Mental health problems are common during pregnancy or within the first year of giving birth (the perinatal period), affecting more than 1 in 10 women. Conditions include antenatal and postnatal depression, obsessive compulsive disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder and postpartum psychosis. These problems can develop suddenly and range from mild to moderate, to extremely severe, requiring different kinds of care and/or treatment.

Perinatal mental illnesses are a major public health issue. As well as having an adverse impact on the mother, they can also impact on the emotional, cognitive and physical development of the child, and in some cases, the consequences can be lifelong and experienced by the whole family.

The good news is that with timely help and support, women can and do recover from these illnesses. However, further investment is required to provide the necessary levels of support for women affected across Wales.

The National Institute of Health and Care Excellence (NICE) clearly defines which services are needed for women affected by perinatal mental health illnesses, and in some parts of the UK, women receive world-class care. However, in many areas perinatal mental illness goes unrecognised, undiagnosed and untreated, leading to avoidable suffering for women and their families.

All these problems warrant attention, whenever they occur in the perinatal period. The good news is that with the right help, women can recover from these illnesses – however, investment is required.

**Current gaps**

Welsh Government have recently invested £1.5 million in annual recurring funding to develop specialist community mental health services across each of the health boards areas. This is a welcome step forward bringing new services to areas where previously there was no provision.

However, this should be seen as a starting point as further investment is needed to reduce the disparity in services between different parts of the country.

In addition, Wales has no specialist inpatient mother and baby unit (MBU), meaning that women needing inpatient care are unable to be treated with their baby.

It is estimated that up to 100 women a year with severe perinatal mental illness in Wales have been treated in adult psychiatric wards, separated from their child, or have had to travel as far as Derby, London and Nottingham to access a MBU.2 This lack of provision must be addressed.

The forthcoming report by NSPCC Wales, National Centre for Mental Health, Mind Cymru and Mental Health Foundation is due to provide a detailed overview of gaps in service provision in Wales, and we encourage Welsh Government to use their findings to take the next step in Wales’ perinatal mental health journey.
Mother and Baby Units (MBU)

Human costs of undiagnosed or untreated perinatal mental illnesses include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Avoidable suffering</td>
<td>Perinatal mental illness can cause intense, debilitating, isolating and often frightening suffering for women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damage to families</td>
<td>Perinatal mental illness can have a long-term impact on a woman’s self-esteem and relationships with partners and family members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>Perinatal mental illness can have an adverse impact on the interaction between a mother and her baby, affecting the child’s emotional, social and cognitive development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicide or serious injury</td>
<td>In severe cases, perinatal mental illness can be life-threatening. Suicide is a leading cause of death for women during pregnancy and in the year after giving birth.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: www.maternalmentalhealthalliance.org/campaign
The costs of perinatal mental health problems report by the London School of Economics and Centre for Mental Health identified that perinatal mental health problems carry a total economic and social long-term cost to society of about £8.1 billion for each one-year cohort of births in the UK. Of these costs 28% relate to the mother and 72% relate to the child.

Wales needs

In line with the Everyone’s Business Call to Act, Wales has specific needs to address the inequality of services:

**Accountability for perinatal mental health care should be clearly set at a national level and complied with**

Following an inquiry by the National Assembly’s Children, Young People and Education Committee, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Services has agreed to establish a clinician-led managed clinical network (MCN) to provide strategic leadership to drive forward further development of perinatal mental health services in Wales.

This network must be given adequate resources to allow it to coordinate further development of services, including in relation to quality standards and care pathways.

**Community specialist perinatal mental health teams meeting national quality standards should be available for women in every area of the UK**

The disparity in services between health board areas in Wales needs to be addressed. Welsh Government has committed an additional £20 million for mental health services in this year’s budget (2017-18) and included a further £20 million in funding over the next two years in the draft budget.

Health Boards must ring-fence a proportion of this additional funding to address the gaps in service provision and ensure they meet NICE guidelines.

**Training in perinatal mental health care should be delivered to all professionals involved in the care of women during pregnancy and the first year after birth**

A sub-group of the All Wales Perinatal Mental Health Steering Group is developing an integrated training and competency framework to ensure all staff in the specialist workforce have sufficient knowledge and skills to offer evidence-based assessments.

We welcome this development but call for training to be extended to all professionals involved in the care of women during pregnancy and the first year after birth. This should include specialist perinatal midwives and health visitors across the seven health board areas.

Contact: Paul Gauci, Everyone’s Business Campaign Coordinator Wales
paul.gauci@everyonesbusiness.org.uk

---

1. NICE Antenatal and Postnatal Mental Health Guidelines https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg192?unlid=5985059842015720221139
2. Perinatal mental health in Wales, October 2017. Children, Young People and Education Committee
3. The Costs of Perinatal Mental Health Problems October 2014. The London School of Economics and The Centre for Mental Health