

**Statement from the Pregnancy, Baby and Parent Organisations (PBPO) in response to the latest UK Covid-19 Inquiry Report – with comment from Aching Arms Founder/CEO – Leanne Turner**

The Pregnancy, Baby and Parent Organisations (PBPOs), representing thirteen organisations that support families during pregnancy, birth, neonatal care, and baby loss, welcomes the findings of the latest UK Covid-19 Inquiry report. The report confirms what families, frontline professionals, and charities have been saying since the start of the pandemic: maternity and neonatal services were not prioritised as they needed to be.

The Inquiry's acknowledgment that maternity must be seen as a high-priority area in healthcare planning is a crucial and overdue step. Throughout the pandemic, pregnant women, birthing people, and new parents faced disrupted care at some of the most vulnerable times in their lives. For many, this led to trauma, unsafe experiences, and, in some cases, devastating loss.

The PBPO fully supports the Inquiry's conclusion that partners should never have been treated as "visitors." Partners are an essential part of pregnancy, labour, birth, neonatal care, and early parenting. Excluding them caused unnecessary harm, increased trauma, and took away important support for both parents and babies.

We especially appreciate that the Inquiry recognises the deep impact on those who experienced pregnancy and baby loss during this period. Many faced this heartbreak without the emotional and clinical support they deserved. The inconsistent access to partners and support networks made grief even harder, leaving many to handle unimaginable moments alone.

During this time, many also hesitated to seek care because restrictions, mixed messages, and fear of healthcare settings made them unsure if services were accessible or safe. Instead of encouraging timely contact, which is crucial for spotting risks and complications, policies unintentionally created barriers that delayed critical care.

At the same time, remote appointments were often used instead of in-person assessments, even though they were not suitable for many parts of antenatal care. Important clinical checks, emotional support, and safeguarding discussions could not be effectively done over the phone or via video. For women with complications, first-time parents, those with limited access to technology, and families facing social or language barriers, remote care widened existing inequalities. As a result, many women missed out on timely, relationship-focused, hands-on care when they needed it most.

It is also important to remember that frontline maternity and neonatal staff worked under immense pressure, often facing unclear, rapidly changing, or delayed national guidance. We acknowledge and deeply appreciate the commitment, compassion, and resilience shown by midwives, neonatal staff, health visitors, and all those who provided essential care during challenging times.

Throughout this period, charities stepped in to fill the gaps, providing emotional support, information, and continuity of care when statutory services were unable to do so. PBPO organisations offered lifelines to families in crisis, but charities should never again be required to replace essential maternity and neonatal services.

Aching Arms is one of those charities. Their Founder & CEO, Leanne Turner said, “We are committed to supporting bereaved families, many of whom carry their grief and suffering in silence each and every day. We will continue to raise awareness of the impact of pregnancy and baby loss on mothers and birthing people, fathers and partners and advocate for improvements to bereavement care. The loss of a baby during pregnancy, birth or soon after, is a devastating experience, it requires specialist and timely support for the whole family.”

Aching Arms calls on the Government, NHS Trust leaders and our health professional partners to ensure in maternity care, today, tomorrow and during a future pandemic that parents, babies and their families are placed at the heart of decision making.

The PBPO charities stand ready to work collaboratively to ensure that what families experienced during Covid 19 is fully understood, and never repeated.