

Dear Secretary,

I am writing to the Select Committee on Reproductive, Maternal and Paediatric Health Services in Tasmania, because I need to share my story.

My name is [REDACTED] I live in [REDACTED] I have two living children, they are 4 and 6 years old. I would like to address the trauma and disrespectful care that I experienced in my pregnancy/miscarriage here in Tasmania.

PREGNANCY

As a former birthworker and informed mother, I was excited to learn that I was unexpectedly pregnant in [REDACTED]. Despite the pregnancy being unplanned, I was so excited to add another child to my family, and my daughters were very excited to have a sibling. As I had been pregnant and/or breastfeeding for the past 6 years, I knew that there was a good chance I would be depleted in life-making minerals and vitamins, and also was aware those types of bloodwork is not standard maternity care. In addition to this I have a complicated sexual trauma history including childhood sexual abuse. Rather than rehashing my complex trauma to a complete stranger, I went to a GP to request a referral to a known midwife who I have been under the care of previously who knew my trauma history, birth history and was able to order the bloods I would need, allowing me to then immediately change my diet to ensure my baby was getting the correct building blocks of life. When I visited the GP at My Clinic Plus Devonport (a new GP as I was new to the state and do not often visit the Dr), she refused to refer me to a known midwife, unless I got a transvaginal ultrasound and bloods done through her. This was extremely triggering to me with such a vast history of sexual abuse – I could not pass ‘go’ until I was once again violated. She would not listen when I explained that I needed to see a known midwife, and refused. This caused extreme stress, and I was in a panic attack for a very long time. After the appointment I drove to a carpark, where I called the father of the child on the phone and explained what had happened. While I was doing this, a teenage girl and her mother came across the carpark to check on my wellbeing as I was so agitated and stressed that they were concerned for my wellbeing.

I continued with the pregnancy, liaising with the hospital to try and get onto the MGP (while also knowing that as a plus size woman at a size 16/18, I would likely be ‘risked out’ of the scheme). At 12 weeks, I started bleeding, and on the day that I received the NIPT results telling me I was pregnant with a son, I also visited the Burnie hospital as my bleeding did not abate. After waiting an hour, I was seen, the emergency Dr was kind enough but on bedside ultrasound inspection he announced “I see no evidence of pregnancy”. He took bloods to check my HCG levels, and promised to ring me at or before midnight to let me know the results. We went back to the father of the child’s house, and started processing the likely outcome that I was losing the baby. Nobody called me, but by then my survival instinct had set in and I was just on admin-lady

mode. I called the hospital after midnight, seeking the blood test results so I could begin grieving, and the news was as expected.

Upon ultrasound the next day, it turned out that my baby stopped developing at 6.5 weeks, which was within a week of my original, traumatic and non-autonomy respecting appointment with that awful GP.

I did receive free follow up appointments with the GP clinic, albeit a different Dr (unsure if this was because I had a miscarriage, or because I threatened to report them to AHPRA for not allowing me my right of a referral to my choice of Private known midwife, whom I was happy to pay for). In the ensuing mental and physical breakdown, I sought GP care at My Clinic Plus Devonport and was told (by [REDACTED]) "If you don't want birth control or antidepressants, then what do you want?!", in an exasperated tone. I was a traumatised single mother of 2 children, deep in grief, seeking mental health support or a pathway forward with a shaking voice and a broken heart.

I proceeded to deal with issues alone, as I learnt is best to do as nobody in the medical field appears to actually care at all, you are just a number and if you do not comply with the standardised mode of 'care' then you are seen as a problem.

I then received a letter from the Burnie hospital stating that I did not qualify for the MGP as I was not 'low-risk'.

SOLUTIONS

The recommendations that I have are:

- Non-discriminatory access to a (better funded and expanded) MGP program, allowing all women - especially vulnerable ones - access to a known midwife
- Respectful Maternity Choices training for GP's or knowledge of their role (as per the Woman-Centred Care – Strategic directions for Australian Maternity Services agreed to in Federal parliament 2019)
- Access to publicly funded homebirth, birth centre or a birthing on country program (reopening the maternity services at Latrobe for a midwife run birth centre would be an excellent use of resources as there used to be a maternity unit there)
- Mandatory trauma-informed training for clinicians
- Legislation on informed consent
- More funding for post-partum care, such as women's health physiotherapy, social worker, lactation support
- Improved support for early pregnancy loss

Kind regards,

[REDACTED]