

RED DEER ADVOCATE

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For the birth of her first child Red Deer mother Andrea Rentz chose to have a standard hospital birth. Her daughter Mia, now four, was delivered by Caesarean section.

But for her second pregnancy, she decided she wanted a different experience and chose to use a midwife.

She and her husband headed to the Royal Alexandra Hospital in Edmonton for the delivery. Rentz said her experience was markedly different. "It was really a wonderful empowering experience," Rentz said. "I didn't realize birth could be such a powerful experience."

She said the birth of her daughter Ana, now 2 1/2, was very low key, with no drugs used. "There are wonderful doctors out there who do a wonderful job and there are lots of people who are really happy with that," Rentz said. "For me I was really happy I was able to make that choice and we were very privileged financially to be able to make that choice (to use a midwife)."

More families will likely have the option to use the services of a midwife, with an announcement that the provincial government will fund the service. The Alberta government announced Thursday that starting April 1, 2009, midwives will be brought into the publicly funded health system.

Rentz said she was cautiously optimistic about the announcement. "Initially it sounds like a great idea and it is a wonderful first step in the direction that the province needs to go," Rentz said. "It's definitely about time that Alberta caught up with the rest of North America."

But she said until she sees what kinds of restrictions will be placed on midwives she doesn't know how advantageous or accessible the program will be.

There are 30 registered midwives throughout the province who up until this point only received funding privately from families willing and able to pay approximately \$3,500 for their services. The Alberta Health Services Board will have \$4 million to implement midwifery service across Alberta in the 2009-2010 fiscal year. Expectant mothers will have midwifery services available to them in hospitals, community birthing centres or in their homes, according to a government press release.

Barb Bodiguel has practiced as a private midwife for 23 years in Central Alberta, helping to deliver more than 1,000 babies. In February, she took a position in Rocky Mountain House, working beside the primary care network, doing midwifery care for the First Nations and Inuit Health branch.

Bodiguel said midwives have pushed for this kind of funding for two decades and it will mean more choices for women. "It will also mean — not immediately — but eventually some relief to the very dire shortage of primary care practitioners in the maternity field," Bodiguel said.

She said she hopes now that funding will be available it will mean that midwives who have left Alberta for other provinces will come back. "I think what this will mean is that midwives will finally be able to step up to the table as equal providers and I think it will really facilitate a lot more team efforts in communities," Bodiguel said.

She said the next step will be to have a university education program for midwives in the province. Currently, those wishing to get training in midwifery must go to Ontario, B.C., the United States or overseas.

A new pilot project offered by the Canadian Midwifery Regulators Consortium, through partners at Mount Royal College in Calgary and the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, is just about underway. The project will allow those with prior overseas training to upgrade their skills so they can become registered in Canada as midwives.

Diane Rach is the chair of the Alberta Midwifery Health Disciplines Committee, which is overseeing the program. She said the funding announcement means that there is much greater assurance that the midwives who go through the program will have employment upon leaving it.

“This is going to be wonderful for the child-bearing women in the province because this now makes us (midwives) accessible to anyone who wishes to use our services,” Rach said.

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