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**Rural Women Matter - Establishing midwifery-led continuity of care in Yass**

The closure of rural maternity care facilities has limited rural women’s choice around models of care and birth location. Travelling to access care and give birth has led to negative social, emotional and safety impacts. Indigenous women are also particularly affected and continuously denied the right to supported cultural birthing practices. Evidence has shown that rural women experience higher rates of preterm birth which may be attributed to the higher proportion of young women and Indigenous women.

Continuity of midwifery care provides better maternal and neonatal outcomes and experiences compared to fragmented care. Positive outcomes include spontaneous vaginal birth of term babies, a positive birth experience, and greater confidence with breastfeeding. Published evidence supports the implementation of caseload midwifery models in rural settings with evaluations showing positive outcomes, especially for women with potential vulnerabilities such as age, socioeconomic status, and Indigenous ethnicity.

Our policy proposal, which will be an oral group presentation, is to utilise the growing body of evidence to implement a midwifery led continuity of care model in Yass, NSW, which currently does not offer birthing services despite increasing consumer demand. We will describe the implementation and evaluation strategies, including data collection and analysis to determine success and sustainably to inform future development of this model in other rural communities. To address the potential barriers of funding, staff shortages and safety concerns, our implementation strategies will include a strong emphasis on workforce recruitment, sustainability, and competency.

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