AIMS For a better birth...

What's going on in Scotland, Wales & Northern Ireland

AIMS Journal, 2025, Vol 37, No 1

By, the AIMS Campaigns Team

Scotland Maternity & Midwifery Festival 26th November 2024

This online event was a good opportunity to discover more about the Scottish maternity services, particularly directly from the government.

Neil Gray MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, Scottish Government presented an update on how, since 2017, they are working towards the 76 recommendations from the Best Start Vision[1], and how a vast majority of them are now complete. It was reassuring to be reminded that Continuity of Carer is one of the two cornerstone recommendations of Best Start, (the other cornerstone is Neonatal Intensive Care). He also made clear that NHS Boards[2] have been asked to prioritise underprivileged and minority ethnic groups, and that all NHS Boards have been given guidance on how to work with an anti-racism approach. He told us that Healthcare Improvement in Scotland (HIS)[3] have been commissioned to develop standards for maternity services. Also from January 2025, allmaternity units will be assessed by HIS Inspections for safety and quality. He mentioned the Scottish Patient Safety Perinatal Programme[4], intended to improve outcomes, to provide safe perinatal care for all, and to support frontline staff to make decisions that are right for their locality. He stated that the Scottish government was committed to providing Placental Growth Factor testing[5] (for preeclampsia) to all women who need it. He went on to say that the Scottish government are funding and supportingSANDS [6] to develop national bereavement care pathways, and that all 14 boards are committed to its delivery. He also mentioned that individualised care and support must be provided to anyone who experiences loss during pregnancy and baby loss, by developing individual care plans following a miscarriage, plus separate rooms to be available in units. The Miscarriage Care Delivery Framework will shortly be delivered to drive focus and progress where improvement is required.

We have written to Neil Gray to ask about the progress of Continuity of Carer implementation and how progress will be monitored.

Transforming Maternity Services Stakeholders Engagement Workshop in Ballymena, Northern Ireland 10th December 2024

This is the second interactive workshop that AIMS has attended as stakeholders in transforming maternity services in Northern Ireland, part of the preparatory phase of the five year plan for the action and implementation of the recommendations from the Renfrew report: "Enabling Safe Quality Midwifery

Services and Care in Northern Ireland."[7]. Two AIMS volunteers were invited to attend this event, which was attended by other service users, service user advocates and officials and representatives of organisations involved in the regional improvement plan. Professor Mary Renfrew presented on the key messages of her recently published report, and there was a progress update from a Department of Health official. Since the report was published on 9th November 2024, there has been quite a flurry in the Northern Ireland maternity world and it was good to see the report mentioned positively at the Scotland Maternity & Midwifery Festival.

Everyone was invited to participate in two breakout sessions, one on Northern Ireland's Key Maternity and Neonatal Priorities, and the other on The Role of Women's Voices in Maternity Services. It was a good opportunity to address the key priorities identified from the previous stakeholder engagement event, and compare them to the recommendations from the Renfrew report. It also gave us an open opportunity to discuss the barriers to service user involvement, for example, how to engage mothers with young babies and keep their enthusiasm in improving maternity services. As with any interactive event, it was all a bit manic as so many people had so much to say!

We were 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 over the next five years.

It feels like an achievement for AIMS to be involved in this work, especially as the Renfrew Report is impressing maternity services across the UK and beyond. AIMS looks forward to being part of the implementation group as a new maternity strategy is developed for Northern Ireland.

A new quality statement for maternity and neonatal services in Wales, 11th February

AIMS is pleased to see the publication of a new quality statement for maternity and neonatal services[8] in Wales, presented to the Welsh Senedd on February 11, 2025. Whilst just a brief document, it indicates key areas of focus and offers opportunities for further engagement. We were particularly pleased to see the focus on choice of place of birth, and look forward to discussing in more detail the Welsh Government's ideas around implementing a full pathway continuity of carer model of care for all.The Senedd discussion[9] suggested a desire for this, although the statement itself seems to be more limited. Watch this space!

We would love to grow both our volunteer base and general contacts in Scotland and Wales, to work with us on influencing maternity service improvement across the UK. If that's you, or you know someone who might fit the bill, please contact us at campaigns@aims.org.uk

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[1] Scottish Government (2017) The best start: five-year plan for maternity and neonatal care

www.gov.scot/publications/best-start-five-year-forward-plan-maternity-neonatal-care-scotland

[2] Editor's note: To understand more about the health board structure in Scotland, this page may be useful: www.scot.nhs.uk/organisations

[3] Healthcare Improvement Scotland www.healthcareimprovementscotland.scot

[4] Scottish Patient Safety Programme (SPSP) Perinatal Programme. (2023) Supporting improved outcomes for women, birthing people and babies in Scotland. https://ihub.scot/improvement-programmes/scottish-patient-safety-programme-spsp/spsp-perinatal-programme

[5] BMJ Awards 2020 - New Testing for Pre-Eclampsia

[6] Sands www.sands.org.uk

[7] Renfrew M. (2024) Enabling Safe Quality Midwifery Services and Care in Northern Ireland.

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

[8] Llywodraeth Cymru-Welsh Government (2025) Quality statement for maternity and neonatal services. www.gov.wales/quality-statement-maternity-and-neonatal-services-html

[9] Welsh Senedd Maternity and Neonatal Quality Statement (2025) www.senedd.tv/Meeting/Clip/839302f0-a336-464e-86da-842fb8b8c9e