with the *Guidelines*. Issues identified as 'B' or 'C' are recommended for consultation and/or referral.
- Appendix A of the *Guidelines* provides explicit guidance for midwives in relation to what is expected should a woman decline a recommended course of action.
- Midwives have a responsibility to encourage women to consult widely and consider the possible benefits and risks of place of birth.
- Midwives have a responsibility to negotiate, plan and document appropriate local networks to facilitate timely consultation, referral and transfer. Where this is not possible, women need to be informed of an alternative plan and this should be documented.

- Midwives undertaking homebirths should have appropriate skills and equipment to manage maternity emergencies.
- It is recommended that midwives seek support within their professional networks and/or inform their insurance company when a woman chooses a course of action against evidence and/or advice.
- Midwives will maintain contemporaneous written clinical records documenting advice, observations, assessments and decisions to act or not to act based on clinical assessment. It is recommended that this documentation includes escalation and transfer plans.
- In the case of a transfer, midwives should provide a comprehensive handover to the receiving clinicians, including copies of relevant documentation.
- Midwives are encouraged to use hand held maternity records as a means to share comprehensive information with a woman and to facilitate collaboration.
- It is recommended that appropriate backup/partnership arrangements are in place.
- Midwives should encourage a woman to have ambulance cover to manage transfer to hospital should this be required. Cost implications should be discussed.

Professional accountability of midwives providing homebirth services

- The professional autonomy of the midwife rests with uncomplicated pregnancy and birth.
- Midwives are competent across the full scope of practice in accordance with the *Continuing Professional Development Registration Standard* of the NMBA.
- Midwives will plan and maintain their professional development including undertaking peer review such as the ACM's Midwifery Practice Review.
- Midwives should establish regular networking and educational opportunities with peers and colleagues.
- Midwives should comply with the *Professional Indemnity Insurance Registration Standard* of the NMBA which provides details about the requirement under section 129(1) where appropriate. The *National Law* provides for an exemption to the requirement for PII cover in respect of intrapartum care at home provided by Privately Practising Midwives. The *Safety and Quality Framework* has been approved by the NMBA to enable privately practising midwives to be exempted from PII arrangements under section 284 (1)(c)(ii) of the *National Law*.
- Midwives comply with local and State policies and laws that apply, including requirements to report clinical outcomes.
- Midwives should participate in clinical audit and case review processes with peers and others, including local referral hospitals where possible.

Professional accountability for midwives¹ in local maternity services:

- Provide opportunities for midwives providing homebirth services to participate in local professional development and risk management activities;
- All maternity care staff should be informed of the requirement to collaborate with, and support midwives who are transferring from a home setting;
- Provide access agreements so that midwives can continue to provide care if transfer to hospital is necessary;
- Have systems and processes to receive a detailed handover where midwives do not have access agreements;
- Ensure all maternity care staff are informed about the role of midwives who stay as support persons, particularly that the hospital clinical staff have responsibility for all clinical decision making and management.

Provision of information to women choosing to give birth at home

- Midwives have a responsibility to provide women with access to comprehensive, unbiased, up-to-date and evidence-based information to enable them to make informed decisions about all aspects of their care, including place of birth. Informed decisions may include issues of consent, the right of refusal of a recommended course of care; and the right to refuse care.
- Information should be provided in a way that the woman readily and easily understands and be culturally appropriate. Consideration should be given to the need for an interpreter where appropriate. Discussions should include the woman's family and supporters, as requested by the woman.
- Midwives should inform women of the terms of the contract under which midwifery care will be provided.
- The following information should be provided to women at the onset of their care, ideally in writing, followed up in discussion; and documented and signed by the woman:
 - Midwifery scope of practice
 - Philosophy of care
 - Rights and responsibilities of the midwife
 - Rights and responsibilities of the woman
 - Acknowledgement that the Australian College of Midwives National Midwifery Guidelines for Consultation and Referral is used
 - Information about the midwife's professional experience
 - Backup/partnership arrangements

¹ Midwives in this Guidance document includes midwifery managers, educators and academics

- Confidentiality and access to the woman's records (privacy agreement)
- Complaints or grievance processes
- Costs and financial arrangements (if relevant).
- Midwives should provide timely advice and assistance to the woman and her family with preparation of the home environment, and recommend equipment or supplies required to assist her labour and birth in that environment.

Guiding Documents

ACM National Midwifery Consultation and Referral Guidelines

ACM self-assessment tool (skills inventory)

AHMC National Maternity Services Plan

ANMC National competency standards for the Midwife

ANMC Code of professional conduct for midwives in Australia

ANMC Code of ethics for midwives in Australia

ANMC Professional Boundaries for Midwives

ANMC National Framework for the Development of Decision-Making Tools for Nursing and Midwifery Practice

NHMRC National Guidance on Collaborative Maternity Care

NMBA Safety and Quality Framework for privately practising midwives attending homebirths

Local maternity service policies as appropriate

State and Territory policies

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Flowchart: Decision-making for midwives providing homebirth services

