



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

20 September 2026

Open letter of welcome from AIMS to Robbie Butler on his appointment to Minister of Health NI

Dear Robbie,

We are writing to warmly welcome you to your new role as Health Minister for Northern Ireland and to assure you of AIMS continued support as Northern Ireland maternity services strive for safe, quality maternity care for all. In light of rumours of yet another closure of maternity services in Newry, AIMS looks forward to witnessing your leadership in the Health department to drive for women's voices to be respected and listened to, and to support 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.

Continuity of Carer

AIMS applauds Northern Ireland for recognising and pursuing this model of maternity care throughout the country. Initially focus has rightly been on women from socially disadvantaged areas but AIMS continues to campaign for all women to have access to a community-based full pathway continuity of midwifery carer model of care. This [model of care](#) has proven safety benefits and responds uniquely well to the recommendations from the Renfrew report, and also to the call in both the Amos and most recent Ockenden report in England to better 'listen to women'. AIMS is asking you as Northern Ireland's Health Minister, to support and promote this well-evidenced model of care as fundamental to any proper reform of maternity services, as women patiently await a new maternity strategic plan in Northern Ireland.

Implementation Group

AIMS keenly participated as stakeholders in the Renfrew review in 2024, a process to transform maternity services in Northern Ireland. Assurance was given by the Health Minister at the time that the recommendations would be progressed through to initiate an implementation group to develop a new maternity strategy for NI. Unfortunately this has yet to happen. We want to bring this to your attention as the new Health Minister and to support you to fulfil this outstanding priority.

[Choice of Birthplace](#)

AIMS is aware that the choice of birthplace has been a burning issue for the birthing women in Northern Ireland since the blanket closure of all freestanding midwife-led units (MLU) in 2022, and continues to be as Daisy Hill maternity hospital faces closure. 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, draining crucial funds for their upkeep:

Lagan Valley MLU

Downe Hospital MLU

Mater Hospital MLU

Association for Improvements in the Maternity Services

Registered Charity No. 1157845

www.aims.org.uk

enquiries@aims.org.uk

There are also the following birthing suites not being used:

Causeway Hospital Maternity Unit

The new Belfast Maternity Hospital

We thank you in advance for your dedication and work as you make progress in making Northern Ireland a place where pregnant women's rights are respected by all, and mothers' voices are heard. AIMS looks forward to supporting you to make a profound difference in the transformation of maternity services in Northern Ireland.

Yours sincerely

The AIMS Campaigns Team

Who is AIMS?

Since 1960, AIMS has been a leading advocate for improvements in UK maternity care. We are a lay-led organisation with national and international links, and a membership that includes health and care professionals as well as lay people. Collectively, our volunteers have decades of experience researching, advocating and campaigning for improvements in UK maternity care. We run an email and telephone helpline for women as they seek to navigate the maternity services, and we offer a range of information resources. We have a large network of people, via our volunteers and members, who engage regularly with mothers, health care providers and others. We use our knowledge, influence and experience to work collaboratively with others to support policy change at local and national level.

Association for Improvements in the Maternity Services

Registered Charity No. 1157845

www.aims.org.uk

enquiries@aims.org.uk