

Dear Ms Powell

Thank you for the email which you sent to Minister Swann regarding Perinatal Mental Health. It has been passed to me to reply.

One of Minister's top priorities is to address and improve mental health in Northern Ireland, including perinatal mental health. You may be aware that before the current Covid-19 pandemic, Minister had accepted an invitation to speak at an event on World Maternal Mental Health Day, which has now been postponed.

The Executive committed in *New Decade, New Approach* to produce a ten year Mental Health Strategy. This strategy will build on work set out on the Mental Health Action Plan and will provide the strategic direction for the development, funding and reorganisation of mental health services for the next decade. Service development of perinatal mental health was being considered as part of the Mental Health Action Plan and prior to the pandemic, a revised Business Case for enhanced community perinatal mental health services for the region was submitted to the Department from the Public Health Agency.

As you have correctly stated, the current pandemic has had a severe impact on services, with the majority of staff in the Department temporarily redeployed to focus on the covid-19 response and much work has been delayed as a result. It has also had an impact on available resources, which have been largely been channelled into delivering the current covid-19 response. As such, the majority of work on the Mental Health Action Plan and Strategy has been temporarily put on hold. Of course, the need remains (and indeed will be greater in the aftermath of the pandemic) and so we hope to recommence this work as soon as possible.

In the meantime, much has been done by the Public Health Agency and Health and Social Care in NI to support mental health during lockdown. The following leaflet based on the Take 5 Steps to Wellbeing was published by PHA on their website. <https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/take-5-steps-wellbeing-looking-after-your-mental-health-while-you-stay-home>

In addition, HSC in partnership with ORCHA (Organisation for Review of Care and Health Apps) has developed a library of Apps to support health and wellbeing during these difficult times. The new Apps library can be accessed at <https://apps4healthcareni.hscni.net/>

Stress Control are offering a free 6 week cognitive behavioural therapy class. To take part, users should access www.stresscontrol.org.

Please be assured that this situation is temporary and we hope to be in a position to refocus our efforts and resources on these important area in mental health as soon as possible.

Kind Regards

Mental Health & Capacity Unit - Department of Health