

MEDIA RELEASE: Wellington mothers need a birth centre

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Wellington mothers may be enjoying a day of appreciation this Sunday, however their right to choose where to give birth has been denied to them for many decades according to local, long-established midwives.

Wellington is the only major centre in New Zealand without a home-like birth centre – an alternative to a hospital or home birth environment. Funding tagged for "primary birth" (straightforward, non-medicated birth) in the capital is directed by the Ministry of Health to the District Health Boards (DHB). Our local DHB has been unable to provide a clear breakdown of how these funds are used. What is clear is that intervention births are costly; increasing the straightforward birth rate is both fiscally and ethically responsible.

This weekend's spotlight on mothers highlights the need for transparency in where the primary funding is devolved by the DHBs, and the release of funds towards giving Wellington women more birthing options.

"A women's right to choose where they can give birth is fundamental as a starting point to positive birth and parenting," says Grant Robertson, Labour MP for Wellington. "New Zealand is all about whānau so it's a serious oversight when intervention in the way we bring new life into our world takes financial precedence over the creation of options for primary birthing."

Birth centres offer women and their whānau a home-like, midwifery-led facility to give birth in, and are proven to reduce the need for intervention during birth, leading to a better overall experience. Additionally birth centres act as a hub for antenatal and post-birth education and support. The Waikato District Health Board (WDHB) is leading the way with 11 funded birthing units, and the results are clear: "The good outcome Waikato demonstrates against the national clinical indicators of normal births and low caesarean



section rates are a result of low risk women being able to birth in environments suited to their needs within their own communities" (WDHB Annual Report, 2013).

The 'Birth Hub' project, which aims to see the development of birthing centres in the Wellington region, believes it is high time the capital stepped up to the play. Acting on behalf of parents, midwives, and members of the birthing community, Birth Hub has researched, lobbied and surveyed the local community to build a convincing case.

"The vast majority of midwives we have surveyed believe that the Wellington region needs a birth centre, and Wellington obstetricians have stated their alignment with our drive to increase the physiological birth rate," says Karen Gault, spokesperson for Birth Hub. "The professionals are behind this, the data backs it, we now need the DHB to recognise the need and take action."

This week the Birth Hub team are encouraging members of the public to help send a message to the DHBs and the Ministry of Health asking for them to establish local primary birthing facilities. Self-addressed postcards have been designed to send to them imploring action. Ask your midwife for one, or contact choice@birthhub.org.

For the birthing community Mother's Day is all year round. It's high time Wellington built a space to celebrate this.

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More information about the Birth Hub project can be found at www.birthhub.org

Media interviews are welcome, please contact:

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