

Lynne Neagle, MS  
Chair, Children, Young People and Education Committee  
National Assembly for Wales  
Cardiff Bay  
Cardiff  
CF99 1NA

Dr. Sarah Witcombe-Hayes  
Wales Coordinator  
Everyone's Business Campaign  
Maternal Mental Health Alliance

23<sup>rd</sup> March 2021

Dear Lynne Neagle, Chair of Children, Young People and Education Committee

I am writing in my capacity as the Wales Coordinator for the Maternal Mental Health Alliance's (MMHA) Everyone's Business Campaign, to draw the Committees attention to a recently launched report on [Maternal Mental Health During a Pandemic](#), commissioned by the Maternal Mental Health Alliance (MMHA) and conducted by Centre for Mental Health.

Last week, the MMHA launched this rapid evidence review which explored just how much of a challenge the pandemic has placed on perinatal mental health and the services that support women, their partners and families during this time. The report draws together all of the available data collected during the pandemic for the first time.

The report findings show a significant increase in poor mental health for women in the perinatal period. This was due to fears over catching the virus; worries over their baby's wellbeing; fears over partners being able to attend labour and birth; and concerns about being able to cope without normal support available. The report found that the impact of the pandemic on maternal mental health has been unequal, with evidence strongly suggesting that women and families of colour and families experiencing socioeconomic deprivation have been most affected.

Other key findings include the dramatic reduction in informal support available to families, and women with pre-existing mental health conditions have risked their illnesses getting worse. Despite the increased need - services supporting women and families were detrimentally impacted. The report highlighted concerns around how voluntary perinatal services were impacted and the challenges that the workforce supporting women and families in the perinatal period have faced with their own wellbeing. The report also shows that there were gaps in perinatal mental health services before the pandemic.

The evidence presented in the rapid evidence review highlights that the pandemic has created a mental health crisis for many women and their families in pregnancy and after the birth of their child. This is likely to have long-term consequences for women and their families as well as for health services. This crisis is current and ongoing, and the risk posed to perinatal mental health need urgent and ongoing attention.

The report makes eight recommendations for urgent action, including calls for:

- The protection and development of services supporting perinatal mental health, including voluntary sector groups
- Relevant bodies to re-assess the true level of demand in light of the pandemic
- Research to be commissioned on the pandemic's ongoing impact, including for women and babies of colour, and those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The MMHA believe that it will be crucial within the next Senedd term to ensure that perinatal mental health is a key priority at the centre of long-term COVID-19 recovery planning. Now more than ever, it is vital that urgent measures are taken to bridge gaps in support and ensure that women and their families across Wales get consistent, accessible and quality care for their mental health during pregnancy and postnatally. We believe that this requires a commitment for the next Welsh Government to:

1. Sufficiently resource all health boards to have accessible specialist perinatal mental health services that meet national quality standards
2. Establish a permanent mother and baby unit (MBU) in Wales, and have a clear and accessible MBU option for women in North Wales
3. Provide training in perinatal mental health care for all professionals involved in the care of women during pregnancy and the first year after birth

The MMHA hopes this report is helpful for the Committee, and we would be happy to answer any questions that the Committee might have about the findings or recommendations.

Yours Sincerely,



Dr. Sarah Witcombe-Hayes  
Wales Coordinator  
Everyone's Business Campaign, Maternal Mental Health Alliance

