



Position Statement on Homebirth Services

This Position Statement should be read in conjunction with the *Australian College of Midwives' Guidance for midwives regarding homebirth services (2011)*.

The Australian College of Midwives supports the choice of midwife-attended homebirth as a safe option for women with uncomplicated pregnancies.

The ACM identifies 10 key principles for safe homebirth services.

Key principles

1. Midwifery care is woman-centred, and is a partnership between a woman and a midwife. The ACM believes that each and every woman should have access to midwifery continuity of carer.
2. Midwives provide midwifery care for women, their babies, and their families in all settings, including the home, consistent with the ICM Definition of a Midwife (2011).

"The midwife is recognised as a responsible and accountable professional who works in partnership with women to give the necessary support, care and advice during pregnancy, labour and the postpartum period, to conduct births on the midwife's own responsibility and to provide care for the newborn and the infant. This care includes preventative measures, the promotion of normal birth, the detection of complications in mother and child, the accessing of medical care or other appropriate assistance and the carrying out of emergency measures" (ICM 2011).

3. Midwives provide homebirth services in private and publicly-funded models.
4. Birth for women and their families is a major life event and a rite of passage that should be respected and facilitated. Women have a right to decide where they wish to give birth to their baby. It is important that all childbearing women have access to evidence based, unbiased information that includes the potential advantages and disadvantages of birth at home.
5. Care from a midwife with consultation, referral and transfer mechanisms is key to safety.
6. Midwives have a responsibility to establish appropriate consultation and referral processes and collaborative networks using the ACM National Midwifery Guidelines for Consultation and Referral.

7. Midwives have a responsibility to ensure that their decisions, recommendations and options of care are focused on the needs and safety of the woman and her baby.
8. Informed decision-making, informed consent, and right of refusal are accepted legal principles in Australia. Each and every woman has the right to make informed decisions, including consent or refusal of any aspect of her care. Women must be respected in the choices that they make.
9. ACM acknowledges that some women may choose a planned homebirth when this is not recommended by a health care provider. Women should continue to have access to midwifery care whatever their choice.
10. A midwife has the right to decline to continue to provide care according to their clinical judgment and skills, except in an urgent situation where this would compromise the safety of the woman or her baby. The midwife is encouraged to act as an advocate, in partnership with the woman, in helping her access further support, information and care.

Resources to guide practice

The ACM supports the use of the following resources to guide midwives in their practice:

- ACM National Midwifery Guidelines for Consultation and Referral
- ACM Philosophy for Midwifery
- ANMC National Competency Standards for the Midwife
- ANMC Code of Professional Conduct for Midwives
- ANMC Code of Ethics for Midwives
- ANMC Professional Boundaries for Midwives
- ANMC National Framework for the Development of Decision-Making Tools for Nursing and Midwifery Practice
- NHMRC Guidance on Collaborative Maternity Care
- NMBA Quality and Safety Framework

Achieving best practice

To achieve best practice in the provision of homebirth services, it is necessary for consumers, professional colleges, health systems, Australian and State and Territory governments and policy makers to work together to:

- foster a culture of valuing physical, emotional, social, cultural and spiritual safety in all birth environments;
- ensure that women have access to public and private midwifery services for planned homebirth;
- develop a responsive professional and regulatory framework to support midwives who provide homebirth services including when women choose a course of action against evidence and/or advice;
- ensure that all women have access to midwifery continuity of carer. This includes ensuring midwives have access agreements with all public and private maternity services to improve the safety and quality of care;
- restrict the provision of all maternity care to appropriately regulated and qualified maternity care providers; and,
- include cover for intrapartum care at home in the Australian government subsidised professional indemnity insurance scheme for midwives before 30 June 2013.

Date of Issue: 8 November 2011

Date of Review: 7 November 2014