



**THE HON NICOLA ROXON MP**

**Minister for Health and Ageing**

**THE HON JENNY MACKLIN MP**

**Minister For Families, Housing, Community Services  
and Indigenous Affairs**

**JOINT MEDIA RELEASE**

10 December 2009

**MORE SERVICES FOR MORE NEW MOTHERS**

The increasing number of women becoming pregnant and having babies will benefit from the Rudd Government's improved maternity services and support programs.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) report *Australia's Mothers and Babies 2007*, released today, shows that the nation's baby boom continued in 2007 with 12,000 more births than in 2006.

The Rudd Government has recognised the need for more services to help pregnant women and new mothers.

The Government's \$120.5 million package of measures to improve maternity services will improve choice and access to maternity services for women during this vitally important time. It will make historic legislative changes to give midwives access to the MBS and PBS for the first time along with a Government-supported professional indemnity insurance scheme for eligible midwives, ensuring new mothers have greater choice in how they deliver their babies.

These improvements are under threat from the Opposition who have blocked the legislation's progression in the Senate and refused to voice their support for the measures.

We also understand the importance of the formative weeks and months in establishing the relationships and routines which will shape a child's positive development.

This is why we will deliver Australia's first comprehensive, statutory, Paid Parental Leave scheme that is in the best interests of newborn children.

Paid Parental Leave will give parents more time to care for their baby during the vital early months of physical, cognitive and emotional development providing the primary carer of a newborn baby, usually the mother, with 18 weeks leave paid at the Federal Minimum Wage.

This will be of significant benefit to low income mothers. In 2007, less than one-quarter of women on very low wages had access to paid parental leave, compared to nearly three-quarters of women on high wages

The Paid Parental Leave scheme also recognises the need to encourage women to maintain their connection with the workforce and helps meet the challenges of an ageing population.

Building on the \$85 million perinatal depression initiative, the National Pregnancy Telephone Counselling Helpline will be expanded and improved to provide advice to women and their families on their pregnancy and the first 12 months of a baby's life. The helpline also provide information on services in their local area and commence operations on 1 July 2010.

Indigenous infant mortality remains a concern. The AIHW report indicates that the fetal death rate for indigenous babies, at 13.3 deaths per 1000 births, is almost twice as high as for non-Indigenous babies (7.1 per 1,000 births).

The Government is working hard to close the gap in mortality rates in Indigenous children under the age of five within a decade by investing more than \$135 million in Indigenous-specific health programs targeting maternal and child health.

**For all media inquiries, please contact:**

**Minister Roxon's Office on 02 6277 7220**

**Minister Macklin's Office on 02 6277 4560**