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## Position Statement

# Keeping Birth Normal

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### Background

Midwives' practice must be informed by evidence-based knowledge to improve the quality and outcomes of midwifery care. 'Keeping birth normal' is an area of ICM strategy associated with women's health, midwives' education and practice, and existing health care systems.

Midwives are advocates of normal childbirth. They can provide evidence to support the advantages of normal birth but women's decisions are affected by factors such as:

- Culture
- Socio-economic issues and health care systems
- Lack of information about the benefits of normal birth
- A fear of normal birth
- An inability to trust their innate ability to give birth

When midwifery education is limited solely to hospitals and medicalised clinical environments it may prevent midwives from practicing the full scope of midwifery practice as outlined in *the ICM International Definition of the Midwife* and the *ICM Essential Competencies for Basic Midwifery Practice*. Such experience may impact on the ability of midwives to support women in achieving normal birth.

ICM supports the following definition of normal childbirth:

- A unique dynamic process in which fetal and maternal physiologies and psychosocial contexts.
- Normal birth is where the woman commences, continues and completes labour with the infant being born spontaneously at term, in the vertex position at term, without any surgical, medical, or pharmaceutical intervention.

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## Position

ICM supports normal childbirth, since for the majority of women, pregnancy and childbirth are physiological life events. The promotion of normal childbirth is included in *the ICM Scope of Practice*; therefore midwives should be competent in all means of supporting the physiology of childbirth. Women should have access to midwifery-led care, one-to-one support, including the choice of a home birth and immersion in water.

Note: the term childbirth encompasses pregnancy, birth and postnatal period.

## Recommendations

Member Associations are encouraged, in partnership with women, to:

- Promote normal childbirth within the maternity service.
- Confirm midwives as the primary caregiver and expert in normal childbirth.
- Enrich midwives' education in order to enhance skills and competencies in normal childbirth.
- Organise educational courses to enhance midwives' practice in normal childbirth.
- Increase midwives' awareness of the benefits of normal childbirth in terms of maternal and neonatal health.
- Establish and use health care indicators and evaluate the results of midwives' practice in normal childbirth.
- Carry out research to demonstrate the effectiveness of midwifery care in normal childbirth.
- Influence and work in collaboration with Ministries of Health and other organisations.
- Participate in the strategic planning and decision making process related to maternity services thereby encouraging politicians to support normal birth.

## Related ICM Documents

ICM. 2004. WHO/ICM/FIGO Joint Statement: Making Pregnancy Safer: The Critical Role of the Skilled Attendant.

ICM.2008. Core Document.Vision Statement.

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ICM.2011. Core Document. International Definition of the Midwife.

ICM.2010. Core Document. Essential Competencies for Basic Midwifery Practice.

Amended 2013.

### **Other Relevant Documents**

Maternity Care Working Party. 2007. Consensus statement-Making normal birth a reality.

National Childbirth Trust/Royal College of Midwives/ Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, UK,

WHO. 2011. Keeping birth normal.

[http://www.int/chd/publications/newslet/dialog/8/keeping\\_birth\\_normal.htm](http://www.int/chd/publications/newslet/dialog/8/keeping_birth_normal.htm)

### **Adopted at Glasgow Council meeting, 2008**

Reviewed and adopted at Prague Council meeting, 2014

*Due for next review 2020*