

MEDIA RELEASE

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Choice and safety must return to Queensland's maternity services

Queensland's maternity services are in crisis, advanced by a lack of collaboration between the public and private sectors, and patients are being denied choice when it comes to having a baby.

We must reverse the declining viability of private obstetrics – driven by the devaluation of specialists and rising health insurance costs – to begin repairing the system and ensure all patients receive safe, best practice care.

"Australia's public and private health systems play a vital, complementary role in offering patients accessible and affordable services of their choice," AMA Queensland President Dr Nick Yim said.

"Queenslanders deserve access to a range of high-quality services across both sectors, including GP-shared care and fully private obstetrician-led models in addition to those offered in our public hospitals.

"However, this access is being threatened by the current lack of collaboration between the two sectors plus additional challenges caused by rising models of care that don't value private obstetricians' expertise.

"Specialist obstetricians train for over a decade and are the most qualified health professionals to keep women and babies safe.

"They are often the only practitioners who can treat patients with complicated pregnancies and births, and without them, we simply can't run maternity services.

"Despite this, state and federal governments have failed to act on the clear warning signs that maternity units were at risk of collapse.

"Those signs included declining birth rates; increasing maternal risk factors; medical workforce shortages in obstetrics, paediatrics, anaesthetics and nursing; rising private health premiums making maternity cover unaffordable; and exorbitant professional indemnity insurance premiums for doctors.

"Governments have also failed to improve the culture of maternity services and support and protect obstetric specialists, instead allocating funding to alternative models which expose doctors to increased medico-legal risk.

"These issues have caused many obstetricians to limit their practice to gynaecology, move interstate or cease practising altogether, and data is emerging that birth outcomes are now worsening.

"We saw the consequences of this failure in Gladstone, where the closure of the private maternity unit led to the closure of the public maternity service, forcing women to travel hundreds of kilometres for care.

"Some of them ended up giving birth on the highway.

"Now we are seeing more private maternity services close across Australia, but governments still aren't acting.

“Both the state and Commonwealth governments must urgently work together to turn this crisis around.

“The private health system must be reformed, including the establishment of an independent private health authority to ensure the private system works for patients and health practitioners instead of corporate profits.

“Investments must be made in obstetric services to broaden birth choice no matter where women live and doctors must be supported to work in our maternity services, including through training supports, reduced red tape and costs, improved protections and genuine private-public partnerships.

“Queensland parents and babies deserve a health system that is high quality, gives them real choice and keeps them safe.”