



5<sup>th</sup> May 2020

Dear Minister Swann,

I hope you are well. My name is Rachel Powell and I am the Women's Sector Lobbyist with the Women's Resource and Development Agency. This week is Maternal Mental Health week and I am writing as a matter of urgency to get an update from the Department of Health on the delivery of perinatal mental health services in Northern Ireland.

WRDA coordinated the Maternal Advocacy Support Project (MAS Project) which met with the Chief Medical Officer Michael McBride and a number of Department of Health officials last year. In this meeting, the Chief Medical Officer pledged to push the Department of Health to fund and secure urgent perinatal mental health services, including an inpatient mother and baby unit and teams of specialist Perinatal Mental Health Professionals in every trust across Northern Ireland. In addition, we are aware that you have pledged to prioritise these services when meeting with campaigners on the issue.

I understand that the current pandemic has had a severe impact on services and that this is an extremely busy time for the Department of Health. However, given the ongoing lockdown, the isolation of mums with poor mental health is putting many at an even higher risk of perinatal mental health issues. It is undeniable that the health service is under extreme pressure in the current pandemic, but we would urge you to consider the treatment of mental health as an essential issue. Suicide is the leading cause of maternal mortality in the UK and there are many mothers who need access to these services; now more than ever.

I would kindly request an update from you on the prioritisation of these services, funding that will be allocated to deliver them and any progress that has been made in the implementation of perinatal mental health support. Further, I would greatly appreciate any update you may have on alternative delivery models that have been considered during the lockdown, such as telemedicine support for new mothers with perinatal mental health professionals.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Kind regards,

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