

Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on petition PE2017: [Extend the period that specialist perinatal mental health support is made available beyond one year](#), lodged by Margaret Reid

Brief overview of issues raised by the petition

The petition is calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to:

- amend section 24 of Mental Health (Care and Treatment), (Scotland Act) 2003 to extend maternal mental health support beyond one year
- introduce a family liaison function at adult mental health units across all health boards
- introduce specialised perinatal community teams that meet Perinatal Quality Network Standard Type 1 across all health boards
- establish a Mother and Baby Unit in North East Scotland

Background

Perinatal mental health problems are mental health problems which occur during pregnancy and up to one year after a child's birth. This includes new problems. It also includes the recurrence of existing problems. The period around birth is a time of increased risk for women who have a history of mental health problems.

The [Royal College of Psychiatrists](#) notes around one in five pregnant women will have a mental health problem during their pregnancy, and in the year after they have a baby. For about five out of 100, this will be a serious mental health problem.

The [Mental Health \(Care and Treatment\) \(Scotland\) Act 2003](#) (as amended by the [Mental Health \(Scotland\) Act 2015](#)) is the main mental health legislation in Scotland. The [Mental Health \(Scotland\) Act \(2015\)](#) introduced a duty to provide mothers with the right to be admitted to a specialist mother and baby unit, jointly with her infant, if they need inpatient mental health care.

The Scottish Government commissioned a review of [Scottish Mental Health Law. This has recently published its final report](#) but – at the time of writing – the Scottish Government has not yet responded to the report. The Review recommended that:

“The duty in section 24 of the Mental Health Act to support mothers in hospital with postnatal depression and similar conditions should be broadened to ensure a wider range of in-patient and community supports for parents who need perinatal mental health care and their children”.

Mother and Baby Units (MBUs)

There are currently two Mother and Baby Units in Scotland (St John’s Hospital in Livingston and Leverndale in Glasgow), which have six beds each.

In 2019 the Perinatal Mental Health Network Scotland, a National Managed Clinical Network, published a [needs assessment and service recommendations for specialist and universal perinatal mental health services](#). This recommended that an:

“additional two to four MBU beds should be provided on one or other existing MBU site, divided between both, or in a third MBU located in the north of Scotland. To be viable, a third MBU should have a minimum of four beds. The Scottish Government and NHS boards should conduct an option appraisal to meet this additional need as part of a national implementation plan.”

In February 2022 the Scottish Government [consulted on how to increase Mother and Baby Unit provision or equivalent services](#) to support women with severe mental illness during the perinatal period and their infants, and a [consultation summary report](#) was published.

In its submission to the Committee the Scottish Government stated that:

“The consultation and other data are currently being considered by National Services Scotland in an options appraisal to consider the potential for increasing Mother and Baby Unit capacity based on cost, equity of access, safety and sustainability of the service. The initial report from the options appraisal is expected in late autumn 2023.”

Community specialist perinatal mental health services

In relation to community services the [needs assessment and service recommendations for specialist and universal perinatal mental health services](#) recommended that:

“All NHS boards should have community specialist perinatal mental health provision. The specific model will be dependent on birth numbers, socio-demographic and geographical needs and, for smaller boards, may be provided in part by boards collaborating together through regional structures. Sessional time for some highly specialised staff may also be provided through regional collaboration. The Scottish Government should ensure that implementation of this work and longer term roll-out is included in a national delivery plan as soon as practicable.”

The Scottish Government published a [perinatal and infant mental health update report](#). This includes an update on the services available in each health board area, at August 2022. This reported that in 2022 there were 14 Community Perinatal Mental Health Teams (three expanded, nine new and two in development). However, a report from May 2023, by the [Maternal Mental Health Alliance](#), reported that only two out of 14 (14%) of Scottish health boards met Perinatal Quality Network Standards Type 1. (The Royal College of Psychiatrists publishes [Standards for Community Perinatal Mental Health Services](#)). A recent report by the [Maternal Mental Health Alliance](#) reported that only two out of 14 (14%) of Scottish health boards met Perinatal Quality Network Standards Type 1.

The [Maternal Mental Health Alliance](#) also found that 46% of health boards predicted there would be an underspend against their estimated budget for 2022-23. In many cases this was attributed to recruitment issues and/or vacant posts.

Scottish Government action

In 2017 [the Perinatal Mental Health Network Scotland \(PMHN Scotland\) was established as a National Managed Clinical Network \(a network of specialist staff working together\).](#)

PMHN Scotland published [Delivering Effective Services: Needs Assessment and Service Recommendations for Specialist and Universal Perinatal Mental Health Services](#), in March 2019. This report assessed the state of perinatal mental health services in Scotland in 2019 and made recommendations to improve care.

In 2019, the Scottish Government established a [Perinatal and Infant Mental Health Programme Board](#) this was intended to oversee, provide strategic leadership and have overall management of the delivery of improved perinatal and infant mental health services.

As mentioned previously an [update report](#) was published in January 2023 and an options appraisal to consider the potential for increasing Mother and Baby Unit capacity is expected in late autumn 2023

Scottish Parliament action

The Health, Social Care and Sport Committee undertook [a short inquiry into perinatal mental health in Scotland in 2021](#). Its report made 55 recommendations including ones about the provision of services in the north of Scotland and extending services beyond one year of birth.

“ [...] the Committee is concerned by evidence of significant inconsistencies in accessibility of MBUs across different NHS board areas and the lack of provision in the north of Scotland, which means mothers are having to travel long distances to access an MBU. It is equally concerned by an apparent lack of awareness from referrers in certain areas of the country of services available from MBUs.

The Committee calls on the Scottish Government to set out the rationale around decisions not to establish MBUs in some parts of the country, particularly in highly populated NHS boards such as NHS Grampian.

The Committee looks forward to seeing the outcome of the options appraisal of MBU capacity in Scotland. Based on the evidence received, it believes there is a strong and compelling case for the establishment of a new MBU serving the north of Scotland.”

The Committee also recommended “the Scottish Government undertake work to ensure NHS boards improve the integration and continuity of perinatal mental health services in the longer term for those families that need it. The Committee believe this should not be restricted to the one year period following the birth of a child”. The [Scottish Government responded to the report](#) in March 2022. In relation to extending the services beyond one year it said:

“Currently, in relation to specialist perinatal mental health, the perinatal period is defined as pregnancy and the first 12 months after birth. This is reflected in section 24 of the Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003 and further amended in section 31 of the Mental Health (Scotland) Act 2015. We are working with the Perinatal and Infant Mental Health Programme Board and Managed Clinical Network to consider the parameters for perinatal mental health support within Scotland as part of Programme Board transition planning. A key part of this work will be consideration of how to ensure that care is responsive to clinical need, with services remaining involved if the care they provide is most appropriate to the patient's clinical need. This may result in a definition of service duration where any specified cut off has built-in flexibility to allow for clinical need. The application of this will be considered as part of the service specification.”

There have also been a number of parliamentary questions on the subject including (S6T-00687): To ask the Scottish Government what action it will take to provide local support to new mothers who require a specialist mental health bed with their baby, following recent reports that many are having to travel hundreds of miles in order to receive the treatment that they need.

In response the Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care said:

“We have been working closely with colleagues in health boards in the north of Scotland to support the development of community services in their areas, so that the right support can be provided at the time when it is needed. In recent months, NHS Highland and NHS Grampian have launched their community perinatal mental health teams, which will improve access to specialist treatment.”

SPICe has published a blog on [Maternal Mental Health](#) and [an update blog](#) in November 2021.

Lizzy Burgess

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The purpose of this briefing is to provide a brief overview of issues raised by the petition. SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at spice@parliament.scot

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