



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, AGEING AND COMMUNITY SERVICES  
Ms Bec Cody MLA (Chair), Mrs Vicki Dunne MLA (Deputy Chair)  
Ms Caroline Le Couteur MLA

## Submission Cover Sheet

### Inquiry into Maternity Services in the ACT

**Submission Number: 75**

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Dear members of the committee,

I am a mother of two boys, one aged 3.5yrs and the other who will be 1yr on the 5/11/19.

After becoming pregnant with my first child, I put myself on the waitlist for the CATCH program at The Canberra Hospital and was unsuccessful. I then found myself an obstetrician who I felt very comfortable with and after explaining to him my wishes for the the way I wanted to birth, being as natural as possible, he recommended that I look into Queanbeyan Hospital to birth as it aligned with what I wanted plus I was a low risk pregnancy.

So after enquiring with Queanbeyan and going for a visit there, we made the decision that we would continue on there. This is where I also had my second baby.

The reason I am writing to this inquiry is because I was fortunate to have 2 great birthing experiences. Yes, I believe Queanbeyan was the right hospital for us but I also put this down to the preparation I did throughout my pregnancy to get myself physically, mentally and emotionally ready.

There were some complications after my second birth, I had a retained placenta (which I wasn't even aware of) so after delivering my baby naturally with no synthetic pain relief and a lot of manual manipulation to try and get my placenta to detach, I ended up in theatre with a spinal block so that my placenta could be removed manually. Definitely not what I was expecting and not the most pleasant thing to go through, but I still look back on that birth experience as a positive one.

Through working with women in this space (I teach prenatal and postnatal yoga), I have heard too many stories where women (and men) are left traumatised by the experience of birthing their babies. It makes me extremely upset/frustrated/angry to think that there are so many people that have a traumatic experience at a time when they are bringing a new life into the world. This should be an empowering, euphoric and joyful day to be remembered with positive feelings not negative ones.

Yes, I know that not everyones birth goes the way they planned, and I am by no means suggesting that the preparation I am talking about can guarantee an outcome. What I am saying is that with the right preparation, the birthing outcome may be the same, but the experience can be completely different.

I truly believe that by empowering women to understand the physical process of birth, they feel confident to ask questions if/when something doesn't feel right. They can be a part of the decisions rather than feeling dismissed or disregarded. All women should have the tools so that they can cope with feelings of anxiety, nerves, discomfort etc and be able to stay calm or have the self awareness so that when they do not feel calm, they can get themselves back to this place.

What I would like to see change, is that every woman (and their partner) be provided with classes so that they can learn these tools that will not only help throughout pregnancy (as a lot of women struggle during this time) and labour, but will also help them in the early stages of motherhood and ongoing. Obviously there are services out there like prenatal yoga and calm birth, but not all women have the ability to access these due to the cost. The government offers hospital classes so everyone knows what the hospital environment looks like, what a pair of forceps looks like, if/when you can request an epidural etc.. but there is no education or emphasis placed on the mental health and wellbeing of mothers and how they can use natural ways to get through labour child birth.

There is plenty of research to back up a natural approach; less intervention needed, lower % of c-section births and lower rates of pre/postnatal anxiety or depression. Which ultimately is a great thing for our hospitals as it frees up services that can be used elsewhere.

I feel that there is not enough support for the women that do not get into the birth centre, CATCH program or have the funds to work with a private midwife, obstetrician or doula. It is every

woman's right to have a positive experience and I want to do everything I can to make sure this is the case.

Thank you for your time to read this.

Jenni Clearihan