

# Tess White MSP submission of 3 April 2024

## PE2017/D: Extend the period that specialist perinatal mental health support is made available beyond one year

I thank the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee for its continued consideration of PE2017. We are now one year on from the date my constituent, Margaret Reid, lodged this petition. She has shared with me her concern and frustration that the Scottish Government is no further forward on progressing the issues it raises.

### **1. Extending the period that specialist mental health support is made available**

Ms Reid's overarching concern remains that access to specialist perinatal mental health (PMH) support is limited to the first year following the birth of a child.

The Health, Social Care and Sport Committee's 2021 inquiry into perinatal mental health recommended that access to these services should not be restricted to the perinatal period.

Recommendation 12.23 of the Scottish Mental Health Law Review, published in September 2022, stated that the duty in section 24 of the Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003 should be "broadened" to allow for a "wide range of in-patient and community supports for parents who need perinatal mental health care and their children."

In June 2023, after this petition was lodged, the Scottish Government published its response to the Scottish Mental Health Law Review. It has undertaken to carry out a Mental Health and Capacity Reform Programme as it believes further research and policy development are required.

***There has been no firm commitment from the Scottish Government to update section 24 of the 2003 Act.***

## **2. Perinatal mental health workforce and access to specialist services**

The Scottish Government has indicated that mental health interventions could already be provided beyond the first postnatal year if there is clinical need.

However, in response to a written question from Oliver Mundell MSP on 8 December 2023, Minister Maree Todd acknowledged that this is based on “what the service can realistically provide given current caseloads, waits and capacity.”

Capacity is a persistent issue in perinatal mental health service provision. A February 2024 briefing on perinatal mental health services by Parent and Infant Mental Health Scotland (PIMHS) and the Maternal Mental Health Alliance (MMHA) highlights that recruitment and retention for the perinatal mental health workforce are “challenges for specialist teams throughout Scotland but are most profound the further North you go.”

PIMHS and MMHA point to a postcode lottery in perinatal mental health services which favours those living in proximity to the Central Belt. They have called for “clear, precise steps” on workforce planning for specialist PMH teams. Meanwhile, gaps in access continue – especially for those in rural and remote areas.

PIMHS and MMHA have also expressed concern that the new Joint Strategic Board for Children and Family Mental Health – which replaces the dedicated Perinatal and Infant Mental Health Programme Board – will weaken the focus on perinatal mental health, which they believe is in a “potentially vulnerable position” in Scotland, jeopardised further by cuts to the mental health budget.

***In light of these developments, women and their families need assurances that sustained effort and investment in PMH services by the Scottish Government will continue.***

## **3. Expanding mother and baby unit provision**

In November 2023 I requested another update from Minister Maree Todd on establishing a mother and baby unit (MBU) in North East

Scotland, following the February 2022 consultation on the options to increase MBU capacity. In the consultation analysis, Aberdeen was heavily favoured as the location for a new unit.

The Minister informed me that the options appraisal has been completed and that the Scottish Government was considering its response. This position was restated in January 2024 in the Minister's correspondence to the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee providing an update on Perinatal Mental Health and related areas.

***In February 2024, the Scottish Government put NHS building projects on hold for up to two years citing budgetary pressures, meaning there is further uncertainty over the expansion of mother and baby units.***

#### **4. NHS Tayside's mental health services**

The Independent Inquiry into Mental Health Services in NHS Tayside by Dr David Strang was published in July 2020. In January 2023, the Independent Oversight and Assurance Committee published its Final Report on progress towards implementing the inquiry's recommendations. It found that NHS Tayside had failed to fully rectify 31 of the 49 issues identified.

***Continued oversight of this process is required to ensure that the persistent issues affecting mental health services in NHS Tayside are satisfactorily resolved.***