



Department
of Health &
Social Care

From Maria Caulfield MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for
Mental Health and Women's Health Strategy

39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU

PO-1501380

Iain Stewart MP

By email to: iain.stewart.mp@parliament.uk

12 April 2024

Dear Iain,

Thank you for your correspondence of 15 March on behalf of a number of your constituents about maternity services.

I am grateful to you for raising your constituents' concerns. The findings in the Sands Listening Project report are deeply worrying; it is unacceptable that some women from ethnic minorities do not feel listened to and heard by healthcare professionals, and feel there is a lack of personalised and joined-up care that is contributing to poor outcomes.

I am committed to tackling disparities in maternal and neonatal outcomes. I established the Maternity Disparities Taskforce to address this by improving access to effective maternity and pre-conception care for women from ethnic minorities and those living in the most deprived areas. The taskforce brings together experts from across the health system, Government departments and the voluntary sector to explore and consider evidence-based interventions, and last met on 31 January.

In March 2023, NHS England published its *Three year delivery plan for maternity and neonatal services*, which sets out how it will make maternity and neonatal care safer, more personalised, and more equitable for women, babies and families. A key objective in the delivery plan is to improve equity for mothers and babies, and NHS England's ambition is to reduce inequalities for all in access, experience and outcomes. The plan underlines that NHS trusts are responsible for ensuring their services meet the needs of their local population and for implementing local plans to reduce inequalities.

NHS England has also published *Equity and equality: Guidance for local maternity systems*, supported by a £6.8million investment, which focuses on actions to reduce disparities for women and babies from ethnic minorities and those living in the most deprived areas. Maternity and neonatal systems have begun to publish equity and equality action plans to tackle local disparities in outcomes and experiences of maternity care. We will measure progress against our equity aims for mothers and babies using the metrics described in the guidance.

On 22 February, the Government launched the Baby Loss Certificate service, fulfilling our commitment in the *Women's Health Strategy*. The certificate is an important acknowledgement of a life lost, and we hope it will provide some comfort and support by validating the loss.

This service is a non-statutory, voluntary scheme to enable those who have experienced any pre-24-week pregnancy loss to record and receive a certificate to provide recognition of a baby loss if they wish to do so. It is not a compulsory certificate, to ensure that it remains the choice of all parents to manage the difficult time of a loss however they see fit. The certificate is an official but not legal document.

Either parent is entitled to a Certificate of Baby Loss if they have experienced any loss under 24 weeks gestation since 1 September 2018, are at least 16 years of age, and were living in England at the time of the loss.

We recognise that some people will wish to obtain a certificate for a baby loss that has happened in the past, which is why we are opening it up to pregnancy losses since 1 September 2018. We will extend this to earlier losses as soon as we can.

I hope this reply is helpful.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Maria', with a stylized flourish above the name.

MARIA CAULFIELD MP