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Pay Seen As Key To Births At Home

The number of Auckland women wanting home births has increased, says the New Zealand Home Birth Association.

The association says many women have their babies in hospital against their will because of a shortage of midwives prepared to deliver babies at home.

It says only two full-time and two part-time domiciliary midwives are now serving the Auckland metropolitan area. Last year eight domiciliary midwives were working to full capacity.

According to the association, domiciliary midwives earn considerably less than their hospital counterparts, yet they are on call 24 hours a day.

For each birth the midwife makes at least one antenatal visit, attends labour and birth and follows with two weeks of postnatal visits.

If a domiciliary midwife helps 60 women a year at a maximum rate of \$141.50 a patient she can earn only \$8490, before tax, a year. At the end of the wage freeze, despite a frozen 17 per cent increase, she will still earn less than \$10,000 a year. Hospital-based nurses are said to earn twice as much.

The association says the Social Security (maternity benefits) Regulations 1939 state that it is mandatory for the Health Department to provide any medical or midwifery services requested by a woman planning a home birth.

The association is encouraging women to take action to ensure the department fulfils its obligations to provide an adequate number of midwives and a salary on a par with other sectors of the nursing profession.