

Baby Lifeline takes campaign to ‘save lives’ by reinstating Maternity Safety Training Fund to Downing Street

Baby Lifeline is today taking a powerful campaign to the heart of Government by calling on Prime Minister Boris Johnson to ‘save lives’ of mothers and babies by reinstating funding for a national maternity training scheme.

We have today published an open letter to Mr Johnson – and delivered it to the door of Number 10 alongside supporting organisations and campaigners - calling for the immediate reinstatement of the Maternity Safety Training Fund in next week’s Budget.

[An online petition, which can be signed here](#), has also been launched, aiming to create ‘a collective powerful voice for change which cannot, and must not, be ignored’.

Our campaign has already secured the support of the Royal College of Midwives and the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, as well as influential senior figures who have led reviews into continued maternity care failings.

The fund has only previously once been made available, in 2016, and resulted in 30,000 maternity healthcare professionals receiving training across the country which they would not have otherwise had.

The call for greater investment into maternity services comes on the back of two recent scandals about poor care and avoidable deaths. It was recently revealed that more than 1,000 cases of potential poor care of mothers and babies are being investigated at Shrewsbury and Telford Hospitals NHS Trust.

A separate independent investigation is focussed on East Kent NHS Trust, where it has been revealed there have been 15 possible avoidable deaths since 2011.

Figures who led major maternity care investigations pledge support

In handing over the letter at Downing Street today, Baby Lifeline founder Judy Ledger was joined by Dr Clea Harmer, Chief Executive of SANDS, Dr Felicity Plaats, President of the Association of Obstetric Anaesthetists, Sara Ledger, Head of Research and Development at Baby Lifeline, Amanda Stevens, chief executive of Hudgell Solicitors, and Derek Richford, who campaigned for an inquiry into maternity services at East Kent Hospitals University Trust.

The campaign has won high-profile supporters including Donna Ockenden, who is currently leading the independent maternity review into Shrewsbury and Telford Hospitals NHS Trust, and MP and former Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt, who himself announced the Government’s pledge to halve the rates of stillbirth, neonatal death, and brain injury by 2025 when he was in office.

Figures who have led previous care investigations, including Sir Robert Francis QC, Chair of the Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust Public Inquiry in 2013, Baroness Cumberlege CBE, who led a major review of maternity services across the country in 2014, and Dr Bill Kirkup CBE, who chaired the Morecambe Bay Investigation in 2015, have also signed the letter to Mr Johnson.

Other significant supporters include Nicky Lyon, Co-founder of the Campaign for Safer Births, Abhi Lall, Consultant Neonatologist and Education Lead for Digital Learning at Great Ormond Street Hospital and Rachel Power, Chief Executive of The Patients Association.

Mrs Ledger said: “What we have here is a powerful combined voice from experienced maternity professionals, patients, affected families and the legal profession, all calling for change. This cannot be ignored and must not be ignored if avoidable deaths and injuries to mothers and babies are to be significantly reduced.

“When serious incidents in maternity services occur, it can become, in effect, a devastating ‘life sentence’ of round the clock care for an injured baby and their family.

“When a woman is injured during childbirth, this can also be long-lasting and devastating. Lives can change forever. For the health professionals involved, it will also something be that they will never forget or be able to come to terms with.”

Research into training highlighted major inconsistencies and gaps

Recent research carried out by Baby Lifeline into maternity training as part of the ‘Mind The Gap’ project revealed major inconsistencies, with some health trusts investing more than £370,000 a year, and others as little as £1,051.

The same report revealed two thirds of maternity trusts don’t make attending training sessions on caring and screening unwell new-born babies mandatory for all staff and just one in five insist all maternity staff be trained on the early recognition and management of severely and critically ill women during childbirth.

Based on current birth and perinatal mortality rates it is estimated that there will be around 2,400 stillbirths, 1,680 early neonatal deaths, and 1,560 cases of brain injury caused by oxygen deprivation each year in England.

Mrs Ledger says this is bringing not only an unacceptable cost in terms of loss of lives, but also in terms of litigation.

She said: “As well as the human tragedy and suffering, there is also an immense financial impact. The value of obstetric claims received in 2018-19 was around £2.5bn. This is around 50 per cent of the value of all NHS negligence claims received.

“A recent award of £37 million was made to the parents of a four-year-old boy who was brain damaged at birth following mistakes and the failure to recognise them. The value of this settlement has been assessed to allow for the round-the-clock care that this little boy will need for the rest of his life.

“We are campaigning for high quality, standardised continuing professional development (CPD) training for maternity healthcare professionals. Evidence shows that with the right CPD training, a high percentage of serious injuries could be avoided. The amount we seek is negligible compared to just one claim like this.

“The year the Maternity Fund was available and used it was highly evaluated and well received, yet, despite this, it was not continued beyond its first year. Consequently, the level of maternity training has since dropped, and we risk undoing all the good work that was done as a result of this fund.”

In support of the campaign, Bill Kirkup CBE, who chaired the Morecombe Bay Inquiry, said: "There have been real improvements in maternity services, but as recent events in Kent and Shropshire have shown only too clearly, much more remains to be done. The Maternity Safety Training Fund is badly needed."

Sir Robert Francis QC, who chaired the Mid Staffordshire Inquiries, added: “The cost in lost and broken lives, not to mention the unsustainable financial burden and the distress of staff caused by these avoidable mistakes, is indefensible. “

Lawyer says number of negligence cases are ‘far too high and must fall faster’

Amanda Stevens, chief executive of Hudgell Solicitors, has supported many families in securing damages to help care for children left with life-long illnesses as a result of negligent care during pregnancy, and those who sadly don't get to take their babies home.

She said: “We fully support this campaign by Baby Lifeline. There can be few more devastating life events than a pregnancy which ends with a mother or baby suffering a life-changing injury, or worse still not returning home to their family at all after complications during labour and birth

“Quite simply, the number of cases remains far too high and must fall faster. Our rate of reduction has been significantly slower than other countries in recent years, and that needs to be addressed.

“Having worked as a hospital manager myself previously, and from many years of supporting those who have suffered from negligent care in my legal role, I know that the vast majority of midwives and doctors working on wards across the country do a tremendous job. They are completely committed to the people they care for and they provide outstanding support to so many on a daily basis.

“However, it remains common for these dedicated health professionals to be under trained, overstretched, left using unsuitable equipment and placed under unacceptable pressures to carry out the most important role of helping a mother bring a new life into the world.

“It is a combination which leads to avoidable injuries and loss of life. It is a collective failing, and there has to be a collective solution. Properly funded, much improved and standardised training would be a significant first step.”

To sign the petition calling for the reinstatement of the Maternity Safety Training Fund visit
<http://chnng.it/Mskq4PkYzt>

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