

Help us **Make All Care Count** for women, babies and families

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What's to come from the MMHA in 2024...

Visualising the provision of Maternal Mental Health Services across the UK.



Launch of the Amplifying Maternal Voices (AMV) toolkit

Continued cross party-political engagement



Our Listening Project and more to highlight health inequalities and multiple disadvantage



Making perinatal mental health a priority for the next government



With a general election on the horizon, 2024 will be a crucial year to make sure that the mental health needs of new and expectant mothers and their families is on the political agenda. Perinatal mental health (PMH) has only been mentioned in a handful of party manifestos over the past four elections despite the far-reaching and serious consequences of failing to provide appropriate care.

The clear evidence showing the significant human and economic benefits of supporting maternal mental health is overwhelming. There has been progress, but too many families still do not receive the care they need. Ongoing attention to maternal mental health is vital!

Leading up to the election, the MMHA team will continue engaging with parliamentarians from all major parties to emphasise how crucially important maternal mental health care is in both the statutory and voluntary sectors.

We are asking that the next government values the mental health of new and expectant mothers' as much as their physical health by committing to making sure it is sensitively discussed every time they see a health professional.

As ever, working together as an alliance and as a sector will be crucial to ensuring all political parties see PMH as an essential part of healthcare, not an optional luxury.

Keep an eye on our social media for ways to get involved and please contact antonia@maternalmentalhealthalliance.org with suggestions.

IN THIS EDITION, YOU'LL FIND...

- Updates and challenges in the devolved nations
- More detail about MMHA's political influencing work
- New research, resources, and tools from and for the PMH community



ENGLAND: Roundtable to discuss the need for enhanced maternal mental health care



“Too many mothers suffering from poor postnatal mental health are not receiving the care they need... I’m so pleased to join the Maternal Mental Health Alliance and other important voices to discuss these urgent challenges...” Abena Oppong-Asare, Shadow Minister for Women’s Health and Mental Health

In November 2023, the MMHA brought the Shadow Minister and experts in women’s health together to discuss how to **improve access to mental health support within maternity and health visiting services**. The panel also highlighted the urgent need to address inequalities leading to higher levels of risk and poorer experiences of care for Black and minority ethnic women, young mothers, and those facing multiple disadvantages such as domestic abuse, poverty, and addiction.

SCOTLAND: Parliamentary roundtable agrees commitment to PMH must continue



“Many women and families in Scotland who need access to specialist PMH services are still at a disadvantage because of where they live.” Tess White MSP

The MMHA and Parent & Infant Mental Health Scotland held a roundtable discussion in Scottish Parliament to emphasise the need for continued investment in PMH services. It’s time to end the postcode lottery and ensure that every family can access the right support at the right time, close to home. [Read the briefing >](#)

NORTHERN IRELAND: Update on the rollout of specialist PMH services

On behalf of the Public Health Agency (PHA), practitioners from across Northern Ireland’s specialist PMH services **gave an update** on the rollout and what new and expectant mums can expect if they are referred.



The PHA also announced that Belfast Trust will be the location for Northern Ireland’s first Mother and Baby Unit. Although this is a positive step forward, it is disappointing that crucial funding for this unit has yet to be agreed upon, and there is currently no delivery plan in place.

Women and families have been waiting for too long. Specific details are needed NOW to provide hope to those in need.

WALES: Urgent recommendations for the next Mental Health Strategy



The MMHA has been working with the Wales Perinatal Mental Health Implementation Network, NSPCC Cymru, and stakeholders to identify **key priorities for PMH and parent-infant relationship (PIR) support** in the next Welsh Government mental health strategy. Our **joint influencing paper** was submitted to Government in October 2023 and identifies sector wide agreement on the gaps requiring attention and action in the forthcoming strategy.

There is no confirmed launch date for the strategy consultation yet, but we will need as many of you as possible to get involved as it will be a crucial opportunity to influence future mental health policy in Wales.

Follow MMHA and NSPCC Cymru for updates.

GP maternal postnatal consultations: what does good look like?

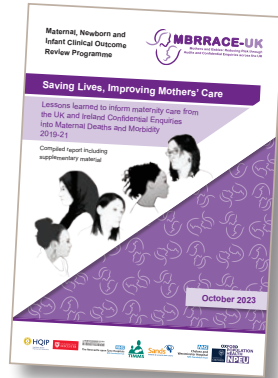
Postnatal checks are an ideal opportunity to monitor, support, and intervene for those mums dealing with mental health challenges after having a baby. Although a contractual requirement since February 2020, **comprehensive guidance** for GPs about how maternal postnatal consultations should be carried out was only released in December 2023. Although late, we welcome the strong focus on mental health, with a section dedicated to identifying PMH issues, risk factors, barriers to disclosure, and treatment and referral options.



MBRRACE: Alarming mental health findings

The 'Saving Lives Improving Mothers' Care 2023' report found that:

- **Suicide** continues to be a leading cause of maternal death
- **39%** of deaths in this reporting period were mental health-related
- **37%** of the women who died were known to have a previous or existing mental health condition.



The disparity in outcomes for Black and Asian mothers continue and 12% of women who lost their lives experienced severe and multiple disadvantages, including mental illness, substance misuse, and domestic abuse. The stark reality is that all women with multiple disadvantages had a mental health diagnosis, and this was often a critical factor in these cases.

An action plan based on the recommendations in the report is needed **now**. We cannot wait any longer to ensure all women can access life-saving mental health support. [Read more >](#)

Cross-party support to tackle birth trauma

In October 2023, Theo Clarke MP initiated the UK's inaugural **parliamentary debate** on birth trauma, sharing her own harrowing experience and demanding better support for affected parents.

On 9 January 2024, the Birth Trauma APPG, of which the MMHA is a Special Advisory Group Member, **launched an inquiry** to investigate the reasons behind traumatic birth in the UK. The written and oral evidence gathered from parents with lived experience and health professionals will inform a policy report, set to be released this spring, including recommendations for the UK Government to reduce birth trauma.



KEY STATISTICS: Young mums

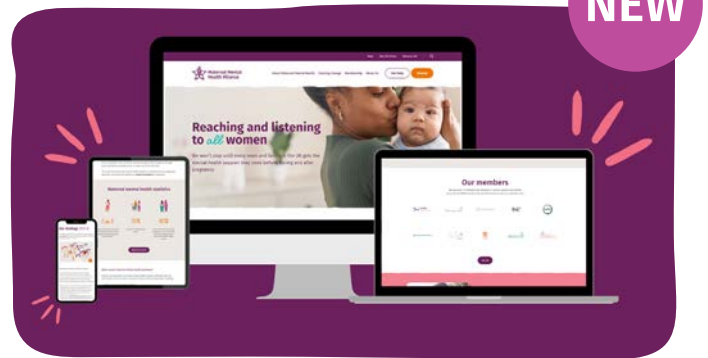


Mums aged 25 and under have been identified as being at particularly high risk of experiencing perinatal mental illness:

- Postnatal depression is up to twice as prevalent in teenage mothers compared to those over 20. (Public Health England, 2016)
- 57% of young mums say they feel lonelier since having a baby (Young Women's Trust, 2017)
- The rate of teenage maternal suicide is increasing (MBRRACE-UK, 2022)

The MMHA and the **Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition's** joint report, '**The maternal mental health experiences of young mums**', explores the mental health experiences of young mums and sets out what needs to change to better support their mental health.

MMHA website live now!



The **new MMHA website** aims to serve as a comprehensive hub for PMH in the UK whether you're a healthcare professional, a mum experiencing mental health problems, a journalist, an MP, or a commissioner. You will find:

- **Lived experience** insights
- Latest **news, research** and **resources**
- The MMHA **member database** providing information about the vital work of our members and the support they offer
- New content about **domestic abuse, young mums**, our **impact** and **campaigns**.

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: iHV and UNICEF UK raise alarm about the rise of poverty and PMH problems

According to **iHV's latest survey**, nearly all UK health visitors (93%) have observed a rise in poverty in the past 12 months. Additionally:

- **78%** of health visitors reported an increase in **perinatal mental illness**
- **69%** reported an increase in **domestic abuse**
- **63%** reported an increase in homelessness.

In a 2023 **UNICEF UK** poll, 74% of the poorest households shared they were struggling with their mental health, compared to 61% of all respondents with young children. The poorest families were also the least likely to have received support (58% compared to 42% of all income groups surveyed).

“**Urgent steps must be taken to ensure that no issues slip through the cracks, and our most vulnerable families receive the support they desperately need.**”

Laura Seebohm, CEO of the MMHA

Media moments

WATCH: MMHA Lived Experience Champions, Emma and Sapna, filmed their stories with **Kensington Palace** to mark World Mental Health Day.



The barriers to UK maternal mental healthcare – The Guardian

Half of anxiety and depression cases in new and expectant mothers missed: report – The National

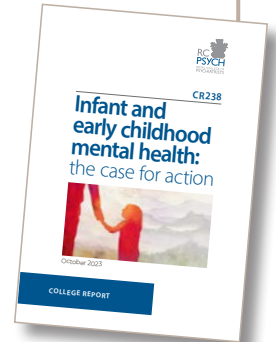
16 days of activism against violence against women and girls – Blog by Laura Seebohm for the RCM

‘Consider dad’s mental health too!’: Resilio specialist suicide prevention workshop attendants urged – yahoo.com

ESSENTIAL READING: New member resources

➤ **Infant and early childhood mental health: the case for action**

In recognition of the fact that the early years of a child’s life offer a fantastic opportunity to improve the mental wellbeing of both parents and their children, the MMHA was asked for input into this landmark **infant mental health report** from the Royal College of Psychiatrists.



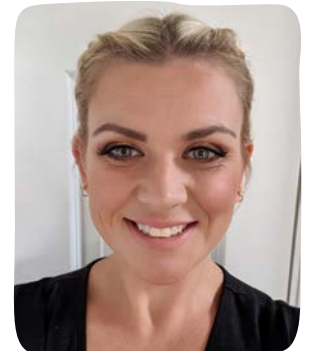
➤ **Royal College of Midwives: PMH Roadmap**

‘**Strengthening perinatal mental health**’ provides a roadmap on how to improve services and midwifery training to ensure that women and birthing people are supported with their mental health during and after pregnancy. Changes the college is calling for include:

- 1** All professionals working with women in the perinatal period have the necessary knowledge and understanding of PMH.
- 2** Every maternity service has a perinatal specialist midwife.
- 3** All maternity professionals should be equally concerned with mental as well as physical health.

MMHA team updates

The MMHA bid a sad but fond farewell to Rebecca Sheppard, who stepped down as our Development and Programmes Manager. Rebecca contributed enormously to MMHA’s growth, and we wish her all the best for the future.



We also welcomed Rachael Jordan as Marketing and Partnerships Director. This new role will be responsible for diversifying MMHA’s income through strategic partnerships and building on our strong reputation.

We are proud to share that Laura Seebohm, CEO, has been invited to represent maternal mental health on the National Suicide Prevention Advisory Group, Maternity Disparity Taskforce, Birth Trauma APPG advisory board and Women and Work APPG.

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

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