

UK Covid-19 Inquiry: joint press release

Today (28th February), prominent pregnancy and baby charities have told the UK Covid-19 Inquiry how all aspects of pregnancy, maternity, neonatal and postnatal care were dramatically disrupted during the pandemic – contributing to the avoidable suffering experienced by thousands of pregnant women and birthing people, new and expectant parents and babies.

Antenatal and postnatal care are included as specific areas to be covered in the Inquiry's Terms of Reference. At today's first Module 3 preliminary hearing Adam Wagner, instructed by Slater and Gordon, represented the 13 organisations that were announced collectively as a core participant. He told the Inquiry how blanket policies implemented at the start of the pandemic had devastating effects on many thousands of families during pregnancy and after the birth of their baby or babies.

The Inquiry heard how disruption to services led to pregnant women and birthing people attending clinics, scans and hospital appointments alone, with many receiving the devastating news that their baby or babies had a serious condition, had died or that their pregnancy had ended, without their partner or anyone else with them for support. Choice around place of birth was also restricted, with services being suspended during intrapartum care, and postnatal support was significantly reduced, impacting mental health and infant feeding services particularly. Sick babies in neonatal care were separated from their parents, and some families experienced the devastation of being unable to be with their babies until they were receiving end-of-life care.

Jenny Ward, on behalf of the group, said "Our charities supported thousands of people during the pandemic, and heard countless stories of how the health, safety and wellbeing of expectant parents and their babies were compromised repeatedly. We've also worked with frontline health professionals who feel they were not adequately supported throughout this time, and whose training needs were not fully addressed.

"While the UK Covid-19 Inquiry has committed to examining the impact of the pandemic on antenatal and postnatal care as part of its overall scope, it has not yet set out that it will be examined specifically within Module 3, which focuses on healthcare. We have urged the Inquiry to ensure this is explicitly included in this Module. With so many affected by the changes to services, it is vital that the Inquiry dedicates adequate time to hearing the voices of parents and expectant parents, to reflect what they and their babies lived through.

"Nothing could have prepared the families and babies we support for the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. What we do know is that decisions made during this time contributed to the stress, pain and harm which was experienced at a time when life already felt like it was turned upside down.

"While as individual organisations we support babies and families at all different stages of their pregnancy, birth and early childhood journey, we are united in our determination to ensure important lessons are learned so that policies implemented in future explicitly consider the full impact on new and expectant parents and their babies".

Notes to editors:

- The 13 pregnancy and baby charities granted core participant status are: Aching Arms, Baby Lifeline, Bliss, The Ectopic Pregnancy Trust, Group B Strep Support, ICP Support, The Lullaby Trust, Miscarriage Association, NCT (National Childbirth Trust), Pelvic Partnership, Pregnancy Sickness Support, Tommy's and Twins Trust.
- Module 3 is the third area of investigation to be opened by the UK Covid-19 inquiry. This Module will examine the consequences for healthcare of the response to the pandemic. It

will look at how the healthcare systems responded, the impact on systems and services, including on patients, doctors, nurses and other healthcare staff. While the Module 3 provisional scope identifies some specific patient groups it will be examining within the context of healthcare response – such as those who were shielding or clinically vulnerable – antenatal and postnatal care is not explicitly referenced here.

- Jenny Ward is Chief Executive of The Lullaby Trust, and co Vice-Chair of the Pregnancy and Baby Charities Network (PBCN), a network of more than 30 charities who work in partnership to improve outcomes and reduce inequalities for new and expectant parents and their babies. All organisations who have been granted Core Participant status for Module 3 are also members of the PBCN.
- For further information about a specific experience, or to request a comment from a specific organisation, please contact the relevant press office directly:
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 - **Bliss**
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 - **The Ectopic Pregnancy Trust**
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