

10 August 2021

Hon. Dr Ayesha Verrall
Associate Minister of Health
Minister for Maternity

by email: a.verrall@ministers.govt.nz

Tēnā koe Minister Verrall,

Safety Check renewals for LMC midwives

The New Zealand College of Midwives (the College) is the professional organisation for midwifery. Our members are employed and self-employed and collectively represent over 90% of the practising midwives in this country. We are writing on behalf of our members to escalate concerns about the Children's Worker Safety Check process for midwives.

A Perth-based company (CV Check) has been contracted across government to undertake Children's Worker Safety Checks for the self-employed New Zealand children's workforce. The Safety Check process became mandatory for the children's workforce in 2018, and requires renewal every 3 years.

These concerns have been raised in three letters to the Ministry of Health (2 February and 25 May from the College of Midwives and 5 May from the Midwifery and Maternity Providers Organisation (MMPO), and at several meetings with the Maternity team in the Ministry of Health, but without satisfactory resolution.

For the past several months, the College has been receiving multiple contacts every week from midwife members seeking support with problems or the significant delays they are experiencing with completing the Safety Check renewal process. Many have been left out of pocket for weeks as payments for work completed are withheld due to these delays.

There are two main concerns with the process:

- 1. Delays related to the Police vetting part of the process (which have become more prolonged than usual in 2021 due to high demand), and delays related to CV Check processing timeframes**

The Ministry of Health and the Police were fully aware of the expected increase in CV Check renewal numbers this year, as it is three years since the original deadline for completion of compulsory children's workers' safety checks by self-employed workers. Indeed, the Ministry advised the College several months ago that 200 midwives' CV Checks would expire each month in the middle part of this year. Capacity has not been increased to meet this demand, which has resulted in CV Checks taking in excess of two months to process from application to confirmation of renewal. The expected timeframe until this year was six weeks.

2. The CV Check application interface has been experienced by hundreds of midwives as onerous, unwieldy and even faulty in some circumstances. Mistakes are very easy to make and often difficult to identify and rectify.

Although some of the delays have been due to incomplete applications or missed follow-up emails, the fact that such a large number of midwives are experiencing problems, indicates a wider systems problem as opposed to an individual user one. The College has repeatedly asked the Ministry of Health to require CV Check to improve its user interface (and for improvements to its customer service). Although individual Ministry staff have been working closely with the College to resolve individual midwife issues on a case by case basis, at this point in time, the root cause of the concerns (the onerous and unwieldy CV Check user interface) remain outstanding.

The impact of these delays or issues has led to financial penalty

Whether the delays were caused by police vetting, CV Check website anomalies, the rejection of a valid RealMe identification, or an individual user error, the result is highly punitive with delays in payment, and sometimes non-payment for the professional service that midwives have already provided. Midwives who have been financially disadvantaged have had to turn to their savings, loans and even alternative part-time work to pay their mortgages and bills, despite having provided a professional service in good faith. This has compounded their frustration and impacted on midwives' morale.

Midwives have identified that this unnecessarily difficult and flawed process, and the delays which are beyond their control, are adding another layer of stress and anxiety to an already stretched workforce. The significant financial penalty being experienced by some midwives has been interpreted as a further indication of the lack of value placed on their role in the health system, and is now leading to attrition from the LMC workforce. At a time when we are experiencing midwifery shortages in all settings, this situation needs to be urgently rectified.

As publicly funded providers of essential health care, the College expects that any mandatory processes required of midwives are streamlined and straightforward to ensure continuous practice and payment without impediment. The College considers it is unreasonable for LMC midwives to have payment withheld due to delays that are beyond their control, or because of an unnecessarily onerous process that is prone to user error.

I look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Ngā mihi,



Alison Eddy

Chief Executive

New Zealand College of Midwives | Te kāreti o nga kiawhakawhanau ki Aotearoa

cc: Clare Perry, Deputy Director-General, Health System Improvement and Innovation, Ministry of Health, Clare.Perry@health.govt.nz

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College self-employed members