

Why aren't midwives regulated in Newfoundland and Labrador?

Did you know:

- If it was 1893 and you lived in Battle Harbour you would be able to take advantage of midwifery services.
- Newfoundland passed a Midwives Act in 1920.
- Midwifery training was provided at the Grace Hospital in St. John's up until 1934.
- The provincial government stopped issuing licences to midwives in 1963.

Despite this history, midwifery is currently unregulated in our province. Regardless of recommendations made over several decades, government has not taken responsibility for this service by legislating provisions for funding and self-regulation.

Compare Newfoundland and Labrador to the rest of Canada where eight provinces and territories already have legislation. Two other governments intend to bring it forward this winter. Five universities in Canada provide an undergraduate midwifery degree – a four-year program with a one-year mentorship. In the absence of a regulatory scheme, there is very little incentive for these graduates to practice in our province.

Midwives can provide complete care with better health outcomes to women during pregnancy, and for both mother and baby during labour and for six weeks after the birth. Regulating the service will ensure a consistent standard of care and provide the safeguards expected in health-care services. In provinces where midwifery is funded, there is a saving of several hundred dollars for each mother who receives this type of care. Women should not have to pay for this service. In a province where most residents agree there are significant concerns with our health-care system, including the shortage of doctors, this should be a priority of the Department of Health and Community Services.

The Association of Midwives of Newfoundland and Labrador and the Friends of Midwifery NL have advocated for legislation for regulated and publicly-funded midwifery services in our province for many years. In the past year, both opposition party leaders have raised the issue in the House of Assembly and the media. In February, 2008, the CEOs of four provincial health boards expressed their support in writing to the Minister.

The Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women calls on the provincial government to take action now.

For information on midwifery contact the Association of Midwives of NL at www.uccs.mun.ca/~pherbert

To provide consumer support and to advocate for midwifery contact the Friends of Midwifery NL by e-mail to kmonaghan@nf.sympatico.ca