

# Health board asked to think again

Wellington area health board members are being asked to look again at plans to reorganise hospital maternity services in the region.

Wellington Maternity Action is concerned that in order to maintain maternity services at Paraparaumu and Elderslea the board will now make compensatory cuts at Wellington and Hutt maternity units.

Wellington Maternity Action was formed 12 months ago because of dissatisfaction over conditions at Wellington Women's Hospital. It widened its brief in April this year because of the change of administration from hospital to area health board.

Barbara Johnsen, spokeswoman for Maternity Action, says the board has as an option the closure of a maternity ward at Hutt Hospital along with the closure of the Elderslea Maternity wing.

This would place intolerable pressure on the one remaining ward at Hutt and would leave the Hutt Valley grossly under serviced in the maternity area, Maternity Action says in the submission.

Says Barbara Johnsen: "In these circumstances, our calculations show there would only be 25 post-natal beds available for an area from Wainuiomata to Upper Hutt.

"We believe this would mean women and their babies would be discharged early, 24 hours after the birth. In the Hutt Valley at present there is one community midwife working part time, 30 hours a week, to follow up all the mothers sent

home. If they are discharged early they and their babies need to be visited at least once a day."

In their submission, Wellington Maternity Action says it feels that while an early discharge should remain a choice for women it should not be an enforced policy.

According to the submission: "Closure of a ward at Hutt Hospital on the basis of a policy of forced early discharge is ludicrous and totally unacceptable in view of the woefully inadequate community support services available at present."

The group is concerned that if one of the two remaining post-natal wards at Wellington Women's could also be closed, this would place "intolerable pressure" on the remaining ward and leave the Wellington area grossly under serviced.

Maternity Action says maternity services at Hutt and Wellington Women's hospitals have already borne cuts. These include the closure of post-natal wards, reduction in staffing levels, axing of nurse manager positions at Wellington.

Barbara Johnsen says the area health board needs to look at the possibility of providing special birthing units for low risk births. "In Wellington, for instance, St Helen's, a custom built maternity unit has been standing empty for eight years."