

MEDIA RELEASE
23 November 2023



MCA welcomes announcement of publicly funded homebirths on the Sunshine Coast

Maternity Choices Australia (MCA) welcomes the announcement today by the Queensland Minister for Health, Shannon Fentiman MP, that the state government will be providing access to publicly funding homebirth through the Sunshine Coast University Hospital.

Today's announcement follows decades of advocacy by MCA and other consumer-led groups to expand access to safer, evidence-based models of maternity care for Queensland women and families in line with other states and territories in Australia.

Queensland is the only state that has never offered women access to publicly funded homebirths, which usually put families out of pocket by about \$6000.

This means many families, particularly those in rural and regional areas, are forced to travel vast distances to a hospital for maternity services, presenting many physical and emotional risks.

MCA's Qld President, Azure Rigney, said the news is a positive indication the Queensland government is listening to what women want.

'The voices of birthing women everywhere have been loud and clear, and what they want is more bodily autonomy and women-centred care,' Ms Rigney said.

'Homebirth has been shown through decades of research and evidence to have better outcomes for mothers and babies and is safe for women of all risk categories.

'We now hope with this really positive news today the Queensland government will move to provide more women from across the state access to out-of-hospital birth.'

The latest data from Queensland shows the government would save almost \$350 million per year if most women had access to a known midwife and out-of-hospital maternity care, taking pressure off an already overburdened hospital system.

The news today also comes against the backdrop of a growing number of freebirths taking place in the state, which means more women are birthing at home without any medical care, sometimes because they cannot afford private midwifery care or they have suffered iatrogenic physical or emotional harm in hospital facilities.

MCA eagerly anticipates the release of the film *Born at Home* in January, which was co-produced by Homebirth Queensland, as well as the 2024 Homebirth Australia Conference to be held on the Sunshine Coast.

Joining Maternity Choices Australia in efforts to lobby the Queensland government were the Maternity Consumer Network, Friends of the Birth Centre Qld, Homebirth Australia and Homebirth Queensland. We also acknowledge the decades of lobbying by past MCA Presidents including Peta Tuck, as well as many maternity veteran advocates like Bruce Teakle, Jo Smethurst and Mel Fox. Director of Midwifery at Queensland Health, Dr Jocelyn Toohill, who led the Queensland Birth Strategy, has also fought tirelessly for homebirth in Queensland.

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