

Mother and Baby Unit Briefing

A joint briefing for the Petitions Committee on why it is vital for there to be an accessible mother and baby unit (MBU) for families in North Wales.

Overview:

Today, on the 3rd of December 2021, the Senedd petitionⁱ by Nia Foulkes to get a MBU in North Wales comes to a close. As organisations, and informed by the views of many families - we know that it's crucial that women affected by severe perinatal mental health problems have access to a specialist MBU close to home. It's not acceptable that acutely unwell women are being admitted to MBU's far from home or are receiving treatment in an inpatient adult psychiatric ward without their babies, at a time that is so crucial for bonding and attachment.

It has been four years since the Welsh Government committed to considering options for inpatient support for women in North Walesⁱⁱ, but this provision has not yet been established. Without this specialist support, women lives are being put at risk. Action on Postpartum Psychosis (APP), NSPCC Cymru/Wales, the Maternal Mental Health Alliance (MMHA) and the Royal College of Psychiatrists Wales call on the Petitions Committee to press Welsh Government for action on delivering an MBU in North Wales.

A MOTHER & BABY UNIT IS VITAL FOR FAMILIES IN NORTH WALES

"I live in North Wales, and I was separated from my daughter and treated in a general psychiatric hospital when I was ill with postpartum psychosis. This was incredibly traumatic for me and my family and it took me a long time to recover."

Sally



What is an MBU?

MBU's are specialist, in-patient units for women who experience severe mental health problemsⁱⁱⁱ in pregnancy, or within a year after birth. MBU's are designed and resourced to offer specialist treatment to mums for their mental health difficulties, while also supporting them to meet the physical and emotional needs of their infants and to develop healthy relationships^{iv}. They are specifically designed to keep mothers and babies together.

Why are MBU's needed?

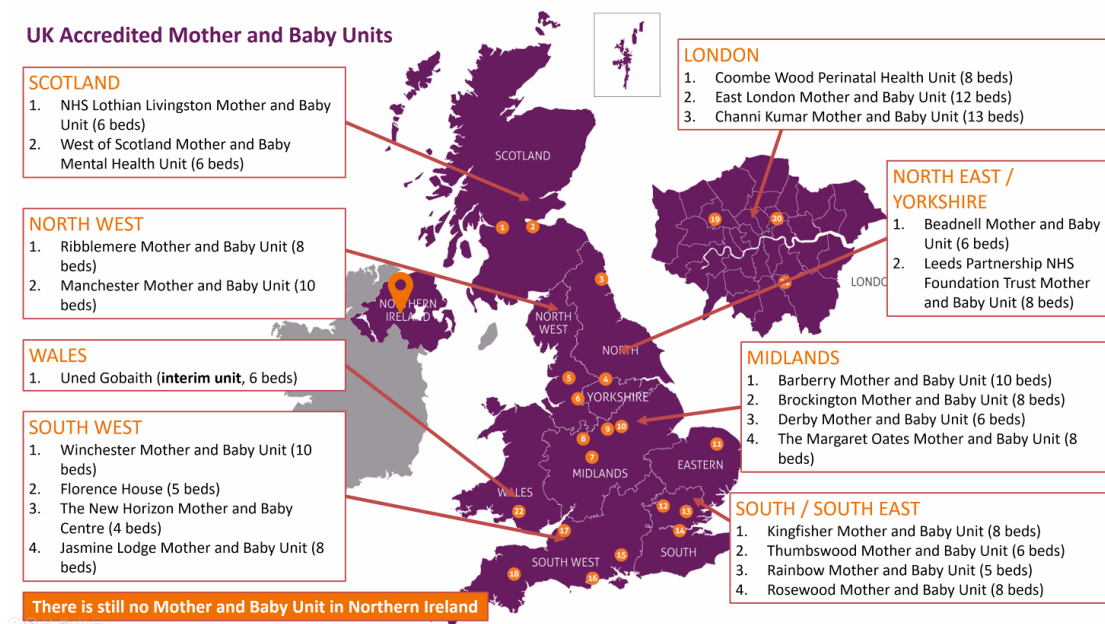
As many as 1 in 4 women can develop mental health problems during pregnancy or within the first year after having a baby (known as the perinatal period). For every 1000 mums, about 2-4 will need admission to hospital for a severe perinatal mental health problem^v. It is nationally recommended that this is to an MBU^{vi}.

If perinatal mental health problems are not identified early and the right support put in place, it can have devastating consequences on the mental and physical health of women, their children, partners and significant others. The new Saving Lives, Improving Mothers' Care (2021) report shows that maternal suicide continues to be a leading cause of direct deaths in the year after pregnancy^{vii}. With 18% of the

women dying by suicide. The report found that 67% of these suicides could possibly have been prevented if there had been improvements in care. Severe perinatal mental health problems can also make it harder for parents to provide the sensitive and responsive care that babies need, potentially affecting the child’s emotional, social and cognitive development^{viii}. This is why it is so important that women and families can access the right kind of support, at the right time, wherever they live in Wales.

MBU Provision

Service provision remains fragmented, with 22 MBU’s throughout the UK, including the newly opened interim unit in South Wales^{ix}. There is currently no accessible MBU for women and families in North Wales.



Current Plans

In 2017, Welsh Government committed to considering options for inpatient support for women in North Wales^x, as part of their response to the Children, Young People and Education Committee inquiry into perinatal mental health^{xi}. While we welcome Welsh Government’s commitment to prioritising MBU provision in North Wales^{xii} and the ongoing work between the Welsh Health Specialist Services Committee and NHS England to develop an eight-bed mother and baby unit for women in North Wales^{xiii}, we are concerned that this is taking too long, and plans are still too vague.

Our Calls

APP, NSPCC Cymru/Wales, MMHA and the Royal College of Psychiatrists Wales call on the Petitions Committee to press Welsh Government for action on delivering MBU provision for families from North Wales. We feel it would be helpful for the Petitions Committee to scrutinise the current status of the MBU for North Wales, explore challenges to progress and press the Welsh Government for a timeline about when decisions will be made and when this provision will be available for mothers and babies. As organisations, we have also raised the need for scrutiny around an

accessible unit for families in North Wales in our joint response to the Children, Young People & Education Committee consultations on priorities for the Sixth Senedd. We feel that addressing these questions within a joint Senedd Debate with the Children, Young People & Education Committee would be particularly helpful.

Questions for Welsh Government:

- Can the Welsh Government provide detail on the current status of the work to develop MBU provision for families in North Wales?
- Can the Welsh Government shed light on what the current challenges or barriers are to progressing the development of the MBU for North Wales?
- Can the Welsh Government give an anticipated timescale for the work that needs to be carried out to develop the MBU for North Wales?
- When does the Welsh Government anticipate MBU provision for families in North Wales being opened?
- How are women and families with lived experience from North Wales being consulted/involved in the service design of the unit?
- Can the Welsh Government provide detail on how Welsh language provision be provided within the unit?

Contact Details

We would be pleased to talk to the Committee in person about this petition and the areas we have outlined in this letter if that would be helpful. If you have any further questions, please don't hesitate to contact us:

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ⁱ See: [To get a specialist mental health mother and baby unit in North Wales. - Petitions \(senedd.wales\)](#)

ⁱⁱ See [gen-ld11290-e.pdf \(senedd.wales\)](#) – Recommendation 7

ⁱⁱⁱ This can include postpartum psychosis, bipolar affective disorder, schizophrenia, and other psychotic illnesses, severe depression or anxiety disorders.

^{iv} For more information on MBU's, see Royal College of Psychiatrists (2018) [Mother and Baby Units \(MBUs\)](#)

^v Royal College of Psychiatrists (2015) Perinatal mental health services: Recommendations for the provision of services for childbearing women. College Report CR197

^{vi} NICE Antenatal and postnatal mental health: clinical management and service guidance. Clinical guideline [CG192] Published date: December 2014 Last updated: Feb 2020 [Overview | Antenatal and postnatal mental health: clinical management and service guidance | Guidance | NICE](#)

^{vii} Knight, M., Bunch, K., Tuffnell, D., Patel, R., Shakespeare, J., Kotnis, R., Kenyon, S., and Kurinczuk, J. J (Eds.) (2021) [Saving Lives, Improving Mothers' Care Lessons learned to inform maternity care from the UK and Ireland Confidential Enquiries into Maternal Deaths and Morbidity 2017-19](#) MBRRACE-UK

^{viii} See Stein, A., Pearson, R.M., Goodman, S.H., Rapa, E., Rahman, A., McCallum, M., Howard, L.M., and Pariante, C. M (2014) Effects of perinatal mental disorders on the fetus and child. *The Lancet*, 384: 1800–1819; Sutter-Dalley, A. L., Murraray, L., Dequae-Merchadou, L., Glatigny-Dalley, E., Bourgeois, M.L., and Verdoux H. A (2011) A prospective longitudinal study of the impact of early postnatal vs. chronic maternal depressive symptoms on child development. *European Psychiatry*, 26(8): 484-489

^{ix} For more information, see MMHA (2021) [Accredited Mother and Baby Units](#)

^x See [gen-ld11290-e.pdf \(senedd.wales\)](#) – Recommendation 7

^{xi} Children, Young People and Education Committee (2018) [Perinatal mental health in Wales](#)

^{xii} See for example the response from the Deputy Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing to written question WQ83645 (e), Tabled on 20/10/2021. [Written Question - WQ83645 - Welsh Parliament \(senedd.wales\)](#); [Children, Young People, and Education Committee 07/10/2021 - Welsh Parliament \(senedd.wales\)](#) point 115. [Plenary 12/10/2021 - Welsh Parliament \(senedd.wales\)](#) point 103

^{xiii} See for example the response from the Deputy Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing to written question WQ83647 (e) Tabled on 20/10/2021. [Written Question - WQ83647 - Welsh Parliament \(senedd.wales\)](#)