

What more can we do? Australians demand better support for desperate mothers to prevent further tragedies



A nurse in Japan demonstrates how to use the nation's first and only baby hatch. (Getty)



Julieanne
Horsman

Every time a newborn is abandoned in Australia it reignites the debate over baby hatches – boxes at a hospital, church or police station where mothers can safely and anonymously leave their unwanted babies.



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The service is provided in dozens of countries around the world including Germany, Pakistan, Austria, Czech Republic, France, China, United States, Canada and Japan.

Abandoning a baby in Australia is a criminal offence and punishable by law

Baby hatches are now being considered for New South Wales and some health professionals are pushing for a national roll-out.



A baby hatch at a hospital in Germany where women can leave their unwanted newborns and know they will get immediate care. (Getty)

The discovery of two abandoned babies in Sydney within just one week sickened and saddened the nation, raising the question of what more could be done to stop desperate mothers slipping through the net.

“There is no doubt we find ourselves with two cases that are currently under investigation that requires us to think seriously about what we need to help families that are in crisis,” Police Minister Stuart Ayres said.

Should we introduce 'baby hatches' for desperate mothers in Australia?

Yes

No

Long time CEO of the Australian Childhood Foundation, Joe Tucci, has renewed his push for a trial of baby hatches in either Sydney or Melbourne where there are well-established services to lead it.

“It might one day save the life of a baby so why wouldn’t we do that?” Mr Tucci said.

“Nothing can take the place of offering new mums good support and information but in some circumstances the women may feel they have no other option.”

Tasmanian Senator Helen Polley is also in favour of establishing “baby safe havens” that would allow parents to “legally abandon a baby without fear of criminal prosecution”.

News Corp columnist Sarrah le Marquand echoed the sentiment on a need for cultural change.

“I definitely think we need to decriminalise a woman being able to anonymously leave a baby behind.”



A baby boy abandoned in a drain by his mother is lifted to safety. His mother has been charged with attempted murder. (9NEWS)



The body of a newborn baby girl was found buried in the sand at Maroubra Beach on Saturday. (9NEWS)

An online poll of 5000 people conducted by 9 News showed 81% of voters support the idea as well.

Many of those who are against baby hatches fear it will make abandoning a baby too easy, thereby encouraging more women to do it.

In New South Wales newborn adoption is rare – roughly 13 babies a year.

There is a strict, multi-step process a mother must follow before she can give up her baby.

Consent for adoption cannot be given until the baby is at least 30 days old.



Behind these gates at a hospital in Germany is a baby hatch where women can leave their unwanted newborns. (Getty)

Before the forms can be signed a mother must undergo counseling which can't take place until at least 14 days after she has been given all information about the process.

Consent must be given within 30 days of undergoing counseling or time starts again and once this process has been completed, the mother has another 30 days to change her mind.

NSW Family and Community Services Deputy Secretary Deidre Mulkerin stressed the importance of encouraging new mothers who feeling hopeless and overwhelmed to seek help.

"If you see a mum struggling reach out, offer support and encourage them."

FACS runs a 24-hour helpline for mothers in crisis. Counselors can be reached by calling 132 111.

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