



Royal College
of Midwives



**Maternal Mental
Health Alliance**

Maternal Mental Health Awareness Week 2022

The vital role of midwives within maternal mental health care

Around one in five women will experience a mental health problem, such as depression, anxiety and psychosis, during pregnancy and after birth. Without access to treatment, these problems can have a devastating impact on the health and well-being of women and their families. Perinatal mental health problems also bring a considerable cost for society, £8.1 billion for every one-year cohort of births in the UK.

This year's Maternal Mental Health Week (2 May - 8 May 2022) coincides with International Day of the Midwife and the theme of the week: the power of connection, shines a spotlight on the critical role midwives can play in perinatal mental health care. Midwives can act as champions and advocates for women and families who are experiencing pregnancy related mental health problems. They can identify maternal mental health problems and facilitate access to the right treatment and support.

Clare's story: "During my pregnancy with my daughter, I felt very little – no excitement, no anticipation, no fear. I was mildly concerned about this, so I mentioned it to my midwife, who referred me to my local perinatal mental health service. I'm extremely thankful for the fabulous care I received, but there is a huge disparity in perinatal mental health support."

The Maternal Mental Health Alliance (MMHA) and Royal College of Midwives (RCM) have long argued that the mental health of new and expectant mothers must be given the same priority as physical health. Suffering can be reduced, and lives can be saved if there is proper investment in better support for women with mental health problems during pregnancy and after birth. This is especially important given the increased maternal mental health risks that have presented as a result of the pandemic.

A recent report by the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) looked at the economic case for increasing access to treatment for women with common mental health problems. Their research found that integrating mental health care into maternity settings and providing midwives and other vital health professionals with increased levels of investment and support, could improve the



lives of women and families and have an economic benefit of around half a billion pounds over ten years.

Although there has been welcome investment in specialist mental health support for pregnant women and families affected by severe and complex mental health problems, there are still major gaps for those who don't need such highly specialised care. To ensure all women and families who need care have access to it, more action and more commitment is now urgently required.

During maternal mental health awareness week, we urge decision makers to demonstrate commitment to the well-being of all women and their families by:

- investing fully in accessible and targeted maternal mental health services for women
- training frontline maternity staff to deliver excellent, safe perinatal mental health care and support
- creating more Specialist Mental Health roles in maternity.

Kirsten's story: "I was referred to the perinatal mental health team at my first midwife appointment. The perinatal mental health nurse who began supporting me was the same one from my first pregnancy, so she understood the problems I was facing. She also arranged for me to have a specialist midwife, who worked closely with the perinatal nurse to coordinate my care."

These actions will make it easier for pregnant women and new mums to access mental health support during routine contacts with their midwives and make a real difference to the lives of thousands of women, babies, and families.

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