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## The new government can create lasting **change** for women, babies and families by prioritising perinatal mental health

After a general election where the three main parties all made commitments to improve women's health and mental health, we welcome the new government to office. Now is a pivotal moment for the future of perinatal mental health (PMH) care in the UK.

Labour's manifesto commitments included prioritising women's health within NHS reforms and ensuring mental health is given the same attention as physical health. Delivering on these changes is a prime opportunity to help all women access the right PMH care.

Investing in PMH is not just a moral imperative; it is also **economically beneficial**. The long-term cost of untreated PMH issues is estimated to be £8.1 billion annually in the UK.

**By focusing on early intervention, integrated care and comprehensive support services, the new government has a chance to reduce these costs and deliver positive change for the mental health of our society, now and for future generations.**



### IN THIS EDITION, YOU'LL FIND...

- Opportunities and risks to make progress in PMH across the UK
- A vision for better integrated PMH care
- New research into maternal suicide
- Reflections on the Amplifying Maternal Voices Project



## What's needed?

The Maternal Mental Health Alliance (MMHA) urges the new Labour government to prioritise PMH in their first term by:

- 1** Equipping maternity and health visiting services to provide high-quality and compassionate mental health care (see [page 2](#) for further detail)
- 2** Closing the gaps in specialist PMH service provision across the UK
- 3** Joining-up care for women and families across statutory services and the voluntary sector
- 4** Addressing health inequalities in PMH and maternity care
- 5** Improving data collection and transparency.

We look forward to working with the new government and supporting them to deliver **the mental health care we know women, babies, and families need.**

“

What I want to know is, what is the government going to do to make sure mothers and birthing people are getting the right help at the right time for their mental health? Considering that suicide is the leading cause of maternal death in the first year. ”

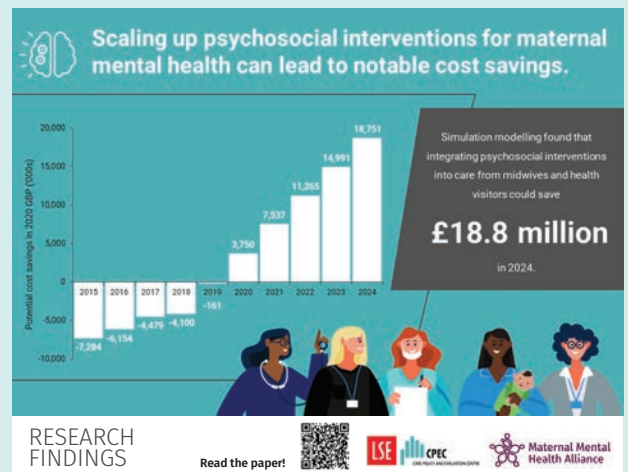
Chrissy Brown, MMHA Lived Experience Champion, speaking at the [Channel 4 NHS Debate](#) in June 2024

# A vision for better mental health care within maternity and health visiting services

Over the past decade, specialist PMH service provision has significantly improved, thanks to the sector's sustained efforts. It is essential that progress is now made for women experiencing common PMH issues, like depression and anxiety, which too often go unrecognised and untreated.

A **newly published scientific paper** presents a solution. The integration of psychological therapies into maternity and health visiting services could help provide accessible, non-stigmatised care for women and their families, help ease pressures on existing health care professionals and deliver more cost-effective care.

We hope the new government utilises this new research to transform PMH care within maternity and health visiting services.



## TAKE ACTION:

### Write to your MP!

With the recent election we now have lots of new MPs in Parliament, as well as a new government. Many of these MPs may not yet know much about maternal mental health.

Please help us to raise awareness amongst parliamentarians of the mental health needs of new and expectant mothers, babies and families. Despite mental illness being the **most common complication** of pregnancy and the postnatal period (**affecting at least 1 in 5**) we know there is far less investment and attention compared to physical conditions.

#### How you can help

- Contact your MP using our **template**.
- Spread the word on social media, tagging your MP and @MMHAlliance.

## New research on preventing maternal suicide says new and expectant mums need to be asked about their mental health



Suicide remains a **leading cause** of maternal death in the UK. **The ASPEN study** by King's College

London sheds light on the experiences of women who attempted suicide during the perinatal period.

Three key themes emerged: **trauma and adversities, disillusionment with motherhood, and feelings of entrapment and despair.**

A webinar hosted by the MMHA to discuss the research sold 500 tickets in just 24 hours! **A recording is available** for anyone who missed out.

“ We hope the findings from this study will lead to increased awareness and support during the perinatal period and help prevent future maternal suicides. ”

Dr Abigail Easter, Reader in PMH at King's College London

## Reflecting on 2 years of the Amplifying Maternal Voices (AMV) project



Now the **AMV project** has concluded, we celebrate the launch of the **AMV Toolkit**, created with PMH experts and the MMHA's Lived Experience Champions, and **reflect on what we learned:**

1. The power of bringing people together and sharing expertise
2. Inspiring work is happening, but more action needed to address inequities in PMH
3. Collaboration is key to achieving change.

Looking ahead, the MMHA will integrate these learnings into our wider work and continue sharing the Toolkit to inspire improvements at a local level.

Whilst there has been significant progress within PMH care, collective action is still required to address inequities, systemic racism, and funding gaps.

## ENGLAND: Tackling birth trauma

During the previous Parliament, the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Birth Trauma published their eye-opening inquiry report. 'Listen to Mums: Ending the Postcode Lottery on Perinatal Care' incorporates evidence from parents and healthcare professionals and calls for a fundamental shift in maternity care.



The report lists 12 recommendations, including access to specialist PMH services across the UK. These valuable learnings must be acted on by the new government.

## WALES: Influencing the next Mental Health Strategy

Alongside NSPCC Cymru and the Wales PMH network, the MMHA and Home-Start Cymru have submitted our response to Welsh Government's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy consultation. Thank you to all the stakeholders who contributed to our recommendations, highlighting the need to prioritise high-quality PMH provision.

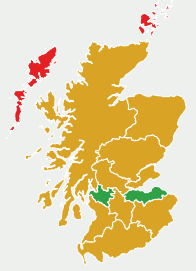
The MMHA will continue to engage with the Welsh Government, so the new strategy delivers for families across Wales.



## SCOTLAND: Evaluation of PMH services expected soon

Since the Perinatal and Infant Mental Health Programme Board was disbanded in March 2023, governance and oversight of PMH in Scotland has been incorporated into a Joint Strategic Board for Children and Families Mental Health. We recognise the importance of seamless support for families, but we urge the new Strategic Board to maintain a focus on the development of PMH services.

An evaluation of the Programme Board and the status of PMH services across Scotland is currently underway. We will analyse the results to identify learnings and support the ongoing need for a PMH vision for Scotland and clear, consistent funding.

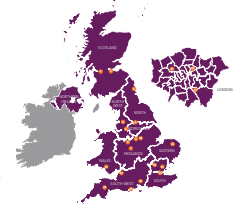


## NORTHERN IRELAND: Update on plans for Belfast's Mother and Baby Unit

We are still waiting for the business case and funding for the planned Mother and Baby Unit (MBU) in Belfast and remain hopeful for an update on this very soon. With a functioning Executive returned, the APPG on Women's Health recently joined us to call for action on the MBU.

Specialist PMH community teams are now operational in all five Health and Social Care Boards. However, pressures with caseloads and staff recruitment remain, and the VCSE sector is supporting many mums who don't meet thresholds for the specialist teams.

The MMHA looks forward to working with the new Health Minister to build on the progress made for women, babies and families.



## ROUNDTABLE: Why support new parents' mental health in the workplace?

On Tuesday 21 May, the MMHA held a roundtable at the House of Lords, hosted by Lord James Bethell, aimed at breaking the pervasive silence around PMH in the workplace. In partnership with Policy Connect and the All Party Parliamentary Health Group, we brought together a diverse group of experts from the voluntary sector, clinical practice, and business to discuss the mental health needs of working parents and how businesses can provide better support.

We want to work with employers to set a new standard of PMH support in the UK. Together, we can define best practice and make workplaces psychologically safe for new and expectant parents.



**Panellists:** Lord Bethell, Luciana Berger (Chair), Dame Lesley Regan, Laura Seebohm, Annie Belasco, Jane van Zyl, Christina Brown, Leanne Howlett, Dr Krystal Wilkinson, Lydia Hamilton-Rimmer, Sandra Igwe, Debbie Woskko MBE and Tania Bowler.

## MMHA staff updates

In May, we bid a fond farewell to Chief Executive, Laura Seebohm. We are hugely grateful for Laura's leadership and the ambitious strategy she set for the Alliance. Taking up the mantel is returning CEO, **Justin Irwin**. Please join us in warmly welcoming him once again.



Justin Irwin, Chief Executive

We were also delighted to welcome back Rebecca French, Everyone's Business Coordinator for Scotland, from maternity leave. And, last but not least, we would like to introduce Izzabella James, our new Coordinator for Wales.

## Media moments

**WATCH: Channel 4: NHS Health Debate 'NHS in Crisis'**, hosted by Krishnan Guru-Murthy, featuring MMHA Lived Experience Champion Chrissy Brown.



- **Women Need Mandatory Maternal Mental Health Check Ups** – *Grazia*, in support of MMHA's Advocacy Day campaign
- **UK birth-trauma inquiry delivered gritty truths, but change will be hard** – *Guardian*
- **North Wales MS calls for better mental health support for parents** – *Deeside.com*
- **Maternal mental health: a call to action** – by Toni Woodman, MMHA – Maternity & Midwifery Forum
- **A third more new mums access mental health help** – *Women's Health*

## PMHP UK's 7th annual Maternal Mental Health Awareness Week (MMHAW)

Thanks to MMHA member **PMHP UK** for bringing the sector together, once again, to raise awareness of PMH problems and the support available.

The MMHA's MMHAW content:

- Reached **over 1 million accounts**, thanks to support from *Grazia* and **some influential mums**
- With video content **viewed 56k+ times**.



Most importantly, we saw an influx of website visitors seeking **PMH information and support**. This demonstrates how vital it is that we continue to raise public awareness and reduce stigma.

## MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: DadPad

In June, we welcomed **DadPad** to the Alliance, a social enterprise offering essential information for dads-to-be based on input from dads, their partners, and professionals.



To mark Father's Day and International Father's Mental Health Day, we collaborated on a **short animation** to highlight the 1 in 10 dads who experience PMH difficulties, key symptoms to look for, and the support available for dads and partners.



Maternal Mental Health Alliance is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) registered in England and Wales (no. 1178152).

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