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Australia's national maternity consumer advocacy organisation

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MEDIA STATEMENT

In response to the National Health Performance Authority's report on Child and Maternal Health 2009 – 2012 release 31st July 2014

Maternity Choices Australia (MCA) welcomes the release of the above mentioned report and acknowledges the importance of this data release as a step towards more transparency from the governing agencies reporting on maternal and baby outcomes in Australia. It is evident in the statistics provided in this report that there are substantial variations in infant and child mortality rates, particularly in 'peer' groups such as Metropolitan 1 and Rural 2. This report also highlights that Australia is performing three times worse than the "best performers internationally".

MCA believes that a primary maternity care system akin to that implemented in New Zealand, United Kingdom and Canada is vital to providing a higher quality model of care and a better service. The hallmark of these systems is that midwives provide one-to-one care to a woman for her antenatal care, the birth of her baby and up to six weeks post partum. Every statistic represents a woman, her baby and their story. Both an individual's medical needs and sociocultural context contribute equally to the outcomes of a woman's pregnancy. Successful outcomes should be determined by how well the maternity system negotiates this complex interplay between medical and psychological requirements.

To improve Australian infant and child mortality rates, we require our maternal health care system to acknowledge and ultimately address both a woman's unique medical and sociocultural needs. Providing continuity of midwifery care to all Australian women, regardless of cultural, social or economic status, is the way forward and is recognised as international best practice. This model of care has been endorsed by every state health minister and the federal Health Minister in Australia in 2010 in the National Maternity Services Plan, and a commitment has been made to follow this through to fruition in 2016.

Such a model of individualised care better meets each woman's emotional, psychological, cultural, physical and medical needs, meaning that primary maternity care is also responsive to community needs, particularly with regards to health inequalities and social exclusion. By adopting a primary maternity care system, we can truly make inroads into closing the gaps that so clearly exist within Australia, and finally join the rest of the world leaders in maternity health care.