



**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: 68**

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The Committee Secretary  
Standing Committee on Health  
Ageing and Community Services  
Legislative Assembly for the ACT  
GPO Box 1020  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

The Committee Secretary,

Thank you for receiving my submission for the Inquiry into Maternity Services in the ACT.

I am detailing my traumatic birth and the terrible aftercare I received at The Canberra Hospital in May 2018. I am suffering from birth trauma in the way of anxiety and PTSD, formally diagnosed in April 2019, from the events surrounding and following the birth at The Canberra Hospital.

Here is a brief summary of my experience:

- My son was born at the Canberra hospital on Saturday 19 May 2018 via emergency c section.
- The birth was traumatic as it lasted over 45 hours from my waters breaking naturally, being induced, undertaking many types of pain relief with minimal effect, 2 failed epidurals until the third was effective, pushed for 2 hours, forceps were attempted which failed, ended in emergency c-section.
- Discharged 3 days later while I was still heavily overmedicated on Tramadol.
- Discharged although my milk had not come in and I was unable to feed my baby.
- I have anxiety and PTSD resulting from my experience, and am currently on the wait list to be seen by ACT Health psychologists as I cannot afford weekly psychologist appointments, which I believe I need at this time.

Here are the key issues that contributed to my birth trauma:

- I never felt well informed about pregnancy or what to expect in labour during my midwife appointments.
- My labour was unnecessarily drawn out, and I believe could have been ended via c-section much earlier than it was.
- I was not informed at any point during labour that my son was in a posterior position which would have influenced my choices and decisions during labour.
- I believed I was having a c-section but the surgeon told me he would use forceps at the last minute.
- I was verbally shouted at by the surgeon telling me that I was not pushing hard enough while he was trying to remove my son with forceps. He told me he would try twice, but I counted 6+ times he tried to pull out my son.
- At this point I had been awake for over 50 hours, pushed for 2 hours, had my epidural topped up, and later told by a Canberra Hospital Obstetrician at my birth review, that the baby was 100% stuck and forceps should not have been attempted. I experience traumatic flashbacks particularly of this memory.
- I was not informed of what exactly was happening to my baby for me to give informed consent. I felt immensely pressured by the staff that I needed to consent to the use of forceps, that there was a sense of urgency for their use. I was terrified to have them, a foreign object, shoved into my body, and as my baby was well and truly stuck, undertaking a calm non emergency c-section at this point would have been much less traumatic. However I was not given the opportunity or the right to decide. Loss of control over my body and self-determination has left me feeling violated.
- I was heavily overmedicated after my birth and was barely aware of my surroundings. I was unable to process what had just happened to me, and this prevented me from bonding with my son.

- The nursing staff were abrupt, rude completely lacking of decency, compassion and care and I was treated like an inconvenience to them. I did not feel cared for by the nursing staff during my hospital stay. I was left feeling violated, like an animal on show, with nurses walking in on me privately showering without my consent.
- My sons severe lip and tongue tie was not assessed for, identified or treated in hospital, so I was unable to continue to feed him due to intense pain I suffered from his inability to latch, despite the level of pain killers I was taking. This is something that should have been assessed for as soon as breastfeeding issues arose and should have been addressed prior to being discharged.
- I was discharged before I could feed my son and was guilted by nursing staff to continue to attempt breastfeeding despite the presence of lip and tongue tie, lack of milk production and myself, barely coping after the birth experience.
- There was no support offered once I was home on how to best feed my baby.
- There was no resources provided or information on how to access an ACT Health psychologist or my surgeon, or information on how to organise a hospital debrief at a later date when I was physically, emotionally and mentally ready.

I hope that you can understand how an experience that should be the most life changing thing to happen to me, becoming a mother, has been an incredibly long journey towards mental recovery.

Still 18 months after my baby has been born, I have not gone a day without having some form of horrific flashback of my labour or when I was 'recovering' in hospital.

I truly believe that when at The Canberra Hospital if I had received more informed care during labour, ample after care, and prompt access to lactation consultants and psychologists, that I would have been equipped to cope far better with the traumatic birth. I believe the horrible after care, or complete lack of care, was the main contributor to my trauma.

Thank you for reading my submission, and if you would like me to appear in person to provide more information I would be happy to do this. I am pleased that I can contribute my story to hopefully improve ACT maternity services and prevent this experience from being repeated.

Thank you for taking the time to read my submission.

# **My experience giving birth in May 2018 at The Canberra Hospital, and being part of the Canberra Midwifery Program (CMP):**

## **Canberra Midwife Program (CMP):**

- After every single midwife appointment, I walked out of the hospital and cried. I was constantly overwhelmed because I was told no information at these appointments. They usually lasted 15 minutes and whenever I asked about anything birth related and was told “I would get that information at the hospital classes”. These classes were held in March when I was 30 weeks onwards. At each appointment I was asked would I breastfeed, yet I had been given no information on breastfeeding. When I asked when I would get information on it, I was again told by the midwife “I would get the information at the hospital class. There was a whole night dedicated to breastfeeding”.
- I had been given the wrong date and times for a midwife appointment more than once. My midwife was often scrambling through my appointments and trying to schedule me in quickly.
- I had two different midwives see me intermittently, one midwife always measuring me a month ahead so both times I saw her, she requested I get an ultrasound. The first time it was bulk billed. The second time I saw the form wasn't requested to be bulk billed so I texted my main midwife asking if there was a way for the form to be re-done so I could get it bulk billed again. I was told, “Sorry the form has already been issued”. I had to pay approximately \$200 out of pocket expenses for the ultrasound when I knew it could be bulk billed which was an unnecessary expense to an already financially costly time. This demonstrated poor patient service and how my wishes were perceived as inconvenient to the midwife.

## **The Canberra Hospital Antenatal Classes:**

- At The Canberra Hospital Birth Centre, the classes portrayed that all births were the textbook straight forward birth, and intervention was rare and often not needed. Contrary to current literature and statistics.
- These classes also talked down to using formula and pain relief. I believe these classes need to be more unbiased to formula/interventions/pain relief. Every women and every birth is different, and women do not need to feel pressured or guilty by midwives, before they are even giving birth. Information should be given on breastfeeding and feeding your baby formula. Women have a choice and they should be given unbiased advice in order to make an informed decision that suits their circumstances, especially when their circumstances change. Eg. traumatic birth, feeding issues , etc.
- One class on breastfeeding is not enough given the huge push by The Canberra Hospital and ACT Health Maternity services to breastfeed. If there is such an emphasis on it by health professionals, this should be reflected in providing ample support services to women to assist in this journey
- Lip and tongue tie should be discussed with parents to be, on how to identify, how it can interfere with traditional breastfeeding, how this can be managed and who to seek help from ect. Of course this should be something assessed by health practitioners before being formally discharged from hospital.

## **Admitted at The Canberra Hospital and being induced:**

- I was admitted late Friday night and induced as I had not progressed much (or at all) with my labour at home despite extremely painful contractions over the last 24 hours.
- The midwife I had seen for most of my appointments was on leave that weekend so I had another midwife attend.
- She did not offer much support or encouragement during the labour process. I honestly wasn't sure what her role was in a birth as I felt like I was going through everything alone.
- To administer the epidural, the anaesthetist took an hour from start to finish. The first 2 attempts were unsuccessful and resulted in positive aspirations; blood was coming out the needle. He tried again for the third and final time, it was successful. It was extremely difficult and psychologically stressful to be bent over for such a period of time, while suffering constant back to back contractions and thinking if I moved I could severely damage my spine.
- My husband told me after that the anaesthetist's hands were shaking while he was administering the epidural needle and kept saying "Oh, how strange. This has never happened to me before," which is NOT what you want to hear when someone is inserting a giant needle into your spine which may have irreversible consequences.
- At one point the epidural machine stopped and none of the staff realised. My husband had to go out of the room and find a midwife to ask her to get it fixed as I was in excruciating pain again. He couldn't find her so asked a nurse who said she would send someone in to fix it and no one ever came. Approximately 30 minutes later my husband went back out to find someone to come and fix it and eventually someone came.

## **Pushing**

- Once I felt the urge to push, I pushed for 2 hours, despite having had an epidural, and had been awake for over 48 hours by this point. I was encouraged by the midwife and believed that if I could just muster my last ounce of energy, that my baby was to be born at any minute.
- I was told at the 2 hour mark he seemed to be stuck and a surgical opinion was needed.
- No one at any point during labour, had checked the position of my baby until I had pushed for 2 hours.
- A doctor/surgeon came in and said I would need a surgical intervention as my son was stuck, and I would need to go to theatre for a c-section.
- I was not informed at any point during labour that my son was in a posterior position which would have influenced my choices and decisions during labour.
- My son's heart rate was always stable throughout labour and pushing so I did not feel any sense of urgency from the doctor/surgeon at this point when they were telling me this information.

## **Forceps and c-section**

- I was unplugged from the epidural and the pain was horrific. I was screaming while I was being wheeled to the theatre.
- While I was being wheeled through the hospital I was given consent paperwork to read and sign for the c-section. I was in so much pain I couldn't see straight let alone read, but I didn't really have a choice I had to sign it as I needed this pain to be over.

- Once we got into the theatre my husband was made to stay outside and this filled me with panic. I was so scared and distressed in this moment at the thought of going through a surgery alone. I had to beg them to get my husband a few times until they let him back into the surgery.
- Once I was on the table and had my epidural topped up again, the surgeon told me he was going to use forceps to try to get my son out.
- I believed I was having a c-section but the surgeon told me he would use forceps at the last minute. This made me feel like I had to have forceps, that there was a sense of urgency. I was terrified to have them shoved into my body, and as my baby was well and truly stuck, undertaking a calm non emergency c-section at this point would have been much less traumatic. I was not given the opportunity to decide.
- The surgeon said he said he would try 2 times. I recall that he pulled with the forceps approximately 6 times, and he was using great force. My husband told me that he had one leg up on the bed to leverage his body weight while he was trying to pull out my son.
- I told the surgeon I couldn't feel anything while I was pushing but he was yelling at me and saying that I was not pushing hard enough while he was trying to remove my son with forceps. He told me he would try twice, but I counted 6+ times he tried to pull out my son.
- At this point I had been awake for over 50 hours, pushed for 2 hours, had my epidural topped up. It made me wonder did the surgeon know this. I was later told by a Canberra Hospital Obstetrician at my birth review, that the baby was 100% stuck and forceps should not have been attempted. I experience flashbacks particularly of this memory.
- The attending surgical staff in the theatre were all excellent, they did help me calm down as they were prepping me for the c-section and during the c-section.
- I did get to hold my son immediately following his birth, which I am very thankful for.

### **Aftercare at The Canberra Hospital:**

- I did not feel any care from the nursing staff. They were very abrupt bordering on rude. It seemed an inconvenience to need them to explain what was happening with my stay and my recovery.
- I had one nurse come into the bathroom and interrupting my first shower that I had in over 3 days. She came into the bathroom and gave me my medicine as it "saved her coming back once I was done" with the shower. I had just had my son attempted to be ripped from my body with foreign objects and my respect for privacy was worth less than a nurses time.
- I was very traumatised by my birth and I did not have any of the nursing staff ask me how I was doing.
- The morning after I had my son, the surgeon came to provide me a debrief. I was so traumatised from the experience I just sat there while he talked about what had happened. I was in no condition to listen to my whole traumatic experience be relived so soon. I was not provided any information on how to organise a debrief in the future when I might feel ready.
- I cried most of the time I was in hospital and the nurses organised the hospital counsellor to come and speak with me. She was lovely but I really needed more hands on support right then and there with how to feed and care for my baby. I didn't have the mental energy to debrief about my birth, I needed support to learn how to feed my baby.

## **Feeding Complications**

- On feeding I immediately felt intense stabbing pain from my son's first 'latch,' despite being heavily medicated ? I was told this was normal.
- The breastfeeding was so intensely painful I couldn't continue after being in so much pain during my long labour.
- Trying to breastfeed caused contractions and this immediately gave me flash backs to my labour so I had to push my son off me, I couldn't cope with this reminder of what had just happened to me.
- I had nurses being very forceful and pressuring me to breastfeed and from our first night my nipples were bleeding and splitting despite telling them it was causing the most horrific pain. Once again I felt like my concerns were disregarded by staff.
- I asked to see a lactation consultant as I was in so much pain. She came the next day and observed me trying to feed my son. I was told he "had a perfect latch" and it was "all fine".
- Her observation was less than 30 seconds. My son hadn't even latched onto me, which shows how little care I was given when I was struggling to feed my baby I wonder, are the staff too lazy or too incompetent to do their job, or under such time pressure they don't have ample time to consult with a patient?
- My sons severe lip and tongue tie was not picked up resulting in him unable to latch properly, he couldn't even latch onto a bottle properly which was realised once we were home.

## **Discharge from The Canberra Hospital:**

- My son was born almost 1pm Saturday 19 May by emergency c-section after my waters breaking 5pm Thursday 17 May. We were discharged in the morning Tuesday 22 May.
- I was discharged while I was heavily overmedicated on Tramadol, I was in a zombie like state and could not focus or really understand what was happening.
- When I was being discharged the nurse joked "that we need the bed".
- The only 'advice' given on feeding was on being discharged we were told by the nurse that we had to feed our son in an hour, so we had an hour to go home, and for my husband to rush to a pharmacy to hire a breast pump, a steriliser, bottles and formula and make it back home before our newborn was crying with hunger.
- My husband and I were provided no information on lactation support and being rudely questioned by a nurse as to why I planned to formula feed my baby once I went home, despite not being able to breastfeed. I felt immense judgement by nurses at the hospital whenever I suggested using a bottle.
- I was discharged before my milk came in (it didn't come in until 10 days after my son was born). This compounded my anxieties after birth and should have been addressed before being discharged ie. Explanations on what to expect, or information on bottle feeding until I was able to begin breastfeeding.

## **Post Natal Support and Follow Up:**

- I was told to pump every 3 hours while supplementing each feed with formula for my son, to encourage my milk to come in. It didn't come in until 10 days after my son was born, and I believe this was due to having a c-section, traumatic birth, and being sent home while I was

overmedicated. This placed extreme anxiety on both me and my husband as new parents, and with no family in the state.

- My son was checked twice at my home by MACH nurses for lip and tongue tie and both times I was told he did not have one, or he looks fine. Of course, neither was true.
- I didn't attend my 6 week check up until 8 months after my son was born. I did not want to come into contact with any medical professionals or have anyone touch my body or do any internal checks as I was too traumatised from giving birth and having forceps used in me.
- I spent the first 3 months suffering extreme anxiety and trying to navigate the medical system to get help for my son who screamed inconsolably most days and nights, and was unable to latch onto a bottle. Some days it would take over an hour for him to drink 120mls between his screams.
- I attended an ACT Health services Early Days session on feeding. The class ran out of time to watch me try to feed my son, so one MACH nurse said I can go and feed him and just to call her if I had any issues. As normal, he began screaming through the entire feed, to the point where I was breaking down in tears in the MACH clinic. The nurse came in and suggested I try an anti-reflux formula but didn't once offer to refer me to any support services for my mental health.
- I attended an ACT Health services sleeping and feeding class. Requested a referral to QE2 as my son was screaming through every feed or wake up screaming every sleep, and I was told if he doesn't improve in a week or two to call back and ask for a referral.
- I took my son to a dental specialist who advised he had a severe lip and tongue tie (he could not even lift his tongue up at all) and we had to pay \$1000 out of our own pockets to have this fixed. I believe this can be picked up at birth and also be corrected for free at The Canberra hospital. His feeding immediately improved and he was able to latch on and drink 120mls within 10 minutes with no screaming. I still cannot understand how something as basic as checking an infant's mouth could go unchecked by so many health professionals and was not considered when we first experienced breastfeeding issues.

### **Post Birth Review with The Canberra Hospital**

- I had found out myself that hospitals could offer a review of the patient file following a traumatic birth, so when my son was 6 months old I called The Canberra Hospital to request a debrief. I was told someone would call me back. I waited over a month and by this point I didn't have the energy to follow up so just continued to wait. 6 months later I contacted The Canberra Hospital again to follow up my request, assuming they had a huge backlog in requests. I was told someone should have got back to me the same week to book me in for a debrief. I asked if my request could be again followed up, and I was promptly booked in for a debrief with .
- I was very nervous going to this debrief, and had horrible anxiety for over a week leading up to it. When we arrived, advised me he had reviewed my file and he apologised for what had happened to me. He acknowledged that it did NOT sound like I was informed during my labour, nor was I offered proper support from my midwife.
- He told me that in his professional opinion, the forceps should NOT have been used on me given my labour length, that NO manual attempt had been made to turn my baby into a position that would enable a successful forcep or vacuum delivery.
- He advised he believed I was over medicated on tramadol in recovery, I should not have been discharged before my milk had come in and before I could feed my baby. believed that my milk did not come in until 10-11 days post birth as my adrenalin was probably so high from the trauma.

- He apologised numerous times and recommended I put in a formal complaint to the hospital.
- confirmed the lack of beds, overcrowding and constant bed block. He said the Canberra Hospital was designed for women to be discharged 24 hours after birth, which is impossible when they have a 30% c section rate, and 50% instrument birth rate. I was told that there was a constant bed block and every morning staff need to choose who should be getting discharged and often they have to discharge women too soon.
- recommended we go through a private hospital for our next baby so we receive a proper level of care.
- I was satisfied that listened to our concerns and validated my feelings that we were not provided adequate support or care during labour, or recovery.
- I was told that I would be provided a copy of my hospital file at the debrief but this did not happen.

### **Accessing a copy of my birth file/records**

- advised I could call Canberra Hospital for a copy of my birth records. I called the department, left a voicemail 2 weeks ago and still haven't had anyone contact me back.

### **Impacts of this entire experience on me, my son and my husband:**

- I struggled to bond with my son for the first few months and I still feel guilty that I spent his first few months crying daily, not wanting to attempt to breastfeed him because it immediately brought up all the memories of the birth and horrible aftercare and lack of support provided by staff at The Canberra Hospital.
- I cried on and off most of the day for the first few weeks, and I cried daily for the first few months.
- I am on anxiety medication and have also been diagnosed with PTSD.
- I suffer from flashbacks of parts of my birth, and a lot of my memories around the birth and the aftercare are really hard to cope with.
- I felt traumatised, abandoned and spat out by The Canberra Hospital.
- I find it really hard to talk about childbirth or hear other people's experiences because mine feels so awful.
- I have struggled to cope as a new mother and have had to push aside memories daily.
- My marriage has been strained because my husband has been unsure how he can best support me while I struggle to cope
- I have felt that I was traumatised and then left to suffer alone with no support from ACT Health.
- I have had to seek out and pay for private psychologist appointments because I am currently on the wait list to see an ACT Health psychologist. I have had to pay \$120-\$260 each appointment as I desperately needed support and could not continue to wait for a free appointment.
- I cannot afford to see a private psychologist weekly as recommended, even with a mental health plan, due to the ongoing costs.
- I have spoken out publicly to ABC News Canberra as I felt this should not happen to other women: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-10-08/canberra-maternity-inquiry-untold-stories/11509008>
- The anxiety and PTSD has affected all aspects of my life. I have had to return to work full time for financial reasons, but am struggling to work due to constant anxiety and suffering flashbacks which still cause a lot of distress. I work from home the majority of the time, and often spread across the 7 day week. I am so thankful my employer has been understanding and accommodating, and let me move into this new role upon my return from maternity leave.
- I was not able to return to my previous role due to the heavy workload and travel due to my anxiety, costing me over \$20K a year in lost income.

- Day to day I still have awful memories and I feel angry that 18 months after my son's birth these are affecting me.
- Reliving and detailing this experience again has been very emotionally exhausting and distressing, but I feel the need to speak out in order to prevent other women's birth trauma that may be caused from inadequate care in The Canberra Hospital.
- I truly believe that if I had sufficient aftercare at The Canberra Hospital, and having fast access to an ACT Health psychologist and lactation consultant, I would not be experiencing majority of this ongoing trauma.

## Recommendations based on my experiences

### The Canberra Hospital and ACT Maternity Services Pre Natal:

1. A centralised point online where women can find out about the ACT Health maternity service options once pregnant, including what hospitals and midwife continuity of care programs are available.
2. Have this website provide information such as 'when birth doesn't go to plan' — so that women are able to be aware and informed of birth trauma and where they can go to access information if they experience this. Information needs to be presented impartially.
3. This website provides a good opportunity to highlight the importance of the range of health professionals that work in maternity care including womens health physiotherapist, counsellors, psychologists.
4. Have this website provide information on labour and birth medical procedures and interventions such as vacuum, forceps, c-section, tearing. Provide this information so women are informed and are less likely to be traumatised by being subjected to an unknown invasive medical procedure.
5. The Canberra Hospital providing more information to women about pregnancy, childbirth and being a new parent during midwife appointments as a service standard. Being measured and having blood pressure taken is not enough.
6. The Canberra Hospital maternity programs to have a centralised or designated 'receptionist' to take care of scheduling in all midwife appointments, scheduling hospital classes, scheduling follow up post-natal midwife visits at home.
7. The Canberra hospital maternity programs to fund additional midwives to lessen current case load of women per midwife, and to provide all ACT women the opportunity to have continuity of care if this is her preferred mode of maternity care.
8. The Canberra Hospital maternity units/birth record departments should have a service standard to return voicemails, and advise of this standard in the recorded voice mail message. 1-2 business days is acceptable, weeks and months is not acceptable.

## **The Canberra Hospital and ACT Maternity Services Post Natal:**

9. The Canberra Hospital dedicating additional funding to more maternity wards, more maternity staff and building future capability taking into consideration the growth rate of Canberra population. Noting that over 30% of women have interventions during childbirth and would not be best practice to discharge these women within 24 hours of birth.
10. Not discharge women who have had c-sections until 4 nights after their surgery minimum, or once their milk has come in and they are confident to feed their baby, unless they request to be discharged earlier.
11. ACT Health or The Canberra hospital dedicating additional funding to lactation consultants, so after giving birth, women can have a dedicated lactation consultant be with them in hospital each feed to show them how to feed their baby and build up their confidence to breastfeed.
12. All babies to be checked for lip and tongue ties routinely as part of feeding aftercare and support.
13. If women elect to formula feed, they should be supported by nursing staff. This is their decision, and their right to choose.
14. The Canberra Hospital to provide a follow up appointment to all women who have c-sections for a scar review and for stitches removal with a doctor, not a midwife.
15. The Canberra Hospital maternity staff training. Staff in a healthcare particularly maternity environment should be empathetic, and have the ability to detect mothers who may need additional support, identifying feeding issues, birth trauma the two key areas often causing post natal anxiety, depression and PTSD.
16. End to end ACT Health and maternity hospital staff (midwife, doctors, nurses, lactation consultant, hospital counsellor, MACH nurses) trained in birth trauma and able to identify women who may have experienced traumatic births and require additional post natal care.
17. ACT Health and The Canberra Hospital to provide fast tracked psychological services to women who identify with birth trauma/postnatal anxiety/depression/PTSD resulting from birth experience
18. ACT Health dedicating more funding towards additional psychologists for post natal care.
19. ACT Health to provide a 12 month continuity of care/wellbeing/model. ACT Health to continue to support all women who have given birth including fast tracked psychological services, womens health physiotherapist check, lactation consultant or advice. The health/medical duty of care should continue beyond the standard 6 week check.
20. ACT Maternity Services to consider providing women with psychologist, counsellor, womens health physiotherapist support as part of the continuity of care. Not something additional that needs to be chased up by the mother, or being required to spend months on a wait list to see an ACT Health Psychologist, or needing to pay privately to get assistance in a reasonable timeframe.
21. ACT Health (MACH ) staff to use baby MACH appointments as an opportunity to check on the mothers mental health. This is the one time I had interaction with any health services after my baby was born and no one asked me how I was feeling or coping .
22. ACT Health Maternity Services to send information pack to new parents with information on all ACT Health Services available including how to organise debrief or counselling support information in the weeks following birth, so women can take action when they are ready.

23. ACT Health Maternity Services to provide follow up parenting classes to EVERY family, or as part of the ACT early days parents group offered in the weeks following the birth. Include topics such as birth trauma and feeding support in sessions, and encourage or offer referral services for ACT Psychologists or ACT Lactation Consultants.
24. ACT Health providing information on birth trauma and information on the ACT Psychological services available to women while pregnant in hospital sessions or via paperwork at midwife appointments, and on discharge from hospital.
25. Provide women with paperwork for surgical interventions including forceps and c-sections before they or the baby are in distress, or before it is an emergency situation. They should not be asked to sign consent forms while screaming in pain and being scared about their safety or the safety of their baby.

## Submission Summary

- To summarise, I was left post partum deeply distressed by the services and lack of quality care provided to me and my newborn, by both The Canberra Hospital and ACT Health.
- I believe that my birth trauma, anxiety and PTSD are the consequence of the actions of staff at The Canberra Hospital, particularly during my aftercare. I live with the psychological scars everyday, it has affected and strained all aspects of my life; home life, family relationships and friendships, ability to return to work, not to mention the ongoing financial cost of seeking psychological and medical services.
- My husband too has been left traumatised from watching the experiences I endured, as well as his inability to contribute to making decisions to prevent trauma, due to lack of information and honest communication by the hospital staff. My son experienced several issues following his birth, predominantly attributed to the failure to identify the lip and tongue ties. He had difficulty feeding in turn causing hours of painful reflux and hunger for weeks. It is inconceivable how this was not identified earlier by the multiple health professionals that would have interacted with us before being discharged.
- I would never wish to give birth at, or be admitted to The Canberra Hospital again if I can help it.
- It is unacceptable that any woman be left with mental scars due to the interactions and actions of the 'care givers' while a woman is giving birth in the ACT.
- More recently, I have had to attend The Canberra Hospital emergency department with my son for an unrelated matter, and I experienced PTSD flashbacks from the birth and aftercare for the duration of the visit. I felt extremely anxious walking to and from the carpark and in and around the hospital grounds.
- The Canberra Hospital must provide better holistic care to women giving birth. Considerations and care should be given for both the baby's and mother's wellbeing.
- ACT Health needs to provide early follow up and timely lactation consultants and psychological services to women, the earlier the intervention the better.