

Submission
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INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

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Partially
Confidential

I am 30 weeks into my first pregnancy. I have many friends and family who have given birth in NSW and I have watched how many of them have ended up with interventions they didn't want or don't even know why they had them, they were just done to them. They weren't given adequate, evidence-based information to make an informed decision and often the way their care providers interacted with them, they didn't even realise they had a choice or that they could say no. They've come away scared, making choices based on fear and in some cases ended up traumatised. Medical interventions should only be done after informed consent has been given by the person receiving the intervention but it seems this often doesn't happen in the maternity system and people are coerced into procedures, particularly induction, without even being given a medical reason.

I have one friend who assumed that the maternity care system was there to support her and put the interests of her and her baby first (which of course should be true) but shockingly realised after her first birth that this was not the case. For subsequent pregnancies, all her birth preparation was around learning to advocate for herself and skilling up her partner to advocate for her because they felt they had to fight the system in order to be able to have their choices carried out. It shouldn't be this way. Women should be supported and nurtured through what can be a very vulnerable journey.

I also know a midwife who was reported by an obstetrician as being obstructive, officially reprimanded and had to get legal representation to clear her name and continue practicing after she intervened to support a woman who had said no three times to a vaginal examination but the obstetrician was still trying to go ahead with it. Putting your fingers in someone's vagina when they've said no is sexual assault whether you're a doctor or not but instead of the doctor getting reported, the person who supported the woman's choice did.

The further I have gotten into my pregnancy and the more I have read and researched, the more I have come to realise the large amount of birth trauma that comes out of the mainstream maternity system. People feel disempowered and dehumanised going through it and it seems misinformation abounds. Subsequently, I do not feel safe to give birth in hospital and so am choosing to birth at home. I live on the [redacted] in Sydney and the only option for home birth here is with a private midwife. I am having an amazing experience, we have long, regular appointments with our midwife who is really getting to know us as people and as a couple. I feel safe and supported knowing that the same person who is doing all our antenatal care will attend our birth as well as provide us with postnatal care in our home. I know I will have a much calmer and more relaxed birth that will better support natural birth physiology because I have an established relationship with my care provider and they know my choices in advance. While I am grateful to be having this experience, it comes at a high financial cost with private midwives costing around \$6500 which is obviously an insurmountable barrier to a lot of people. Many pregnant people don't even know this option is available. The hospitals and GPs I asked were unable to assist me in finding this option and even if they were, private midwives are few and far between.

I strongly encourage the committee to look into the research on the benefits of continuity of midwifery care models (I had originally thought I would just try and get into a hospital midwifery group practice, I tried and wasn't able to even though I put my name down really early) as well as the benefits of doulas. Making these options widely available and publicly funded as well as giving all people the option to birth at home under the public system, would make a huge positive difference. We all start our lives by being born and for birth to be a

positive, empowering experience instead of a traumatising one, sets the stage for confident parenting and happy childhoods and the ripple effect of this through society would be huge.