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**From:** Better Births Illawarra  
**Sent:** Friday, 3 May 2024 2:57 PM  
**To:** Birth Trauma  
**Subject:** Final Report Key Recommendations - with Endorsements.  
**Attachments:** Key Recommendations Birth Trauma Inquiry Report.pdf

Dear Honourable Select Committee members,

Please see attached the updated letter now with logos from organisations endorsing the key recommendations.

Yours Sincerely

**Sharon Settecasse**  
Director of Community Engagement  
Better Births Illawarra  
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# Access to empowered birth is the immediate priority.

May 2024

Dear Honourable Select Committee members,

Better Births Illawarra is a community organisation committed to ensuring women in NSW have access to empowered births. A necessary part of that is to see preventable birth trauma eliminated.

Through our work with women and birthing people<sup>1</sup> and their families, we know women in and out of the Illawarra do not have access to empowered births. Alongside these women, we worked to expose the heart-wrenchingly high rates of birth trauma in NSW.



Better Births Illawarra has played a key role in ensuring the inquiry heard firsthand the experiences of women birthing in our communities and across the NSW health system. We helped thousands of everyday women and families make often very painful submissions of their own traumatic birth experiences. We sat with women, cried with women, translated for women. We attended every hearing, supporting these women to give evidence alongside supporting the communities affected by birth trauma and the inquiry.

Through Better Birth Illawarra's experience working with birthing women, we understand that the issues facing women in the Illawarra affect women statewide. From Wagga Wagga to Byron Bay, we know women and families are experiencing trauma at the hands of our maternity care system.

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<sup>1</sup> From herein the term woman or women refers to females and is inclusive of birthing people who identify along the gender spectrum.

The hearings of the Legislative Council Select Committee on Birth Trauma, including the evidence of the many courageous women, have exposed the heart-wrenchingly high rates of birth trauma in NSW and the effects it has on our communities. The Committee's work and the evidence presented demand an immediate and meaningful response from both the NSW health system and the Government.

**Every NSW woman must have access to empowered birth. This requires woman-centred and evidence-based changes be made to ensure respectful maternity care in NSW, including:**

- **Universal access to continuity of midwifery carer models offered at all public hospitals:** All women, regardless of risk profile, have access to continuity of midwifery carer models throughout pregnancy, birth, and postpartum. This model is proven to reduce birth trauma, improve outcomes for mothers and babies, save money, and increase midwives' job satisfaction. Expansion of this existing model includes incentivised targets and service level agreements.
- **Reduced unnecessary medical interventions in the perinatal period:** Legislative, policy, and practice changes ensure medical interventions are offered only when clinically necessary or maternal-informed choice is exercised, including using targets to align NSW intervention rates with international standards (i.e. caesareans, inductions, episiotomies, and instrumental births) and bundled maternity funding to stop incentivising over-servicing
- **Obstetric violence legislation introduced:** Provide legal recourse for women who experience violence in maternity settings, including recognition of obstetric violence as gendered violence. This includes aligning policy and practice with international human rights obligations.
- **Quality maternity care is delivered that ensures a woman gives true informed consent:** All care provided respects a woman's bodily autonomy, dignity, guarantees their confidentiality and is sensitive to their needs and perspectives, all maternity care professionals must undertake mandatory training on informed consent, policies and guidelines must be reviewed and amended if found unsupportive of consent and body autonomy..
- **Publicly funded homebirth in all hospitals:** Regardless of risk profile or geographical location, women must have access to homebirth. This includes access to Birthing on Country facilities and stand alone birth centres.
- **All women receive trauma-informed care:** Trauma-informed care must be accurately reflected and prioritised, including implement ongoing mandatory training for all maternity care practitioners including capacity building in bereavement support, supporting sexual abuse survivors and survivors of previous birth trauma.
- **All First Nations women experience culturally safe and responsive maternity care:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women need to receive culturally safe and responsive maternity care, including improving access to wrap-around Birthing on Country programs, pathways for First Nations midwives and addressing racism in policies and practise.
- **Specialised support for marginalised communities:** Specialised services for refugee and CALD families, address racial and social stereotyping, resource effective language and literacy barriers, support for women living with a disability, address barriers for LGBTIQ+ families, and increase diversity in the midwifery workforce.
- **Timely and tailored access to publicly-funded postnatal support for all:** Families (including fathers/partners) need to be provided with physical, psychological, and emotional support

postpartum based on preferred choices of services including; birth debriefing, physiotherapy, lactation advice, neuroprotective early parenting support, bereavement support, and psychology.

- **Transparency and accountability measures introduced in maternity care:** Systems to be implemented to document and address obstetric violence including; improve complaints procedures, involve consumer representative groups in decision-making from inception, and embed the latest research and best practice faster. The creation of a Chief Midwife role in the NSW Health Department is necessary for the oversight of these measures.
- **Evidence-based birth education tailored to all families:** Women need to have access to evidenced based birth education, which includes information on all pregnancy, birth, and postpartum options, as well as how to achieve their birth preferences.
- **All women are supported to access their birth preferences:** Women can access publicly funded care in their preferred location that supports their birth choices, including vaginal breech, vaginal births after caesarean (VBACs), water births, and Caesareans.
- **Address midwifery workforce challenges:** Staff shortages must be addressed by increasing university access and through paid student midwife placements. Core retention issues must be addressed by increasing pay, altering ratios, improving professional safety and wellbeing. This includes debriefing and psychological care to address vicarious trauma, and facilitating pathways for working in preferred models of evidence-based care.

These key changes to our maternity health system must be implemented and funded to ensure women can access empowered births in NSW. The health system, the government, and key medical stakeholders have a clear choice. The generations of women who have suffered and continue to suffer the debilitating effects of preventable birth trauma, including the thousands of women who supported this Committee, have waited long enough.

**Better Births Illawarra**

[www.betterbirthsillawarra.org.au](http://www.betterbirthsillawarra.org.au)

## Organisations endorsing the key recommendations.



- Better Births Illawarra
- Waminda South Coast Women’s Health and Wellbeing Aboriginal Corporation
- Maternity Choices Australia
- Hygieia Health Ltd
- Disability Maternity Care
- Peaceful Birth Partnership
- Homebirth Australia
- Homebirth NSW
- Brave Psychology
- Illawarra Baby & Child Loss Support
- BEST Birth Experiences Study
- Australian Midwifery and Maternity Alliance
- Maternal Health Matters
- The Still Nest
- Newcastle Birth Movement

ENDS.

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**From:** Better Births Illawarra  
**Sent:** Tuesday, 7 May 2024 1:23 PM  
**To:** Birth Trauma  
**Subject:** Request to include one more key recommendation in Final Report

Dear Hon Select Committee members,

We omitted an important detail in our Key Recommendations document we emailed last week.

Can you **please add the following to the point on: Transparency and accountability measures introduced in maternity care:** Systems to be implemented to document and address obstetric violence including; improve complaints procedures, involve consumer representative groups in decision-making from inception, and embed the latest research and best practice faster. The creation of a Chief Midwife role in the NSW Health Department is necessary for the oversight of these measures.

Please add:

- **For the *Connecting, Listening and Responding: A Blueprint for Action - Maternity Care in NSW* meeting minutes and membership of the Maternity Expert Advisory Group (MEAG) and the Maternity Consumer Reference Group (MCRG) be published on the appropriate website directly after each meeting.**

This request comes as the MEAG and MCRG was announced after submissions closed and we expect this process to be transparent with all stakeholders, including mothers who have suffered trauma. It is not something stakeholders should have to request through GIPA and we believe it will increase trust, accountability and transparency. .

Please let me know if you need any information or have questions.

Warm Regards,  
Sharon Settecasse  
Director of Community Engagement  
Better Births Illawarra  
[www.betterbirthsillawarra.org.au](http://www.betterbirthsillawarra.org.au)