



Office of the Assistant National Director
Access and Integration

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Oifig an Stiúrthóir Náisiúnta Cúnta
Rochtain agus Comhtháthú: Seirbhísí
Meabhairshláinte FSS
Ospidéal Naomh Loman
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Deputy Róisín Shortall,
Dail Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.

19th of September 2024

PQ Number: 36633/24

PQ Question: To ask the Minister for Health if a dedicated funding allocation for the development of the inpatient mental health support mother-and-baby unit has been agreed; if not, when he expects to announce this allocation; the timeline he is working towards in establishing this unit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. -Róisín Shortall

Dear Deputy Shortall,,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question, which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response. I have examined the matter and the following outlines the position.

The Specialist Perinatal Mental Health Services (SPMHS) Model of Care for Ireland was launched in 2017 and provided a national framework for the development of mental health for women in the perinatal period. It has been very successfully implemented with the establishment of a hub and spoke model covering the 19 maternity hospitals across the country. All the hub sites have appointed full consultant led multidisciplinary teams providing a comprehensive range of services to women with moderate to severe perinatal mental health problems. In addition, an innovative aspect of the Model of Care was the development of Perinatal Mental Health Midwife posts in all of the maternity hospitals who provide care to women with milder mental health problems. The MOC has effectively transformed the development of specialist perinatal mental health services in Ireland and has received very positive feedback in the international literature. However, a number of issues have emerged with the implementation of the MOC which have created an imperative to update the Model of Care.

The hub sites have become incredibly busy, with some sites (NMH and Rotunda) seeing a doubling of clinical activity which is unsustainable. This has prevented the hub sites in providing the support to their associated spoke sites as envisaged by the MOC. While women with milder mental health problems across the maternity services nationally can access services from the Perinatal Mental Health Midwives, women attending the spoke sites do not receive directly provided specialist perinatal mental health services and are managed by Liaison Mental Health Services (where they exist) or by the sector Adult Community Mental Health Teams. A steering group has been established to refresh the Model of Care and will plan for equity of access to directly provided SPMHS in all of the maternity hospitals.

In addition, with the huge increase in hub site clinical activity, some of the services are now curtailing services and introducing more restrictive referral policies.



Despite the recommendation in the SPMHS MOC that a National Mother and Baby unit be developed at the psychiatric unit (Elm Mount Unit) based at St Vincent's University Hospital (SVUH), progress has been slow. Elm Mount Unit does not have the space for an MBU and additional development is needed to facilitate this among other services such as a High Dependency Unit, Eating Disorder Beds and Old Age Psychiatry beds. A feasibility study, to examine all of these needs was recommended in early 2023, commenced work in July 2024 and its outcome is awaited. If it is determined that further development of Elm Mount Unit cannot accommodate an MBU in addition to these other beds then a new psychiatric unit will need to be built on the campus of SVUH.

The absence of a national MBU means that mothers who require admission in the post-natal period have to be separated from their babies with all the documented adverse effects of this.

The steering group to refresh the Model for care has been meeting since June 2024 and expects to complete its work in Q2 2025.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tony McCusker', written in a cursive style.

Tony McCusker
General Manager
Access and Integration; HSE Mental Health Services