

# Mental health and the journey to parenthood

Communications pack for local Healthwatch

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## Introduction

On Monday 9 September we will publish our new report '[Mental health and the journey to parenthood](#)'. The report looks at the experiences of women who experienced mental health problems during and after birth and draws on national research as well as the work undertaken by eight local Healthwatch.

This document contains resources to help you communicate the findings of Healthwatch when it comes to mental health support during pregnancy and after birth - especially if you have local findings which you want to raise awareness of or want to encourage local women to share their experiences with you.

### What does this pack contain?

- An email for stakeholders
- A press notice you can localise
- Social media messages and graphics
- A short news item for your newsletter

## How can you support our campaign?

### 1. Email local services and stakeholders

We've prepared a draft email, which you can send to your lists to share our findings:

*"Dear XX,*

*Today, Healthwatch launches a national report which looks at the views of women's experiences of mental health problems, before, during and after pregnancy.*

*As you support families affected by perinatal mental illness, we thought you would be interested in our findings and willing to support our campaign to help raise awareness of the changes people would like to see.*

*Please download and share the report. We've also included some simple ways that you can help share the important message of what people told us about their experiences of mental health and the support they received.*

*Kind regards,*

*XX*

#### **How can you support Healthwatch's campaign?**

- **Share our report** - Raise awareness of the changes new parents would like to see and of the importance of speaking up, by sharing our findings with your supporters and members.

- **Share our stories** - We have several personal stories told by some of the women behind the report. Share these emotive blogs and videos through your own channels. You can find us on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn.
- **Tweets to help you share the message** - We've drafted a few Tweets so you can help us raise awareness of the issues families face before, during and after pregnancy.

Are you okay? It's not enough to ask the question, you need to listen to the answer too. Make the space for conversations with #NewParents about their #MentalHealth to encourage them to get the help they need, when they need it. Read @HealthwatchE latest report: <https://www.healthwatch.co.uk/mental-health-and-journey-parenthood>

Thousands of women and their partners told #Healthwatch about their experiences of mental health problems during the journey to parenthood. Find out what they said: <https://www.healthwatch.co.uk/mental-health-and-journey-parenthood>

Did you know around 1 in 4 women experience mental health problems in pregnancy and after giving birth? New report from #Healthwatch looks at the stories behind the numbers, and the changes the #NHS can make to better support #newparents in managing their #MentalHealth <https://www.healthwatch.co.uk/mental-health-and-journey-parenthood>

## 2. Press release template

### PRESS RELEASE

EMBARGOED: 00:01 Monday 09 September 2019

**Healthwatch calls on health professionals (in area) to make more space for new parents to talk about their mental health**

Independent health and social care champion Healthwatch (XX) is calling on local services to make more space for new parents (in area) to talk about their mental health.

- New national report echoes the experiences of local women who are not experiencing the support they should expect if they have mental health problems when pregnant or after having a baby.
- Women feel mental ill health often triggered by a combination of issues, such as severe sickness in pregnancy, traumatic births, physical illness and a history of mental health problems.
- A fear of speaking up, a lack of opportunities to discuss mental health with professionals, not knowing where to turn for help and limited access to support all adding to women's struggles.
- Healthwatch calls on health professionals to make more space to talk about mental health and check on the wellbeing of women during and after pregnancy.

**A new report** exploring the experiences of women with mental health problems during the journey to parenthood has found that many people are not experiencing the consistent support they should expect if services were following NHS guidelines.

The findings reflect what women in X told Healthwatch X after the local health and social care champion investigated the issue last X.

Published today by Healthwatch England, the report - 'Mental health and the journey to parenthood' - focuses on a survey of 1,738 women and draws on the research undertaken by

Healthwatch X. These women reported either having a mental health condition diagnosed by a doctor before, during or after having a baby or they said they had experienced a mental health problem which had not been diagnosed.

With the NHS committed to providing maternal mental health support for more than 30,000 extra women by 2020/21, the work undertaken by Healthwatch can help local services understand what's working for new mothers and what isn't.

The national report echoes what people told Healthwatch (in area), with many women reporting good experiences of care. (please insert local examples).

### Variable mental support for new parents

However, the national and local research also indicates that many women are not experiencing support that meets national NICE guidelines which set out what mothers should expect when it comes to the recognition, assessment and treatment of mental health problems during and after pregnancy.

When asked about the support they had received, parents in X said: (please insert local findings).

### Action needed to tackle fear and promote mental wellbeing

With one in four women experiencing mental health problems in pregnancy and the 24 months after birth, analysis of the stories women shared also highlights the need to provide more opportunities for new parents and health professionals to talk about mental health during the journey to parenthood.

Common themes highlighted by the experiences of women include:

- **The range of issues that can help contribute to mental health problems:** Severe pregnancy sickness, the physical health of babies, a history of mental health problems, feelings of isolation and a lack of empathy from professionals can all play their part.
- **People don't know where to turn for help:** Despite the increased focus on NHS support for mental health, women told us about not being given enough information about the mental health support available and what to do if they need help.
- **Women feel scared about speaking up:** Even though women know they are struggling with their mental health, factors such as fear that they will be judged as bad parents or healthcare staff attitudes can act as a barrier to seeking support.

Sharing her experience Kristy said (insert a local example if you have one): *"I fell into this feeling of failure. I've failed to breastfeed. I've failed to have a girl. I've failed to create the perfect family. I didn't recognise I was ill, I just thought I had failed, that the boys deserved a better mother, and I thought everything would be better once I was physically well. I was so ashamed to talk about how I was feeling, because we're told how lucky we are to have a baby."*

*"There needs to be more support for women who are pregnant and aren't well. I started feeling so miserable when I was pregnant because I couldn't enjoy it and no one understood. I didn't know what obstetric cholestasis was until I got it and if I'd been able to reach out and get some support, it might have made it easier."*

### Other national findings

When asked about the support they had received:

- A third of women (33%) who had a diagnosed mental health condition said they were not given any advice about maternity and mental health at any point.

- Nearly half (47%) of all women described getting support for their mental health as ‘difficult’ or ‘very difficult’.
- More than half of all women (58%) said they did not get a care plan that considered their maternity and mental health needs, while 36% reported not feeling involved in decisions about their care.
- A third of all women (36%) rated the quality of mental health support given by health professionals (e.g. GPs, midwives and health visitors) as poor or very poor.

Commenting on the findings **[Insert name of CEO]**, Chief Executive of Healthwatch x said: **(insert local comment)**

**Imelda Redmond CBE, National Director of Healthwatch England said:**

*“It’s good to see that the NHS is investing in better mental health support for new mothers. While our research does highlight the positive impact that the right support can have, it also shows how much more needs to be done to make sure that all women get the right help, at the right time.*

*“People meet with a whole host of professionals before and after having a baby, and space must be made for them to talk about how they’re feeling. Parents must feel empowered to speak up and understand where to go for support so that they can manage any mental health problems they face, form strong bonds with baby and help lay the foundations for a healthy, happy life for all involved.”*

**ENDS**

Media enquiries: **(insert local contact details)**

**Notes to editors**

**About us**

Healthwatch x is the county’s independent health and social care champion. It exists to ensure that people are at the heart of care. Teams of staff and volunteers listen to what people like about local health and social care services, and what could be improved. These views are then shared with the decision-making organisations, so together a real difference can be made. More information: **[Insert Healthwatch web address]**

Healthwatch England is the independent champion for people who use health social care services. We exist to ensure that people are at the heart of care.

<https://www.healthwatch.co.uk>

### 3. Tweets

We have drafted some tweets to help you promote the key findings from the report and encourage more people to have their say.

- *Are #NewParents getting the right support for their mental health? Read @HealthwatchE latest report 'Mental health and the journey to parenthood' to find out more about people's experiences, and the changes that services can make to provide better care: <https://www.healthwatch.co.uk/mental-health-and-journey-parenthood> #MentalHealth*
- *Thousands of women and their partners told #Healthwatch about their experiences of mental health problems during the journey to parenthood. Find out what they said: <https://www.healthwatch.co.uk/mental-health-and-journey-parenthood>*

- Did you know around 1 in 4 women experience mental health problems in pregnancy and after giving birth? New report from #Healthwatch looks at the stories behind the numbers, and the changes the #NHS can make to better support #NewParents in managing their #MentalHealth <https://www.healthwatch.co.uk/mental-health-and-journey-parenthood>
- If you support #NewParents, make the space for conversations about their #MentalHealth to encourage them to get the help they need, when they need it. Read @HealthwatchE latest report: <https://www.healthwatch.co.uk/mental-health-and-journey-parenthood>
- New report from #Healthwatch highlights people's experiences of #MentalHealth problems before, during and after #pregnancy, and call on services to give people more opportunities to talk about how their mental wellbeing. Find out more <https://www.healthwatch.co.uk/mental-health-and-journey-parenthood>
- Three key issues people shared about their experience of #MentalHealth during the journey to parenthood. Find out more in the new report from #Healthwatch <https://www.healthwatch.co.uk/mental-health-and-journey-parenthood>
- #MentalHealth and the journey to parenthood - Take a look to see what people have told #Healthwatch about their experiences. <https://www.healthwatch.co.uk/mental-health-and-journey-parenthood>
- Do you have an experience about #MentalHealth and the journey to becoming a #NewParent that you would like to share? Talk to Healthwatch [\[Insert your contact us link\]](#)
- After such a difficult #pregnancy, Kristy expected to feel better once the baby was born. But with pressure to breastfeed and to create 'the perfect family' Kristy found herself struggling with her #mental health and not knowing where to turn. <https://www.healthwatch.co.uk/blog/2019-09-09/mental-health-and-journey-parenthood-kristys-story>
- Rachel's story helps us understand how crucial it is for parents to get the support they need, when they need it. Trusting health professionals to listen to how you're feeling can make all the difference. Read Rachel's story: <https://www.healthwatch.co.uk/blog/2019-09-09/mental-health-and-journey-parenthood-rachel%E2%80%99s-story>

#### 4. Newsletter blurb

Healthwatch England's new report, which explores the experiences of new mums, shows that some women are not receiving the mental health support they should expect.

The report also highlights that triggers like severe sickness in pregnancy, fear of speaking up, and a lack of information about where to turn for help, can all contribute to mental ill-health.

Healthwatch is therefore calling on health professionals to make more space for new parents to talk about their mental health and to check on the wellbeing of women during and after pregnancy. Find out more <https://www.healthwatch.co.uk/mental-health-and-journey-parenthood>

## Contact details

For more information please get in touch with the Healthwatch England communications team by emailing [hub@healthwatch.co.uk](mailto:hub@healthwatch.co.uk)