

New taskforce to level-up maternity care and tackle disparities

- New Maternity Disparities Taskforce to explore reasons for disparities in maternity care and address poor outcomes for women from ethnic minority communities and those living in deprived areas
- This comes as data shows black women are 40% more likely to experience a miscarriage than white women, and deprived areas can have higher rates of still births
- Taskforce will identify the barriers faced and how the government can continue to improve care to further reduce the number of stillbirths and maternal deaths

A new Maternity Disparities Taskforce will tackle disparities in maternity care experienced by women from ethnic minority groups and those living in deprived areas.

The taskforce will be established by Minister for Patient Safety and Primary Care, Maria Caulfield, and co-chaired by Chief Midwifery Officer, Professor Jacqueline Dunkley-Bent OBE, to make real progress in understanding the reasons for poor outcomes in maternity care.

The government has taken action to halve the rate of stillbirths, neonatal deaths, maternal deaths and brain injuries by 2025. The latest figures show the stillbirth rate has reduced by over 25% since 2010 and the neonatal mortality rate has reduced by 29%, surpassing the ambition for a 20% reduction by 2020.

However, while progress has been made, disparities continue to persist – the reasons for which remain unclear.

Data shows there is an almost 2-fold difference in mortality rates between women from Asian ethnic groups and white women, and they are also higher for black women. Studies have also found black women are 40% more likely to experience a miscarriage than white women.

Birmingham is one of the most deprived areas of the country and has the highest rates of neonatal mortality and stillbirths at 11.4 per 1,000. Birmingham also has a high number of low birth weight of all babies (9.7% in 2018) and a high prematurity rate.

Minister for Women's Health, Maria Caulfield, said:

For too long disparities have persisted which mean women living in deprived areas or from ethnic minority backgrounds are less likely to get the care they need, and worse, lose their child. We must do better to understand and address the causes of this.

The Maternity Disparities Taskforce will help level up maternity

care across the country, bringing together a wide range of experts to deliver real and ambitious change so we can improve care for all women, and I will be monitoring progress closely.

As a nurse, I know how incredibly challenging the last 2 years have been and would like to thank all our dedicated maternity staff for their hard work and commitment throughout the pandemic.

The taskforce seeks to increase understanding of the drivers behind the disparities, examine the social factors linked to poorer health outcomes and tackle these issues in order to improve the health and wellbeing of women and their babies.

It will seek to do so by looking to consider and support evidence-based interventions for the following areas:

- improving personalised care and support plans for mothers
- addressing how wider societal issues impact maternal health, working with experts in other government departments
- improving education and awareness of pre-conception health when trying to conceive, such as taking supplements before pregnancy and maintaining a healthy weight
- increasing access to maternity care for all women and developing targeted support for women from the most vulnerable groups
- empowering women to make evidence-based decisions about their care during pregnancy such as the development of a new digital framework, which provides women with support to make informed decisions during labour

The first meeting will be held on 8 March, with meetings held every 2 months to maintain and track progress, bringing together experts from across the health service, mothers, government and the voluntary sector, with membership to be published this month.

It will build on existing work by government and the NHS to improve care, for example the government has invested £5 million in the Brain Injury Reduction Programme to reduce the rate of brain injuries in babies occurring during or soon after births.

The NHS has produced equity and equality guidance to help local maternity systems address these disparities and the taskforce will work to improve cross-government working to address the social determinants of health for women and babies from ethnic minority groups and those living in the most deprived areas.

Professor Jacqueline Dunkley-Bent, Chief Midwifery Officer for England, said:

The NHS' ambition is to be the safest place in the world to be pregnant, give birth and transition into parenthood. All women who use our maternity services should receive the best care possible, which is why the NHS is committed to reducing health inequalities

and our equity and equality guidance sets out how the NHS will do this.

We welcome the extra impetus and support that the new taskforce will provide in tackling these important issues and look forward to participating in it.

Dr Edward Morris, President of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG), said:

We strongly welcome this new Maternity Disparities Taskforce, which will aim to tackle the unacceptable inequalities that exist for women from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds when it comes to maternity outcomes.

The colour of someone's skin should never dictate whether they have a positive or negative birth experience. The RCOG's Race Equality Taskforce is committed to working with this new taskforce to understand why these disparities exist and create meaningful solutions to improve healthcare experiences and outcomes for all ethnic minority women.

Commenting, the Royal College of Midwives (RCM) Director for Professional Midwifery, Mary Ross- Davie said;

The disparities in outcomes and experience of maternity care for black and Asian women and women from other ethnic minority backgrounds are shocking, so the RCM welcomes the creation of the Maternity Disparities Taskforce and is keen to be part of the work in finding solutions. The RCM has long called for more consultant and specialist midwife posts in trusts and health boards to provide better support to women with pre-existing conditions such as increased BMI, high blood pressure, diabetes, and mental health conditions. In many parts of the UK, these midwife roles either do not exist or are very limited, yet they could make a huge difference to black and Asian women in particular.

There is some excellent work being done in some areas, so it would be good to see that experience shared across maternity services. Improvement of outcomes relies on sharing what works and what doesn't, so that we can bring about effective, consistent change. We look forward to working with colleagues on the taskforce to highlight the current problems and find ways to address them in a positive way.

To support maternity staff and families further, the NHS is increasing the maternity workforce further with a £95 million recruitment drive to hire 1,200 more midwives and 100 obstetricians.

See the [Maternity Disparities Taskforce terms of reference](#) (published 18 July 2022).

Cooperation between Iraq and Kuwait is a historical achievement for multilateralism

Thank you, Mr President. And may I start by thanking the UNCC's Governing Council President, Ambassador Michael Gaffey, for today's briefing and to the Vice President of the Governing Council, represented by Ambassador Lucy Kiruthu, for her support. Thank you and welcome too to Dr Fuad Hussein, Iraq's Minister for Foreign Affairs, and to Kuwait's Ambassador Mansour Ayyad Al-Otaibi.

As we've heard, following the Special Session of the Governing Council on 9 February, the Security Council meets today to discuss the resolution, which acknowledges the fulfilment of the Commission's mandate and instructs the winding down of all its activities. After thirty years, the UNCC represents an important success for the international rules based order, as Ambassador Gaffey said, a historical achievement for multilateralism in achieving reconciliation after conflict and solutions to large-scale and complex problems related to conflict. The novel work undertaken by the UNCC has required the close cooperation and engagement of Iraq and Kuwait, who have both contributed to ensure the success of the UNCC.

Security Council Resolution 687 of 1991 affirmed Iraq as liable under international law for any direct loss, damage or injury to foreign Government, nationals and corporations as a result of the unlawful invasion and occupation of Kuwait. The Security Council acted under Chapter VII of the UN Charter to establish the UNCC as a means to process claims in respect of that liability. Since then, as we heard, the Commission has paid out \$52.4 billion in compensation to more than 1.5 million claimants. The final payment of over \$600,000 made in January of this year marked the fulfilment of the Commission's mandate after more than 30 years. With the completion of the mandate, Iraq has now fulfilled its obligations in relation to this Chapter VII measure.

We commend Iraq's commitment to its payment under various governments and in exceptionally difficult economic and security circumstances. We also take this opportunity to reflect on what the successful completion of the Commission's mandate represents: not only is it a reminder of the consequences of breaching international law, it's also an example of what we can achieve through positive cooperation at the United Nations.

We would like to extend our thanks to the Commission's Secretariat, past and

present, for their tireless commitment and work to date. And we are confident the Secretariat will complete its remaining tasks with the high level of diligence they have maintained throughout. The United Kingdom stands ready to support all actions necessary to take forward the dissolution of the Commission by the end of this year.

Finally Mr President, the United Kingdom expresses its gratitude to colleagues on this Council for their constructive engagement on the resolution before us today, which helps to draw to a close, the long but ultimately successful endeavour of the Commission.

I thank you, Mr President.

Continued violence in the Central African Republic undermines the chance for inclusive political dialogue

Thank you, Madam President, and thank you to the Special Representative to the AU, Special Representative, and to Mr Caholo.

Firstly, the United Kingdom is concerned that the continued violence in the Central African Republic undermines the chance for inclusive political dialogue. We urge all parties to respect the ceasefire.

We also welcome the return of opposition parties to the Republican Dialogue process and acknowledge the immense efforts on the Luanda joint roadmap initiative. This is positive progress. The political agreement remains the only way to achieve long-term peace and stability for the citizens of the Central African Republic.

Secondly, the United Kingdom remains concerned by the continuing deterioration of the humanitarian situation in the CAR and the on-going threats to civilians. The high levels of displacement and conflict-related sexual violence highlighted in the Secretary-General's report are unacceptable. And the on-going targeting of humanitarian personnel and denial of humanitarian access must stop.

Sadly, reporting shows that violations of International Humanitarian Law, and violations and abuses of human rights by all parties to the conflict continue. The United Kingdom deplores the indiscriminate killings of unarmed civilians, and targeting of Fulani and Muslim communities by the FACA and the Russian mercenary group, Wagner – as we've heard from others. Wagner plays a destabilising role in the country. Its presence undermines the work of the UN mission to the detriment of the citizens of the CAR. We call on the government to ensure the full application in the country of international

humanitarian and human rights law and that all perpetrators of violations or abuses are held to account.

Thirdly, I want to touch on threats to the safety and security of UN peacekeepers. We note the decrease in violations of the status-of-forces agreement in the last reporting period. However, we continue to call for clarity regarding the attack on a UN police bus last November which resulted in UN casualties and a civilian death.

We are also deeply concerned by the jamming of MINUSCA's GPS signals and satellite communications. This requires urgent investigation. Any delay in resolving the issue will put UN civilian and uniformed personnel at unacceptable risk.

Lastly, I'd like to once again emphasise that the arms embargo exists to prevent weapons falling into the hands of armed groups and fuelling violence. It is not intended to prevent the government from obtaining the equipment it needs for defence and security sector reform. Indeed, to date, the Committee has approved all exemption requests submitted under the framework of the arms embargo.

We welcome any progress the government has made in regards to meeting the Council's benchmarks, but it's critical that the block on the Panel of Experts is lifted soon.

And finally, Madam President, if I may, I would like to add my voice to those of my Council colleagues to thank the Special Representative for his tireless work and service over the past three years and wish him the best in his future endeavours.

Thank you

[Home Secretary calls with international partners](#)

The Home Secretary Priti Patel today held a series of calls and meetings to discuss the situation in Ukraine with key international partners.

She spoke to her counterparts from Latvia and the Czech Republic – Marija Golubeva, Interior Minister of Latvia, and Vit Rakušan, Czech Interior Minister – and also had a conversation with the Polish Ambassador to the UK, Piotr Wilczek, and met the Canadian High Commissioner to the UK, Ralph Goodale.

In all these conversations the Home Secretary underlined that the UK stands in solidarity with Ukraine and that a united international response to

Russian aggression was the best way to protect innocent lives and each other's homeland security.

It was deemed vital that diplomatic efforts continued to try and seek a resolution to this situation, but that appropriate action also needed to be taken in order to demonstrate the seriousness with which Russia's actions are viewed by the international community.

In this respect, the Home Secretary was able to share details of the sanctions announced by the Prime Minister against five Russian banks and other individuals today.

She repeated her condemnation of the escalation of Russian disinformation operations and noted the worrying reports of malicious cyber incidents in Ukraine, which represent serious and hostile acts.

Another common theme on which partners agreed was on the importance of a safe, orderly and managed approach to migration and migration flows resulting within the region as a result of the current crisis.

The Home Secretary agreed to keep open lines of communication with her international partners in the coming days.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said:

This is a fast-moving situation but through discussions with my international counterparts there has been universal condemnation for Russia's aggression against Ukraine.

The people of Ukraine can be reassured that there is an international determination amongst friends and allies to speak with one voice in response to recent events and we are already demonstrating that Russia's actions have serious consequences.

Ministers ask businesses to help in drive to end rough sleeping

Business leaders are being urged to give jobs to former rough sleepers in a bid to help keep people off the streets for good.

At a meeting with top executives today (22 February 2022), ministers called on business and charity leaders to be more generous in offering employment opportunities to former homeless people, challenging the stigma around giving jobs to people who have been living on the streets.

The drive is part of a £2 billion package of funding to help eradicate rough sleeping by targeting the root causes of the problem and ending rough sleeping by the close of this Parliament.

Employment improves the accommodation prospects for people experiencing homelessness and rough sleeping both in the long and short term – an income means they have more choices and an employment contract will improve the negotiation position of any tenant.

At today's virtual round table, Minister for Rough Sleeping and Housing Eddie Hughes, and Minister for Welfare Delivery David Rutley, stressed that finding jobs for people was key to helping to end homelessness and called on businesses to do more.

Minister for Rough Sleeping and Housing Eddie Hughes MP said:

A job for someone who has been homeless or slept rough is a vital step towards helping them to rebuild their life and can be crucial to ending the cycle of homelessness.

There was a huge amount of support around the table today – and we heard first-hand just how much giving someone who was homeless a job benefits the individual and the business.

Now I'm calling on more businesses – big and small – to step up and do their bit to change lives – just by simply giving someone a chance.

Minister for Welfare Delivery David Rutley MP said:

We're determined to help vulnerable people as best we can, with wraparound support that is designed to get people back on their feet. One of the most important milestones on this journey is getting people back into work, and Universal Credit's individual tailored employment support, in addition to its financial element, is a vital resource to help people take that next step towards rebuilding their lives.

I encourage any and all businesses to collaborate with our fantastic jobcentres to see how they can make a difference in vulnerable people's lives and explore the untapped potential of this group.

SCS JV Skills, Education and Employment Manager Frankie Jones said:

With 34,000 jobs forecast to construct HS2, there is an unprecedented opportunity to shape the workforce of tomorrow. Skanska Costain STRABAG Joint Venture (SCS JV) works in two

boroughs that have the highest homeless rates in London and we are working to make a difference, alongside our supply chain, offering full time employment on HS2 to people who have experienced homelessness.

Matt Downie, Chief Executive of Crisis, said:

It is great to see the UK government encouraging businesses to do their bit to tackle rough sleeping. Through our services, we know that access to well-paid, secure work is vital to helping people end their homelessness.

No one should be denied reaching their full potential because they have no home. With the right support and the stability of a safe and secure home, people who have experienced homelessness make hugely positive contributions to businesses and society.

We look forward to working with employers and the UK government to ensure training and employment opportunities are available to help people leave homelessness behind for good.