



NEW ZEALAND COLLEGE OF MIDWIVES (INC)

April 2014

Maternity care in New Zealand

New Zealand is fortunate in already having an internationally respected maternity service that is led by midwives.

At the centre of the New Zealand maternity care system is the belief that a woman should receive continuity of care from a known midwife or healthcare professional throughout pregnancy, labour and birth.

Maternity care in New Zealand is free. Care for most women is led by a Lead Maternity Carer or LMC. LMCs can be midwives, general practitioners or obstetricians. More than 90% of women registered with an LMC choose midwives as their lead carer. (Ministry of Health, 2012, *Report on Maternity, 2010*)

LMC midwives are based in communities, usually working within group practices and in conjunction with other health professionals. Women are cared for by their LMCs – with practice partners as back-up – throughout pregnancy, labour and birth and for six weeks after the birth of their babies. If complications develop at any stage the woman will be referred to an obstetrician or another appropriate health professional.

New Zealand women can give birth at home, in community-based birthing units or in hospital depending on their health during pregnancy and whether they are likely to need specialist support. If a woman is giving birth at home her LMC midwife will be assisted by a back-up colleague. If she gives birth in a birthing unit or hospital her LMC will work with “core” midwives employed by those centres.

Midwives play an important role in helping a new mother to care for her baby by providing a minimum of five home visits before the baby is transferred to the care of Plunket or another Well Child service at the age of six weeks.

The standard of the New Zealand’s maternity service has been praised internationally by a range of experts and organisations. A report commissioned by the Ministry of Health, published in November last year, from the research consultancy Malatest International comparing New Zealand’s maternity system with six other countries, Australia, Canada, Ireland, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States stated that New Zealand had similar or better results across a wide range of measures. The report highlighted a variety of strengths in the New Zealand system including its strong, stable midwifery workforce, community based continuity of care and high levels of consumer satisfaction. (*Comparative study of maternity systems*, Malatest International for the Ministry of Health)

