



9APR2021

Dear Attorney General,

Maternity Choices Australia (MCA), Maternity Consumer Network (MCN), Homebirth Queensland Inc (HBQ), Friends of the Birth Center QLD (FBC), Maternal Health Matters (MHM), and Maternal Scholars Australia (MSA) are writing this introduction letter, to congratulate you on your well-deserved recent appointment. We have been following along the introduction of the Queensland Human Rights Act 2019 and now the establishment of an independent taskforce to investigate coercive control laws. All groups are unfunded, and volunteer run and interested in consulting the taskforce.

For some background;

- Primary prevention for Domestic and Family Violence in pregnancy can be meaningfully improved through continuity of midwifery carer models (Appendix 1 by Kathleen Baird). This saves about \$1000/birth and there are about 60,000 births a year.
- Appendix 2 is our brief to the QHRC on the devastating impacts that coercion in the maternity system has had on pregnant women and our maternity consumer representatives for raising these issues.
- Women must be afforded informed consent free from coercion, disrespect and abuse. We include Appendix 3, HRiC submission to Australian Human Rights Commission on 'Violence against women in the provision of reproductive healthcare and the failure of state and legal accountability mechanisms to respect, protect and fulfil sexual and reproductive rights of women in the provision of health services'.
- In a statement published in 2014, the World Health Organization reported that disrespectful and abusive treatment occurs during childbirth in facilities and includes "*outright physical abuse, profound humiliation and verbal abuse, coercive or unconsented medical procedures (including sterilization), lack of confidentiality, failure to get fully informed consent, refusal to give pain medication, gross violations of privacy, refusal of admission to health facilities, neglecting women during childbirth to suffer life-threatening, avoidable complications...*"

The UN Special Rapporteur (2019) analyses the issue of mistreatment and violence against women in reproductive health services with a focus on childbirth and obstetric violence. She examines the root causes and structural issues that need to be addressed to combat such forms of mistreatment and violence. Recommendations to States and other stakeholders include, for example:

- adopting appropriate laws to combat and prevent mistreatment against women during childbirth and to prosecute perpetrators and provide reparations and compensation to victims;

- that States address the problem from a human rights perspective, and conduct an independent investigation into women's allegations of mistreatment and gender-based violence in health-care facilities; and
- ensuring health systems have the necessary budgetary resources to provide quality, accessible reproductive and maternal healthcare, thus ensuring that women's reproductive health needs and interests are met.

Specifically our groups see an immediate need in Queensland for;

1. The scope of this taskforce to include obstetric violence and a focus on shifting cultural attitudes to rights regarding maternity services.
2. Primary prevention to lower community and institutional violence through trauma informed care from a known midwife. This model of care (that women have been requesting for 30 years) is a protective factor utilizing affirmative consent affording a woman informed consent, two-way communication and greater confidence.
3. Education on bodily autonomy and consent in a healthcare setting should be included in respectful relationships and sex education in schools to reduce coercion, disrespect and abuse.

We hope to have the opportunity to discuss further during a wide and varied consultation period.

Yours sincerely,

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Appendix 1

Domestic and family violence outcomes with continuity of midwifery carer

<https://www.maternitychoices.org/advocacy>

Appendix 2

QHRC Brief

https://5e90d5c2-53bf-4d00-aec4-4b585e72f4bb.filesusr.com/ugd/369522_f10169bc2f114782bfcfdffb77b5ccb4.pdf

Appendix 3

World Health Organisation Report on Prevention and elimination of disrespect and abuse during childbirth

https://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/topics/maternal_perinatal/statement-childbirth-govnts-support/en/#:~:text=This%20law%20defines%20%E2%80%9Cobstetric%20violence,of%20the%20capacity%20to%20freely