

TUATAPERE BIRTHING UNIT IN DANGER OF BEING CLOSED

Nestled in the beautiful Waiau Valley is one of Southland's great contributors to improving maternal and child health in rural New Zealand, Tuatapere Maternity centre. Caring midwives and dedicated staff provide care to women for pregnancy, childbirth and during the first few days following the birth. Women are provided with breastfeeding and mother care support and home cooked meals.

The skilled Tuatapere midwives also offer homebirth and water birth options.

However, this wonderful service for Southland mothers is now at risk of being terminated by the Southern District Health Board. The Board is effectively closing Tuatapere Maternity by refusing the service provider Waiau Health Trust Ltd's request to extend their contract which expires on the 31st of March 2012 to enable them to explore more viable models of care and pulling all funding for inpatient services.

The community is rallying to support their maternity centre and claim that the SDHB is shirking its responsibility to their rural community and setting precedent for cost cutting of essential services women and their families are entitled to nationwide. Their decision to pull funding from Tuatapere Maternity, the primary facility that serves the rural women of Tuatapere and the surrounding area leaves some of the most vulnerable populations at greater risks of tragic outcomes.



Tuatapere Maternity represents what the Ministry of Health is touting as their ideal of "integrated services" and yet the Southern District Health Board has deemed the maternity centre non-viable without defining what would be considered viable and proves the strategic plan of "closer sooner, better and more convenient care" a load of rubbish.

The Save Tuatapere Maternity Action Group was formed in an effort to save the birthing facility and they have launched a very public campaign to contest the Health Board's decision. The Group facilitated a public meeting on the 12th of March to discuss the current situation. About 190 members of the public turned up to address a matter which is obviously of great concern to the Western Southland community. At this meeting the Waiau Health Trust Ltd. announced that it would be keeping the facility open and operating beyond the end of their existing contract with the Southern District Health Board, but this will not be sustainable for long without the funding from the Southern District Health Board.

On the 14th of March the Action Group also facilitated a protest. Pregnant mothers, babies in prams, students, mums and dads, grandmothers and grandfathers – more than 100 people in total – pushed prams and marched to the Tuatapere Maternity Hospital to support the Waiau Health Trust Ltd in their fight to retain maternity care in the Western Southland district. There was no question about what the community want. The placards stating, “Our numbers work”, “This dad’s family started here”, “Save our maternity home”, “Don’t gamble with our maternity”, “Where is National when we want 2 Labour” got the message across clearly that the Tuatapere Maternity Unit is wanted and needed, and the community will fight for it.



The community believes the SDHB have not acted in good faith and they foresee the loss of their maternity centre in line with a pattern of behaviour which will ultimately speak to a nationwide whittling away of basic services all communities are entitled to.

To sign their petition – it will only take a minute – go to:

<http://www.petitiononline.co.nz/petition/retain-southern-district-health-board-funding-for-the-inpatient-services-of-labour-birth-and-post-natal-care-at-tuatapere-maternity/1474>

For further information on Tuatapere's Maternity Centre go to:

<http://www.tuataperematernity.co.nz/>

