

# WHY HOMEBIRTH?



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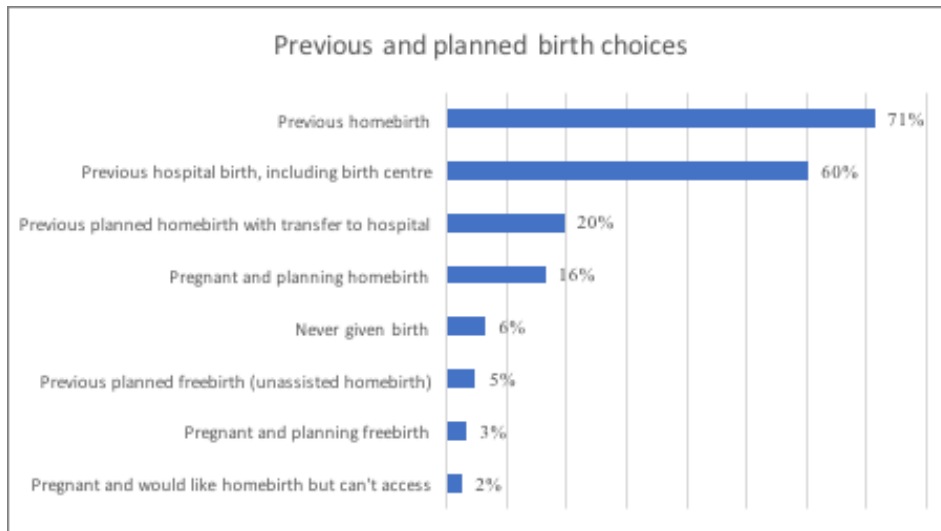
# INTRODUCTION

Homebirth Access Sydney ran a survey in 2018 to investigate women's reasons for choosing homebirth and their experiences, including barriers they faced accessing private midwifery care.

Women were invited to complete the survey online via the Homebirth Access Sydney Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/Homebirth.Access.Sydney/>

A total of 255 women answered the survey. They were largely:

- living in New South Wales (51%), followed by Victoria (20%), Queensland (16%) and the remainder spread amongst the other states and territories plus one overseas
- mostly between 20-40 years of age (82%)
- mothers who had previously given birth (at home or hospital) or were pregnant and planning a homebirth

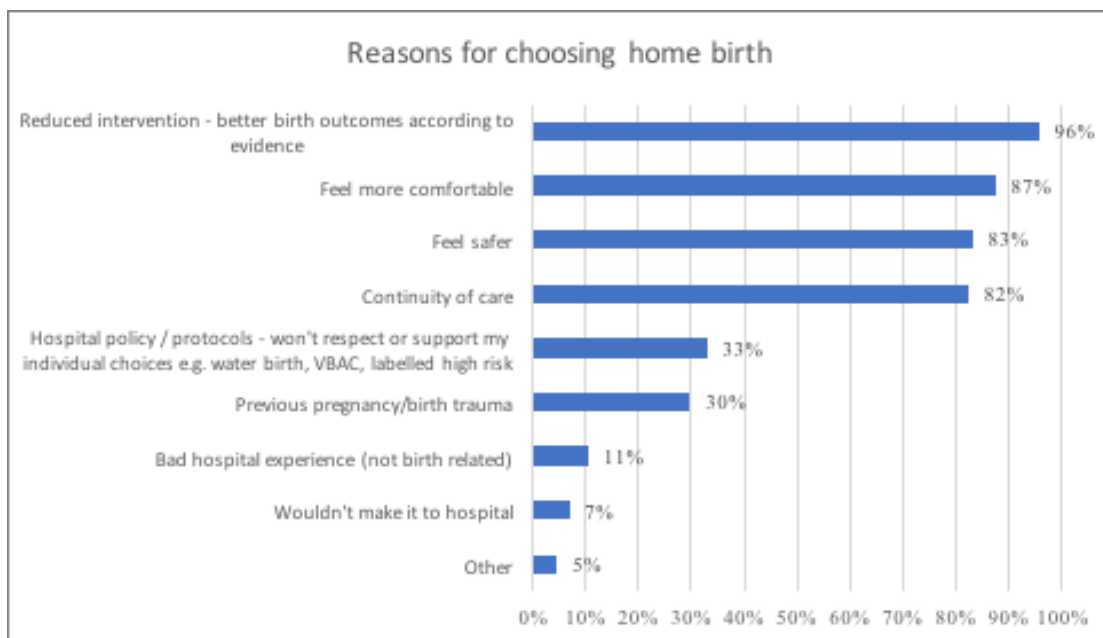


# REASONS FOR CHOOSING HOMEBIRTH

Women were asked to say why they chose homebirth. They could select all that applied from a list of options and could also select 'other' to give different reasons or more information.

The top reasons women gave for choosing to give birth at home related to avoiding interventions / achieving a normal, physiological birth, feeling safer and more comfortable at home and wanting continuity of midwifery care.

There were also significant proportions of women who felt their preferences would not be met in hospital and who had experience trauma in a previous hospital birth.



A selection of the other responses given were:

*“At the hospital I felt bullied and there is so much scaremongering”*

*“I wanted evidence-based care and to be listened to and have my rights to informed consent and bodily autonomy respected”*

*“I am 43 and have had IVF. I would be classified as high risk with a hospital and have every intervention under the sun. I don’t want this.”*

*“I was born at home. Everyone in my family has had homebirths. Tradition.”*

*“As a midwife in a public hospital I see how many issues are caused by our treatment of women and as I had low risk pregnancy, I knew the safest place was not the hospital!”*

We can see the push and pull factors driving women’s choice to birth at home.

On the one hand, women are drawn to homebirth with a sense that:

- They deserve respectful, individualised care from a known midwife, and that this isn’t on offer through the hospital system
- Birth is a normal, family event that unfolds most easily in the privacy and comfort of home
- That birth should not (usually) require medical intervention or management in a hospital setting.

Women also hear stories or have direct experiences of feeling disempowered, coerced and alienated by the hospital maternity system. This pushes them to research their options, where they realise the benefits of homebirth.

## HOME BIRTH AFTER CAESAREAN

A good proportion of women choose homebirth because they feel the hospital maternity system doesn't support their wishes in 'higher risk' circumstances, including vaginal birth after caesarean (VBAC).

Almost a fifth of women in our survey (49 women or 19%) planned a homebirth after caesarean (HBAC). The majority gave birth at home (88%).

The women who transferred to hospital, were evenly split between those who gave birth vaginally (6%) and those who had a repeat caesarean (6%).

This compares to a 15.5% successful VBAC rate nationally



94% successful VBAC rate under PPM care



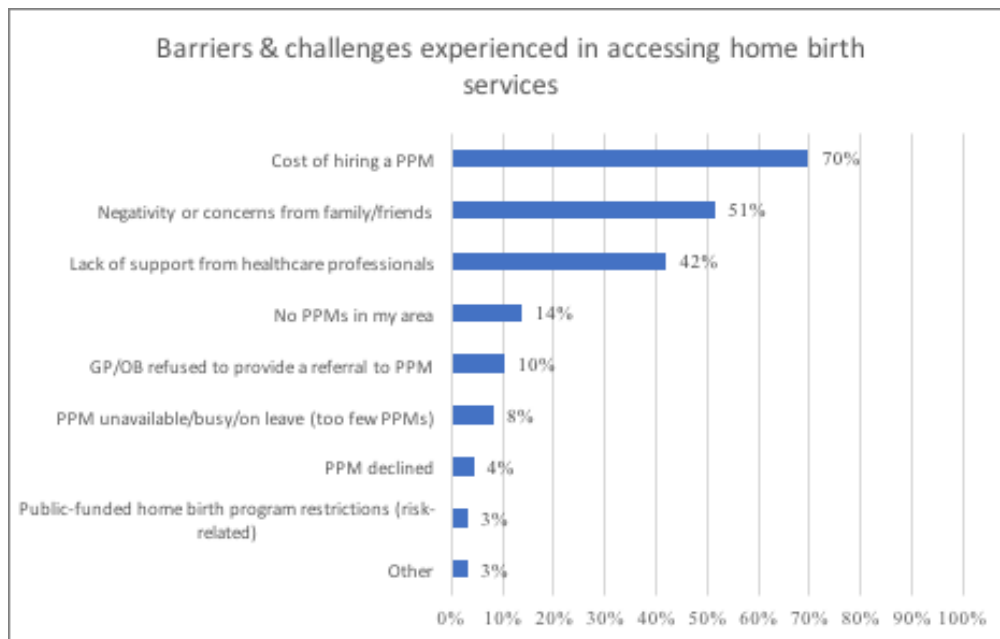
15.5% successful VBAC rate in hospital care

<sup>1</sup> <http://theconversation.com/explainer-vaginal-birth-after-caesarean-48328>

# BARRIERS TO HOMEBIRTH

The primary barrier to accessing home birth services is the cost, with 70% of women participating in the survey finding the cost of hiring a Privately Practising Midwife (PPM) difficult to manage.

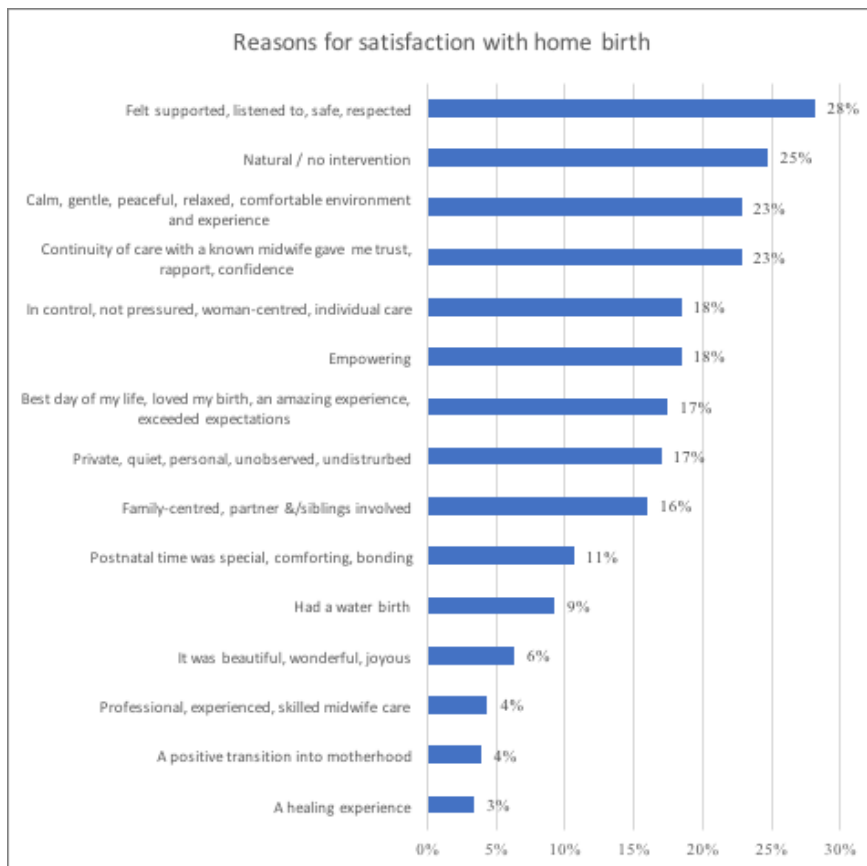
Negativity and a lack of support from family/friends and also from healthcare professionals is also widely experienced (by 51% and 42% of women respectively). This points to a need to educate the community and health providers about the evidence on the safety of home birth. For some women (10%), lack of support for their choice to birth at home resulted in their doctor refusing to provide a referral to a PPM. Other barriers related to unavailability of PPMs, with 14% having no PPM in their area and 8% unable to find a PPM that could support them for their expected due date.



# SATISFACTION WITH HOMEBIRTH

The vast majority of women answering our survey (81%) were satisfied with their experience of giving birth at home.

They were asked to highlight why they were happy with their home birth experience and reasons given are presented below.





A selection of direct quotes are included below to illustrate the strength of sentiment expressed by the women:

- “I was trusted, I believed in myself, the birth experience was the most amazing experience of my life and I will never forget cuddling up with my baby and husband in our bed on the first night.”  
“I had the most peaceful and perfect birth in my own space in my own time with known care providers and my family present. No interventions, no pressure. I hope I never have to birth any other way.”
- “My two homebirths were the best days of my life. I was thoroughly supported in all of my decisions and was made responsible for all of those decisions. Therefore, I was EMPOWERED. I did it. My babies and I did it, without the fear mongering. I feel stronger in myself and my mothering for it.”
- “I also think it helped my 3 year old son to be present for his brother’s birth. There has been no jealousy. I’m beyond proud of myself for birthing at home and so happy for my babies that they entered the world gently.”
- “I wanted a calm peaceful uninterrupted birth and my midwife, birthing partner and sister were all in my loungeroom while I laboured and my son was born. It is literally the highlight of my life and still brings tears to my eyes thinking about the joyful experience.”

“I got the birth I had been visualising, without intervention, drugs or time limits. And, because of all of that there was no stress, no issues and the birth was incredible. But, what made it incredible was the passionate and highly trained midwives who supported us every step of the way. That would never have happened if we birth in a hospital.”

“Exceeded all expectations for a satisfying birth experience. I did not have to be concerned about organising care for other children and they were able to participate in the whole birthing experience. No worry about other professionals barging into room. ‘Normalizing’ birth for other children.”

“Absolutely, it was the best experience of my life. I was extremely well supported by my midwife, husband and doula. My wishes were listened to. I was informed every step of the way. I felt safe at home. My experience gave me confidence to trust in myself and my intuition, making me a better mother. My experience showed me what a female body is capable of and made me feel as though I can accomplish absolutely anything in life. My experience made me pity all the women who don’t have my experience as they will never understand what a huge impact a fantastic birth can have on your life.”

“So much yes! I was able to have an intimate birth without people walking in and out. My birth plan was respected and I wasn’t questioned in regards to my choices. I was able to have the birth I dreamed of which was an undisturbed water birth. I couldn’t have had this in a hospital with routine VE’s and continuous monitoring as was with my previous births.  
Yes, it was everything I’d hoped for. Very empowering and respectful, I felt listened to, unhurried and had a wonderful post birth rest on my own sofa.”



Homebirth Access Sydney

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