



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

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: 14

Date Authorised for Publication: 05.02.2019

Joan Garvan, PhD (ANU)

14th January, 2019

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Inquiry Into the Maternity Services in the ACT

Terms of Reference: Relevant experiences & learnings from other jurisdictions

Numerous studies on the Transition to Parenthood have found that the birth of an infant is ‘a critical life stage’ that is often experienced as overwhelming. There is a gap between the expectations and the experience of new mothers. An international body of research on the TtoP found issues arising from marital dissatisfaction, high levels of depression, concerns related to life course (particularly for women), and difficulties with sharing housework. There is a significant body of literature on issues that are raised for women in regard to their identity as mothers and associated difficulties in what I have called ‘finding a line between self and baby’.

Further to this, there is a spike in domestic violence when women are pregnant and in a high proportion of DV cases there are young children in the family. Midwives and Maternal and Child Health Nurses can play an important and mediating role in preventative strategies.

Recommendations made in an earlier submission on Domestic Violence in the ACT were:

- Expand and develop Baby Makes 3 program - need for practitioners to strengthen core couple relationship during the early years after the birth of an infant so as to facilitate communication and cooperation;
- Need for professional development training for midwives, Maternal and Child Health Nurses and GPs so practitioners might assist women and men to identify and alleviate violence within families;
- ACT Primary Health Network to coordinate communication and collaboration and to deliver information across the health sector;
- Need for funding to run volunteer peer support programs for young families in the ACT (for example: Family Connect (NSW), Good Beginnings, Benevolent Society).

QEII in the ACT are currently running a Relax into Parenting and Baby Makes 3 program that has been evaluated and found to have positive outcomes. The program, however, unfortunately only reaches a small proportion of families who birth in the ACT each year.

The birth of an infant is an event of high social and cultural significance. Midwives and Maternal and Child Health Nurses are important touchstones between our health and welfare system and new families. There is a need for a holistic response to pregnancy and birth with

better support for young families and improved links between health and welfare practitioners. The indigenous First 1000 Days program is providing leadership in this regard. Particularly in this early 21st century our system is failing new families if they do not respond to issues raised by the Transition to Parenthood and support for young families.

The Women's Centre for Health Matters resource 'Having a Baby in Canberra' is a valuable guide to information and services for pregnant women and their families. I believe there is a need to advertise and/or circulate information about this more widely so as to reach a larger audience.

See further information and references in the attached document: 'Perinatal Depression and the Transition to Parenthood' and in my submission to the earlier Domestic Violence and Gender Inequality Inquiry in the ACT.

Sincerely, Joan Garvan