

Briefing from the Baby Loss Awareness Week Alliance for the general debate on Baby Loss Awareness Week - 23rd September 2021, Main Chamber, House of Commons

Introduction

Thousands of parents experience pregnancy or baby loss every year. It is estimated in the UK that:

- one in four pregnancies end in miscarriage
- one in eighty pregnancies are ectopic
- 5,000 wanted pregnancies are terminated for medical reasons every year, and
- 14 babies are stillborn or die shortly after birth every day.

This year, the theme for the Baby Loss Awareness Week is wellbeing. We have laid out below key steps the Government can take to help improve the wellbeing of those affected by pregnancy and baby loss.

Families who have experienced pregnancy and baby loss often find that doing something to prevent the same thing happening to others helps them cope with their loss and grief. Therefore, we have also outlined key steps to ensure that fewer people have to go through this devastating loss.

National Bereavement Care Pathway

The APPG on Baby Loss was instrumental in the creation of the government backed National Bereavement Care Pathway (NBCP)¹ which seeks to improve the quality and consistency of bereavement care received by parents in NHS trusts in England after pregnancy or baby loss.

This includes five pathways for different experiences of baby loss² and provides health care professionals with what they need to deliver excellent care. While the Department for Health and Social Care strongly urge trusts to take part in the NBCP, mandating the pathway and its nine standards would lead to greater time, funding and resources being available to healthcare professionals to deliver them.

“Overall, the care we received cannot be faulted, and we are so grateful to have had this level of care. I truly hope this becomes a national standard that all bereaved parents will benefit from, as I cannot express how much it has helped us navigate through this most difficult time.”

Parent of a stillborn baby, who received care at an NBCP participating trust³

¹ <https://nbcpathway.org.uk/>

² The five pathways are: miscarriage (including molar and ectopic pregnancy), Termination of Pregnancy for Fetal Abnormality (TOPFA), Stillbirth, Neonatal Death and Sudden Unexpected Death of an Infant (SUDI).

³ https://nbcpathway.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-07/NBCP_ProgressReport_Jun20_FINAL.pdf

Question: Will the Government ensure that all bereaved parents will be cared for by trusts following the National Bereavement Care Pathway by making it a mandatory requirement?

Mental Health Care

Pregnancy loss or the death of a baby can have a significant impact on the emotional and mental wellbeing of women and partners. We know that women who have experienced baby loss are at higher risk of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety and depression than those who haven't⁴.

A survey carried out by the Baby Loss Awareness Week Alliance in 2019 found that 60% of parents who experienced pregnancy or baby loss who would have liked specialist psychological support for their mental health were not able to access it on the NHS⁵. While it is welcome the needs of mothers who have lost a baby will be included within the remit of the new Maternal Mental Health Hubs in England, further work is needed to ensure that this support is accessible to all women who have lost a baby and that the needs of partners are also addressed.

"I self-referred after our first loss and was diagnosed with PTSD. The counsellor told me that group bereavement counselling was not suitable as I'd not lost a loved one. After our second loss I chose not to look for help." Bereaved mother⁶

Question: What steps is the Government taking to ensure that all women who experience pregnancy and baby loss and their partners are able to access the mental health care they need?

Statutory miscarriage leave

While it is welcome that parents are now entitled to Statutory Parental Bereavement Pay and Leave if a child dies after 24 weeks of pregnancy and before they turn 18, this does not apply to miscarriage (a loss before 24 weeks). Several companies are now introducing periods of leave for all women who have experienced a miscarriage. We believe the Government should lead the way in adopting this best practice and that leave following a miscarriage should be a statutory entitlement.

Question: Will the Government introduce a statutory leave entitlement for those who experience miscarriage?

Maternity safety

Recent reports from the CQC, Health and Social Care Committee, the Ockenden Review of maternity services at Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust, and ongoing investigations at

⁴ <https://babyloss-awareness.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/BLAW-Out-of-Sight-Out-of-Mind-Report-2019.pdf>

⁵ as above

⁶ as above

other trusts highlight just how much more there is to do to improve maternity safety and reduce preventable baby deaths in the UK.

Following the publication of the Health and Social Care Committee's report in to the safety of maternity services in England⁷, the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Baby Loss heard from experts in the field that the current rate of progress in reducing stillbirths, while welcome, means that the National Maternity Safety Ambition to reduce stillbirths and neonatal deaths by 50% by 2025 will not be met. Improving staffing levels in maternity services and addressing health inequalities are key drivers in ensuring that it is.

The Royal College of Midwives estimate there is a shortage of 2,000 midwives in our maternity services, and NHS Providers calculate an extra 496 Obstetrics and Gynaecology consultants are needed.

"there remains worrying variation in the quality of maternity care which means that the safe delivery of a healthy baby is not experienced by all mothers."

The safety of maternity services in England⁸

Surveillance data shows that compared with white babies, stillbirth rates for Black and Black British babies are twice as high, and, for Asian and Asian British babies they are 1.6 times as high. For babies from the most deprived families, stillbirth rates are 1.7 times higher than from the least deprived.

Among the Committee's recommendations are:

- Urgent action to address staffing shortfalls in maternity services
- Increase budget for maternity services by a minimum of £200-350m per annum with immediate effect
- Government as a whole to introduce a target to end the disparity in maternal and neonatal outcomes with a clear timeframe for achieving that target

Questions

- **What are the Government's plans to plug the staffing gap in NHS maternity services?**
- **What target will the Government introduce to end the disparity in maternal and neonatal outcomes between different groups?**

About Baby Loss Awareness Week

Baby Loss Awareness Week aims to:

⁷ <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/6578/documents/73151/default/>

⁸ as above

- support bereaved parents and families and to unite with others across the world to commemorate their babies' lives and lost pregnancies.
- raise awareness about pregnancy and baby loss.
- drive improvements in care and support for anyone affected and in the prevention of pregnancy and baby loss.

The [Baby Loss Awareness Week Alliance](#) are committed to raising awareness of pregnancy and baby loss, providing support to anyone affected by pregnancy loss and the death of a baby, working with health professionals and services to improve bereavement care, and reducing preventable deaths.

There has been an annual debate on baby loss to mark Baby Loss Awareness Week since the inception of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Baby Loss in 2016. The week itself falls on 9-15 October each year, when this year, the Parliament in Westminster is on recess.

More information & contacts

Baby Loss Awareness Week Alliance via campaigns@sands.org.uk or 07879 897248