

Urgent mental health support for new dads

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 16 Medi 2024
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Petition title: Calling Welsh Government to provide urgent mental health support for new dads.

Text of petition: Fathers with perinatal mental health problems are up to 47% more likely the risk to be rated as a suicide risk than at any other time in their lives (Quevedo et al, 2010).

New research also shows that a new father has a 22% risk of anxiety and depression during the perinatal period. Birth Trauma affects at least 30,000 women in the UK and fathers are witnessing the trauma and not getting help for PTSD. Fathers also go through baby loss and need to support the baby on neonatal wards.

We want the Welsh Government to set up support for fathers in perinatal mental health teams across Wales. We also want fathers to receive support with finance up to six weeks.

There is a report that is coming out on birth trauma that I am part of with Theo Clarke MP on fathers and birth trauma. Please look at Fathers Reaching Out - Why Dads Matter in 2020 with all the recommendations for better supporting fathers. Supporting all new parents for their mental health has far



better outcomes for the whole family, including the baby. If we don't include fathers we are at risk of mothers being affected, Adverse Child Experience (ACEs), Substance Abuse, Relationship Breakdowns, Crisis in other services and not getting to the root cause. One of the biggest killers in men is suicide and with the high risk in new fathers this is urgent. Paternal Mental Health is one of the leading causes of suicide, but we don't screen and support fathers in 2024.

1. Background

The perinatal period covers the time during pregnancy and the first year after having a baby.

During the perinatal period, [women can be affected by a number of mental health problems](#), which can range from mild to extremely severe. [Partners and other family members](#) may also experience perinatal mental health difficulties. This includes depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD). [Research from NCT](#) (2015) suggests that more than one in three (38 per cent) new fathers in the UK have concerns about their mental health.

The [Wales Perinatal Mental Health Network](#) has been established, which is a national clinical network bringing together a range of professionals from different sectors. The Network works with women and their families to develop services.

The [NHS Wales Executive website](#) provides links to relevant advice and guidance relating to perinatal mental health, including: [Perinatal and Infant Mental Health Curricular Framework](#); [Perinatal Mental Health Programme and Pathways](#), and [Support and Advice leaflets](#).

The website for the [Perinatal and Infant Mental Health Curricular Framework](#) states:

We recognise the vital role that fathers and partners play during the perinatal period so we want to ensure that we support their mental health and wellbeing as well.

The [Wales Perinatal Mental Health Programme](#) (WPNMHP) document sets out the actions practitioners will take to ensure the **mental health and wellbeing of**

women and their partners/families is supported during the perinatal period. The document has a section on **fathers, partners and supporters** (pages 57-8) which states that it is important for professionals who engage with parents to take time to listen to their concerns regarding the health of their partners. At the same time, it is important to observe for signs of difficulties in the relationship of the parents or that the father/partner is suffering from anxiety or depression themselves.

This section goes on to provide information on some of the symptoms that can be experienced by men and notes that fathers, partners and supporters should also be asked 'How are you feeling today?' at all contacts with the relevant health professionals. A pathway for identifying need is set out in the programme.

In a letter to the Committee dated 10 July 2024, the then Minister for Mental Health & Early Years confirms that through the Perinatal Mental Health Programme's training offer, the Welsh Government actively encourages colleagues to inquire about the mental health of all fathers during the assessment period and to provide necessary support or referrals to ensure they receive appropriate treatment. All specialist perinatal mental health teams currently offer assessments and many also provide support to fathers, if required. A best practice guide, is currently being developed following a recent Community of Practice event, "Fathers Matter Too".

Organisations such as NCT and PANDAS (post natal depression awareness and support) provide information relating to perinatal mental health issues for fathers.

2. Welsh Government action

The letter from the then Minister for Mental Health & Early Years highlights the Welsh Government's recent consultations on the draft mental health and wellbeing strategy and the draft suicide and self-harm prevention strategy that closed in June. It states that officials are currently analysing responses and will consider the evidence sources referenced in the petition as part of that analysis. It is envisaged that the consultation reports for both strategies will be published in October, with a view to publication of the final strategies and delivery plans at the end of the year.

The draft suicide and self-harm prevention strategy includes an objective to deliver rapid and impactful prevention, intervention, and support to those groups in society who are the most vulnerable to suicide and self-harm through the

settings with which they are most engaged. The letter provides more detail on how this will be delivered.

3. Welsh Parliament action

The Fifth Senedd's [Children, Young People and Education Committee](#) undertook an inquiry into [perinatal mental health](#) and published its [report](#) in October 2017. The aim of the inquiry was to consider how perinatal mental health services are provided and how the Welsh Government could make improvements. The emotional well-being and mental health needs of fathers and the wider family during the perinatal period was part of the approach to the inquiry.

The Committee carried out follow-up work on the inquiry, with details provided on the [Committee's website](#).

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.