18 November 2004
New Era For maternity Services

Dr Peter Toyne MLA
Minister for Health

Women and their families in the Northern Territory will benefit from a comprehensive new maternity services package launched in Alice Springs today.

Minister for Health Dr Peter Toyne said the initiative consolidates the community midwifery program and opens the door for independent midwives to practise in the Territory.

“This is a complete package which offers support, quality service and choice for mothers,” Dr Toyne said.

The first stage of the program includes:

- consolidation of the Community Midwifery Program
- a home birth model of maternity care.
- provision of training in advanced obstetrics skills for current midwives and medical practitioners.
- outreach ante-natal service to remote communities

Dr Toyne said the Community Midwifery Program in Darwin will be given a new home outside the hospital.

“This consolidates the good work already being done, and creates the foundations for further expansion.

“This new era for maternity services will also give greater choice to women by providing a home birth model of maternity care.

“As part of this service women will also receive pre and post natal care at home.

“The unavailability of indemnity insurance for independent midwives has meant they haven’t been able to meet the requirements of registration.

“We could have changed the legislation which requires all medical practitioners to have indemnity insurance, but that would have weakened protection for the public.

“Instead, we will indemnify independent midwives through the Department of Health and Community Services.

“This is based on similar successful models in Western Australia and South Australia.

“We will work with all stakeholders to get independent midwives working in the Northern Territory as quickly as possible.
“The Government will also upgrade obstetric training for nurses and medical practitioners.

“In addition to this, two new midwives will be employed in the Top End and Central Australia to improve services for women in remote communities.

“These measures provide a comprehensive package to improve maternity services across the Northern Territory.

“This is all about optimising care and choices for women in urban and remote areas.

“This program will build on the expansion of maternity services already underway including the $2.5 million Birthing Centre at Royal Darwin Hospital,” Dr Toyne said.

The key elements include:

- two new high tech birth rooms
- upgrade of existing four birth rooms
- additional staff to implement a new-midwifery led model of care across the birthing centre
- refurbish the entire 6th floor maternity ward
- employ a dedicated midwifery nurse to work with patients from remote areas

“This will provide a more friendly environment for women, with the emphasis to be on midwifery led care for those who don’t need medical intervention during childbirth.”

“The new birth rooms will each have a deep immersion bath, an ensuite and a non-hospital bed, along with a lounge so family members can stay,” Dr Toyne said.

Building on the Birthing Centre will start next year.