

Urgency demanded for Indigenous maternity services

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Greater urgency is needed for Indigenous maternity services. Credit: University of Queensland

The federal, state and territory governments need to show "greater urgency" in regard to improving maternity services for Indigenous women in Australia, according to a new report.

The report, led by Mater Research Institute–University of Queensland (MRI-UQ) Professor Sue Kildea, provided a review of Australia's National Maternity Services Plan (NMSP) and resulting actions regarding Indigenous mothers and babies between 2010-2015.

"There is little doubt the NMSP resulted in stronger maternity services in some areas," Professor Kildea said.

"However, all women need one-to-one care from a midwife working side-by-side with Indigenous health workers, and collaborating with obstetricians and other health professionals when needed.

"We need a new maternity services plan, incorporating high level monitoring, otherwise Australia will not tackle emerging priorities and complete unfinished business from the last plan, particularly for Indigenous women in rural and remote communities."

The report states that 24 per cent of Indigenous women who give birth each year are located in remote Australia, compared with just two per cent of non-Indigenous women.

Australian Indigenous babies are almost twice as likely to be born with low birth weight than non-Indigenous babies or Indigenous babies from other countries, and twice as many deaths occur.

The report says the NMSP "expired without notable results" in increasing the Indigenous maternity workforce, providing culturally competent maternity care and developing dedicated programs for 'birthing on country'.

Professor Kildea, along with co-authors from the University of Sydney - Professor Sally Tracy, Professor Juanita Sherwood and Professor Lesley Barclay - and Fleur Magick-Dennis from the Aboriginal Culture Birthing and Parenting Organisation, noted three organisations have united in calling for fresh action.

The organisations are the Australian College of Midwives, the Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses and Midwives, and the

Council of Remote Area Nurses of Australia.

"Leadership must continue to come from the Australian government with greater urgency than has been evident to date," Professor Kildea said.

"Dedicated funding must be allocated towards the identified priority areas.

"This recommendation is based on international evidence that already exists."

More information: Sue Kildea et al. Improving maternity services for Indigenous women in Australia: moving from policy to practice, *The Medical Journal of Australia* (2016). [DOI: 10.5694/mja16.00854](https://doi.org/10.5694/mja16.00854)

Provided by University of Queensland

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