



**NEW ZEALAND COLLEGE OF MIDWIVES (INC)**

**Media Release**

**May 2006**

### **Global Message for International Midwives Day**

The world needs midwives now more than ever. That's one of the messages being promoted during this year's International Midwives Day, being celebrated around the world this Friday.

CEO of the New Zealand College of Midwives, Karen Guilliand, says more midwives are needed as women in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century are exposed to a worldwide explosion of unfiltered information that can be confusing and make women and families anxious. While Internet and other digital communication growth can be a wonderful thing, it can also overload prospective parents with unnecessarily detailed information.

"Midwives help women and families to make sense of all this information to ensure they can make decisions based on fact, not myth and sensationalism," says Karen Guilliand.

The NZCOM CEO also says with so many women and families leading busy and demanding lifestyles with less support from extended families, the midwife can be an anchor in what may be an uncertain time.

"We were thrilled with the recent breastfeeding figures which showed an increase in the number of exclusively breastfed babies. Women are to be congratulated for sticking with it, in these busy times. The midwifery profession has contributed to this, and the overall, positive health outcomes for mothers and babies in New Zealand."

Like all health professionals who are advocates and supporters, midwives also need to have their own support networks. Raising the profile of what midwives do is only part of celebrating International Midwives Day.

"We also aim to strengthen the support networks that make it possible to sustain midwifery practice," says Karen Guilliand.

Women birthing in New Zealand have access to a maternity system that is held up by many countries in the OECD, as leading the way in safe, family friendly and professional maternity care.

Karen Guilliand says even when we compare ourselves with our closest neighbour, Australia, New Zealand mothers and babies are doing well.

“Babies born in this country require less intensive care, are born later, weigh more and are more likely to be breastfed and immunised. New Zealand mothers are more likely to have fewer birth complications and less trauma from the birth process.”

“International Midwives Day is all about midwives, mothers and babies. We look forward to enjoying the celebrations with our colleagues and clients around the country and the world”, says Karen Guilliland.

**ENDS            Contact Ali Jones for more information, cell: 027 247 3112**

**Note:** New Zealand was the first country in the world to mark International Midwives Day in 1987 after which it was adopted by the International Confederation of Midwives in 1992.

## **International Midwives Day, May 5<sup>th</sup> 2006 – backgrounder**

- New Zealand established International Midwives Day and we were the first to celebrate it in 1987. It was originally celebrated towards the end of the year (Oct).
- That first International Day of the Midwife was marked by one major event, the opening of New Zealand's first Midwifery Resource Centre in Christchurch. This is proving very successful, and operates as a drop-in centre for women and midwives, a meeting place, an education centre, a library and research base and clinic for independent midwives and their clients. It is located within the New Zealand College of Midwives Head Office in Manchester Street.
- IMD was then adopted by the International Confederation of Midwives (ICM) in 1992 and the date changed to May 5<sup>th</sup> as this was the start of Spring in the Northern Hemisphere, a time linked with the birth of new life.
- The aim of the day is to celebrate midwifery and midwives, while raising awareness of what midwives do in their specialist work with women, babies and families.
- Internationally, the day is co-ordinated by the ICM, which has 87 midwifery associations from 73 countries from around the world.

## Summary measures of perinatal health in Australia and New Zealand (2003)

Table 1.1 presents summary perinatal health information for Australia and New Zealand derived from the 2003 Australian National Perinatal Data Collection (NPDC)<sup>1</sup> and New Zealand Maternal and Newborn Information System (MNIS)<sup>2</sup>. Data include measures of pregnancy-related interventions, maternal risk factors and birth outcomes.

**Table 1.1: Summary measures of perinatal health for Australia and New Zealand 2003**

Variable	Description of Measure	NZ	Aust
Maternal Age	Mean age for first baby	30.2	29.5
	Percentage of mothers who were teenagers (less than 20 years)	7.1	4.6
	Percentage of first-time mothers aged 35 years and older	19.8	11.8
Parity – first baby		40.2	41.8
Indigenous status	Percentage of mothers who identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander <sup>(a)</sup>	-	3.6
	Maori	19.8	-
	Pacific	10.5	-
Normal vaginal birth		67.4	60.8
Induction of labour	Percentage of mothers who had an induced onset of labour	20.1	26.1
Instrumental vaginal births	Percentage of mothers who had an instrumental (forceps or vacuum extraction) birth	9.5	10.7
Caesarean section	Percentage of mothers who had a caesarean section <sup>(b)</sup>	<u>23.1</u>	<u>28.5</u>
<u>Total operative births</u>		<u>32.6</u>	<u>39.2</u>
Episiotomy	Surgical incision into perineum	10.4	16.1
Preterm birth	Percentage of all births that were less than 37 weeks gestation	7.2	7.9
Low birthweight	Percentage of liveborn babies weighing less than 2,500 grams at birth	5.9	6.3
Perinatal death rate	Perinatal deaths per 1,000 births	10.2	10.1 <sup>(c)</sup>

<sup>(a)</sup> Excludes Tasmania

<sup>(b)</sup> Excludes breech birth

<sup>(c)</sup> Excludes neonatal deaths for NT

<sup>1</sup> NPDC – Australian National Perinatal Data Collection (256,584 mothers and 256,925 babies)

<sup>2</sup> MNIS – New Zealand Maternal and Newborn Information System (54,581 mothers and 55,119 babies)