

Publicly Funded Homebirth Position Statement



Importance/problem

Publicly funded homebirth (PFHB) programs are an important sector of maternity care in Australia. Homebirth with a Privately Practicing Midwife (PPM) is not a viable option for many women in Australia due to accessibility (not enough midwives providing this service, particularly in regional areas) and affordability.

Publicly funded homebirth programs provide women with an affordable way to birth at home in the care of registered midwives.

Publicly funded homebirth programs help to promote homebirth within communities as a safe option for birth. Many women who seek out the services of PPM's do so because of a previous negative experience birthing within the hospital system. Some women choose to freebirth rather than birth again within the hospital system, some choose this as a last resort because they can't afford or can't access the services of a PPM.

Although PFHB programs are an important option for women to be able to access, many women have reported negative experiences due to the restrictive policies of those programs. Hospitals have been known to reject women from their PFHB programs very late in their pregnancies due to manageable factors such as gestational diabetes, leaving them without a care provider and causing unnecessary stress for them and their families.

Our aims

We aim to have more publicly funded homebirth programs established around Australia to increase access and affordability of homebirth as an option for women and their families. We aim to improve the public perception of homebirth by normalizing it as a legitimate and safe model of care.

We aim to improve the experiences and satisfaction of women participating in existing PFHB programs by liaising with hospitals and the consumers who have participated in their PFHB programs.

How will we do this?

We will identify areas that would most benefit from the implementation of new PFHB programs, and areas where the consumer demand exists. We will engage with local consumer groups and assist them in gaining access to meet with their local hospital and LHD to discuss the possibility of establishing a PFHB program in their area. We will provide them with information and examples from established PFHB programs around the country and evidence based information on how PFHB could improve maternity outcomes and satisfaction for women in their health district.

We will provide feedback from consumers to hospitals with established PFHB programs and encourage them to review any policies that are repeatedly restricting women in their care. We will provide examples from other established PFHB programs where policies are less restrictive and the maternal outcomes remain positive.

Where are we now?

We have conducted a small survey of women within the Northern Sydney LHD and engaged with a local maternity consumer group, Mums @ Ryde. A member of the HBNSW committee and a representative from Mums @ Ryde have met with management of the LHD to discuss the possibility of establishing a PFHB program at Ryde Hospital. Further discussion and consumer engagement is planned for this in 2020.

We have gained inside knowledge on how a PFHB program is established by participating as consumer representatives in the steering committees for two other PFHB programs in the Sydney area. We have connections within various hospitals and LHD's that we plan to use to establish meetings and discuss the logistics of establishing new programs.