

Submission  
No 873

## INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

**Name:** Name suppressed

**Date Received:** 11 August 2023

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Partially  
Confidential

My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am a mum of 2 and a womens health physiotherapist.

I work in a role where I see women carrying birth trauma in an almost frequency. For some it happened 6 weeks ago, for other it was 40 years ago but they have only just started to seek help for injuries that occurred at the birth of their first born.

Women falling pregnant are not provided enough support to help prepare their bodies, or minds, for birth and are NOT provided enough education to help them make informed choices at the birth of their children. We talk about informed consent but how can a woman possibly give informed consent to a procedure taking place when she is in the heights of labour when she has little knowledge of what it is and the potential risks to her own body before this point?! It is not a matter of scaring women but informing them and giving them tools and information before the birth so they can make INFORMED CHOICE at the time they need to. We are lucky to live in a time when we have access to interventions to improve maternal and child mortality during labour and birth and I do believe that perhaps sometimes healthcare providers are worried about using it when they actually really should! Other times it is simply not indicated and puts the woman at risk of complications and birth trauma.

When someone comes to see me postpartum and is carrying birth trauma she has been forgotten and 'dumped at the side of the road' by the already massively under strain health system. She has not had a birth debrief, been given access to counselling, been given an appointment with a qualified women's health Physio to help her heal from her injuries. They have not been told about the Australasian Birth Trauma Association or anything. Just left to care for a tiny newborn or in some devastating instances left with an empty cot and a 'broken' body and a whole heap of shame that she 'should' be ok because surely this is what happens to everyone right.

The physical toll of not healing their body (because no one actually tells them how to heal themselves after a birth other than 'do pelvic floor') can prevent them from returning to exercise they would normally do which in the long run will help prevent other long term health conditions. Women NEED to be doing resistance and impact training BEFORE they reach menopause to maintain their bone density, muscle mass and cardiovascular health. Once we are having those hormonal changes the risk for these things only increases.

As for pelvic floor...well....a sheet of paper telling them to do them is simply not enough. They don't understand that their pelvic floor has stretched over 9 months and that it will take approximately 12 weeks before the stretch returning to more of a pre pregnancy state. They don't all know how to actually switch their pelvic floor on, how their breathing and coordination with their diaphragm is so important, that their pelvic floor can be avulsed from the bone or actually go into hypertonicity and cause issues like pain with sex. Speaking of which can we have some accountability from obstetricians about their perineum tear repairs?! I have sent women back due to a break down or 'gap' in the stitches only for their

male OB to say 'oh it's only cosmetic' when actually it's causing them pain. What if a man was left with a hole in his penis after surgery and we told him oh don't worry it's only cosmetic!

I know I am getting frustrated writing this so let me gather my thoughts and come back to the point.

The health system is massively over stretched and midwives are not given enough time with patients, education on current research or enough pay to help women in pregnancy on their own. Women are not provided with enough support postpartum and a 6 week check with a GP who is also overstretched and not specialised in the area of pelvic floor and post partum recovery is simply not enough.

I believe that women should be able to attend a clinic in pregnancy where they have access to midwives, pelvic floor physios, dieticians and an OB (for high risk). They should get free birth prep courses such as Calmbirth, hypnobirth, she births, Australian birth stories. Postpartum I believe EVERY WOMAN should have at least an appointment with a pelvic floor trained Physio at 6 weeks postpartum which is subsidised by Medicare, a birth debrief and access to counselling which is Medicare subsidised. They need to have more than 5 sessions split between multiple disciplines, how are they expected to chose between their mental health and their physical health?!

Please look after our women. I look forward to a day where I have less tears in clinic from broken women from a broken system.

Regards