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Maternal Mental Health Services in England need more funding

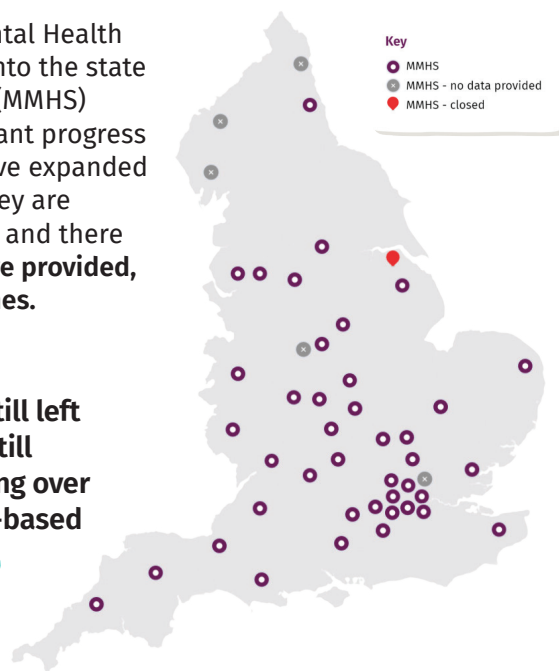
A new report from the Maternal Mental Health Alliance (MMHA) offers a snapshot into the state of Maternal Mental Health Services (MMHS) across England, highlighting significant progress and large gaps. Positively, MMHS have expanded to cover much of the country, but they are struggling to meet levels of demand and there is stark variation in **what services are provided, assessment criteria, and waiting times.**



Women and birthing people are still left waiting for months and months, still jumping through hoops and leaping over mountains to get to the evidence-based care they need and deserve.

Dr Camilla Rosan, British Psychological Society

The MMHA calls for increased investment to build on the progress to date and ensure these small but vital teams have the resources necessary to deliver care to all who need them.



Five key findings

- 1 Only 11/41 MMHS support women who have had their babies removed through care proceedings, a group at especially high risk of perinatal mental health issues and suicide.
- 2 One Maternal Mental Health Service has already closed due to funding.
- 3 Waiting times for assessment ranged from 0-26 weeks.
- 4 For those who met the criteria, waiting times for treatment ranged from 0-52 weeks.
- 5 Staff reported being overwhelmed by rising referrals, citing limited resources.

IN THIS EDITION, YOU'LL FIND...

- Latest MBRRACE enquiry into maternal deaths
- Perinatal mental health news from across the UK
- Key statistics, new research and exciting partnership projects



New NHS 10-year plan: an opportunity to deliver change for families

The Government recently led a consultation on what the next NHS long-term plan should focus on, encouraging submissions from individuals, NHS staff and health organisations. This was an opportunity for the MMHA, and those we work with, to highlight the perinatal mental health needs of parents and babies.

The Government committed to prioritising women's health within NHS reform. However, the **Autumn 2024 budget** was a missed opportunity to take meaningful steps toward an equitable system that genuinely integrates mental health support during the maternity journey.

“The upcoming NHS 10-year plan is now the space where the government must follow through on its promises with concrete investments in perinatal mental health, acknowledging that recovery is possible with the right support at the right time.”

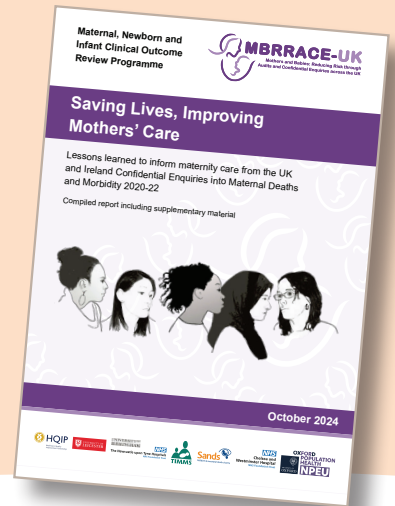
Justin Irwin, CEO of the MMHA

MBRRACE: Immediate action needed following alarming rise in maternal deaths

Suicide remains the leading cause of direct maternal death between six weeks and one year postpartum, with over a third of deaths in **the latest MBRRACE reporting period** attributed to mental health-related causes.

The findings underscore an urgent need for better mental health support and highlight persistently stark disparities: Black and Asian women, as well as those in deprived areas or facing severe disadvantages have significantly higher mortality risks.

The Alliance calls for a comprehensive action plan to address these persistent gaps in maternal mental health care, reduce stigma, and ensure every new and expectant mother gets the support they deserve.



MMHA meets new ministers to talk UK PMH

In November, the MMHA's Luciana Berger, Justin Irwin and Karen Middleton met with the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, Wes Streeting MP, and Minister for Patient Safety, Women's Health and Mental Health, Baroness Gillian Merron, to discuss **the UK's perinatal mental health (PMH) landscape**.



As well as the progress made over the last decade, the meeting covered why it's important to continue listening to parents with lived experience. We thank the ministers for their time and look forward to continuing the conversation on how to deliver further meaningful change for women, birthing people, babies and families.

NORTHERN IRELAND: Survey launched to inform women's health planning

Supported by the Department of Health (DoH), Queen's University Belfast and Derry Well Women aim to **gather insights from women across Northern Ireland (NI)** on their health priorities and experiences.



The findings will help inform DoH planning, including the development of a Women's Health Action Plan and the case for a long-term NI Women's Health Strategy, aligning with similar strategies in other parts of the UK and Ireland.

This marks an important step toward ensuring women's voices shape the future of healthcare in NI, and a vital opportunity to highlight why PMH should be a core focus.

SCOTLAND: Fragile picture of third sector funding in Scotland

Just 16 third-sector organisations were awarded funds from the Scottish Government's **Perinatal and Infant Mental Health Fund** 2024-26, from 90 applicants. This is down from 34 organisations supported by the previous round of funding.

At a time when many voluntary sector organisations are struggling with funding and rising levels of demand for services, we need to ensure these organisations, who play such a crucial role supporting women, babies and families, have enough resources.

WALES: Ensuring equitable access to inpatient care

During a September Senedd debate, Siân Gwenllian MS **raised a question** about Mother and Baby Unit (MBU) care for families from North Wales, citing concerns with this being provided by the new Chester unit, including bed numbers, travel distance, and lack of Welsh-language support. Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing, Sarah Murphy MS, acknowledged these points and committed to a review with support from the NHS Wales joint commissioning committee and Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board clinicians. **The MMHA will monitor developments to ensure specialist inpatient PMH care is accessible for all North Wales families.**



New research partnership to shape the future of mental healthcare for Black mothers

The **Motherhood Group** is leading a **new research project**, with support from the MMHA and **Centre for Mental Health**, to better understand and advocate for the mental health needs of Black mothers across the UK.

This project will elevate Black mothers' voices on barriers to quality mental healthcare and inform a report highlighting systemic gaps and community-led solutions, and drive systemic change toward equitable, culturally competent care.

Connecting young mums to reduce loneliness and suicidal ideation

The MMHA is supporting the Mental Health Foundation's **Creating Connections project**, which aims to raise awareness of the specific barriers surrounding young mums and the importance of peer support.

To date, the project has delivered:

- Five workforce training sessions for professionals working with mums aged 25 and under.
- A social media campaign to raise awareness of young mothers' unique challenges.

“No one has ever offered me support with the impact this has had on my mental health or even acknowledged it is hard.”

Survey respondent

A digital resource, set to launch next year, will round off the project, providing information to help healthcare professionals, commissioners and voluntary organisations meet **the mental health needs of young mums**.

New report explores maternal mental health, substance use, and child removal

'**Listening to the stories of women who have experienced child removal due to drug and alcohol use**' highlights the need for trauma-informed care and healthcare training. It calls for greater research and policy changes to better support affected families, emphasising the importance of centring lived experience in development work.



The MMHA hopes the report will inspire empathy, foster understanding, and promote actionable change.

“To get your child removed, for me, still feels like a whole different level of failure. So, to speak with other people who have been through that... it matters so much.” Anonymous participant

WATCH:

'Honest conversations' film about young motherhood with MMHA Champions Raiye and Jayde.



KEY STATISTICS: Fertility and PMH



Fertility challenges are a relatively common experience, affecting **3.5 million people** per year in the UK.

Infertility-related trauma is more common than previously recognised, according to **new survey data** published by MMHA member **Fertility Network UK**.

590 parents

from across the UK and Ireland responded.



61% reported aspects of the fertility care they received made trauma worse.

41% met criteria for PTSD and complex PTSD.

Media moments



- **'Mums are dying and it's so preventable'**
On 14 November 2024, the BBC reported on the tragic death of Lucy, a mum-of-two from North Yorkshire. Coverage featured **MMHA's specialist PMH team mapping** and interviews with MMHA Chair, Luciana Berger, on **Look North** and **BBC Radio York**.
- **WITCHES** – Elizabeth Sankey's documentary, released on 22 November, explores her experience of postnatal depression and life on a MBU. It features PMH experts Dr Trudi Seneviratne, Dr Krystal Wilkinson and more.
- **Grieving mothers who have lost babies have to wait six weeks for mental health help to start** – *The Independent* on the launch of MMHA's MMHS mapping report.

ESSENTIAL READING: Largest ever study on postnatal depression in British South Asian mothers

The ROSHNI-2 trial, led by the University of Leicester, found that the 'Positive Health Programme' – a culturally tailored talking therapy treatment – helped British South Asian mothers recover faster from postnatal depression compared to standard GP care.

Published in *The Lancet*, the study highlights the need for culturally sensitive services to address barriers like language, community-based stigma, and family dynamics.

“Perhaps even more significant than the positive mental health outcomes of this research, the ROSHNI-2 trial has proven that inclusive research is possible.”

Farah Lunat, Research Operations Manager



Researchers urge healthcare policies to adopt inclusive approaches to better support underserved communities.

MMHA staff updates

We bid farewell to team members Holly Latham (Lived Experience Coordinator), Toni Woodman (Senior Campaign Assistant), and Rhonda Murphy (Everyone's Business Northern Ireland Coordinator). We are so grateful for their contributions to the MMHA's mission and wish them all the best in their new roles!

We're delighted to welcome Shizana Arshad (Lived Experience Coordinator) and Claire Phillips (Everyone's Business Northern Ireland Coordinator) to the team.

They bring a great deal of passion and expertise to their roles, and we're excited to have them on board.



MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: Bliss



I'm celebrating
World Prematurity Day 2024
#NeonatalFeelings
17 November 24

For World Prematurity Day 2024, MMHA member **Bliss** highlighted the mental health and wellbeing challenges faced by parents with babies in neonatal care.

The neonatal unit experience can be overwhelming, often leaving a lasting impact on parents' mental health. However, this aspect of neonatal care can often be overlooked. To address this, Bliss created space for parents to share their **#NeonatalFeelings**, reflecting on the full spectrum of emotions experienced during their journey, reminding them that all these feelings are a natural part of the neonatal experience.

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

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