



We support all maternity service users to navigate the system as it exists, and campaign for a system which truly meets the needs of all

AIMS Campaigns Team
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Dear Professor Renfrew,

Enabling Safe Quality Midwifery Services and Care in Northern Ireland October 2024¹

First of all AIMS would like to thank you for taking on such a huge and critically important piece of work in Northern Ireland maternity services. We have several dedicated volunteers working on the frontline and AIMS has been aware of the growing concern about the lack of transparency and accountability in maternity services for quite a few years.. The findings of the report confirm what our own local knowledge has shown us about just how dire the situation truly is. It is fantastic to read about the pockets of excellence of care in Northern Ireland too, which are cemented with the many personal and intimate stories shared so explicitly by mothers and families.

AIMS has been a longstanding supporter of relational care as a fundamental building block of safe, personalised and equitable maternity service, and we are delighted to read the many references to **Continuity of Carer** throughout the report. We continue to prioritise this model of maternity care in our campaigning work with the governments in all Four Nations in the UK. AIMS is specifically aware of how the model has been rolled out in Northern Ireland and has been highlighting this progress since December 2020:

[Campaign update: Continuity of Carer, Northern Ireland - trying to do it properly! | AIMS](#)

Update in our journal in March 2023:

[Transforming to Continuity of Midwifery Carer - Exciting Times for Northern Ireland Maternity Services | AIMS](#)

We are also very aware that **choice of birthplace** has been an issue for the birthing women in Northern Ireland since the blanket closure of freestanding midwifery-led units throughout the province in 2022. AIMS is delighted this issue has been addressed in your solution focused report but given the persistent dominance of obstetric care and medicalisation, AIMS is interested in how transparently the challenges will be reported, and how progress will be tracked and set out in the coordinated 5 year strategic plan. AIMS position paper on [Choice of Birthplace](#) supports the rights of all pregnant women both to decide where to birth their baby under the 'principle of autonomy', and to be supported to make evidence-informed decisions, as part of their individualised care. Therefore AIMS believes that free standing birth centres should be made available to all who want them as well as alongside birth centres and obstetric units, and

¹ https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/doh-midwifery-renfrew-report-oct-2024_0.pdf

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that there should be consistent support for homebirths. AIMS notes the reference made to community maternity hubs and applauds recognition that these should not work in isolation from other options of maternity care, but be part of a region wide infrastructure.

AIMS has been a keen participant as stakeholders in the process of transforming maternity services in Northern Ireland, attending the interactive workshops which are part of the preparatory phase of the five year plan for the action and implementation of the recommendations from the report. We have listened to service user feedback, and heard the flurried excitement from the healthcare professionals. We have been assured that this work will be the first step to building the regional maternity improvement plan which will be the blueprint for maternity and neonatal services for the next five years, and we look forward to being involved in future events. And for these reasons we remain hopeful that the stories of the women and indeed the men and birthing partners have not been told in vain and they will continue to be listened to, and that change will happen to support women to be involved in their maternity care. We remain hopeful that midwifery-led care will be a validated option of care and this means re-opening the wonderful midwife-led birthing facilities which are sitting cold and closed across the country. We remain hopeful that the outcomes of this report means consistent and continued support for the midwives to do the job they long to do, to be with women.

AIMS recognises that huge change is required and full implementation of this wonderful report can really make that change. We want to see progress as a result of your recommendations, acknowledging that some will go at different paces and with the pockets of excellence, the entire system does not need to be fixed. We do have some concerns though about how the transformations will be implemented in an already overloaded workforce, and as the recommendations are starting to be implemented, whether women and families will really be the centre focus, given the emphasis on staff safety?

AIMS looks forward to being a valued stakeholder in the implementation group as a new maternity strategy is developed for Northern Ireland.

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