

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE MIDWIFE

Statement by Minister for Health

MS A. SANDERSON (Morley — Minister for Health) [12.13 pm]: I rise today to acknowledge International Day of the Midwife, which fell on 5 May last week. International Day of the Midwife celebrates the important care midwives provide birthing mothers, their babies and families each and every day. This year, International Day of the Midwife celebrated 100 years of progress since the formation of the International Confederation of Midwives, but this milestone is much more than an organisational achievement. As the ICM states —

From the establishment of the first midwifery schools to the appointment of the first chief midwives and to the increasing numbers of direct-entry midwifery programmes and more and more women being able to access continuity of care from a known midwife, the past 100 years have seen highly consequential achievements ...

That is in midwifery as a profession.

I am on the record as a strong supporter of free and informed birth choices for women. Too often women feel pressured into making choices in the labour room they later regret by conventional obstetric care that does not put women at the centre of their own care and decision-making. Too often we see the lasting impacts of traumatic experiences during labour, often disempowering women, and their decisions disregarded in the labour room. I am a strong advocate for the continuity of midwifery care, which evidence suggests is the gold standard for mothers and babies. As knowledge about and access to these services grows, I hope we will see better outcomes and more empowering birth choices for women in Western Australia.

This government has established more midwifery group practices in our regions to support women to have their babies closer to home. Midwifery group practice is an internationally recognised, evidence-based clinical initiative that provides quality and sustainable maternity care through on-call midwifery services 24/7; increased access for local women to scheduled antenatal appointments; early discharge home, with postnatal follow-up and home visits for up to four weeks; care and care coordination by a known midwife; increased access and support for expectant mothers; and attendance by the primary midwife and support at medical appointments.

Midwives are key to getting the best outcomes for mother and baby. Too many women are left traumatised by the experience of giving birth and the cascade of interventions. I am a passionate advocate for women-centred care and WA women having access to a range of safe birthing options. Some women feel safer at hospital and some women feel safer at home. All these choices should be respected and supported. The new women's and newborns' hospital will be a centre of excellence for midwifery-led care. I cannot wait to talk to WA women and midwives about what they want to see in our flagship maternity hospital and, importantly, provide a system that supports birth choices for women of all cultures. These past few years have been challenging for the health system and I would like to especially thank all the midwives who supported the births of many children born throughout the pandemic.