

£3 million more to reduce brain injuries at birth

- Patient Safety Minister announces £3 million for second phase of programme to improve maternity care and reduce brain injuries at birth, bringing total investment to over £5 million so far.
- Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) in collaboration with the Royal College of Midwives (RCM) and THIS Institute will lead second phase to roll out tools and training across the NHS
- Programme will help achieve ambition to halve the rate of brain injury during or soon after birth by 2025.

NHS maternity staff will benefit from a further £3 million to improve the safety of the women and babies they care for, the Patient Safety Minister has announced today.

The funding will support the RCOG, RCM and THIS Institute to deliver the second phase of a programme to reduce brain injuries at birth, which can have a devastating impact on babies and their families.

The first phase, announced in July 2021 included nearly £2 million to develop tools and training to monitor and respond to a baby's wellbeing during labour, and manage complications with babies' positioning during caesarean sections.

As part of the first phase, over 500 healthcare professionals and over 140 women and birth partners were consulted. Nearly all healthcare professionals surveyed agreed there should be a national approach to monitoring babies during labour, adopted by all NHS Trusts. Women and their birth partners called for better information, clear communication and involvement in decision-making.

Under today's announcement, the RCOG, in partnership with the Royal College of Midwives and The Healthcare Improvement Studies Institute at the University of Cambridge (THIS Institute), will develop a national programme to roll out tools and training products. It will also seek to address workplace culture factors, such as ensuring midwives and obstetricians are working together to deliver safe care. For example:

- the development and testing of national tools to monitor and identify any deterioration in the baby's health during childbirth;
- training for midwives and doctors focusing on teamwork, cooperation and positive working relationships, alongside technical skills, is being developed and pilot tested;
- a strategy to improve national databases to help identify what enables excellent care, bringing together CQC reports and published data on national brain injury rates; and
- a childbirth safety culture toolkit to be developed and piloted which

will include a new approach to ensure the whole system learns from good practice and mistakes.

Patient Safety Minister Maria Caulfield said:

I want every mother and baby to get the best possible care and start to life and am committed to supporting our dedicated NHS staff to make positive changes, backed by over £5 million of investment.

The second phase of this vital programme will help us improve maternity care and prevent mothers and babies from suffering the trauma of a brain injury during birth.

I thank the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists for leading the work to roll out tools and training to support maternity teams to provide excellent care.

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

We are delighted that funding has been awarded to our collaboration to deliver phase two of the Avoiding Brain Injury in Childbirth (ABC) programme. By drawing on expertise from across the health sector, and listening to the experiences of women and their families, we are developing tools to support maternity units in providing the best possible care to pregnant women and their babies, and establish clear processes for effective fetal monitoring.

Any event of avoidable brain injury is tragic, for the newborn, for the family, and for the midwives and obstetricians involved. All maternity staff want to ensure that both mother and baby have the best possible outcomes. The development of these approaches to monitor babies is key to supporting maternity staff to safely deliver babies. We are grateful to all the women and healthcare professionals who have been involved with the design of this national programme. This collaborative approach has provided us with a robust base on which to build as the programme enters the second stage.

Gill Walton, Chief Executive of the Royal College of Midwives, said:

While rare, brain injury to a baby is devastating for the mother and her family, and even more so when those injuries could have been avoided. We must do all we can to prevent this happening and this latest funding is a boost to that end.

The call from women, midwives and doctors is clear. They want and need support, tools, training, and systems to stop these tragedies happening. This welcome injection of money and the work it will fund will take us further towards reducing brain injury around birth, and the RCM along with our partners in this initiative will continue to work to hard to make this happen. There is more work to be done but this is another positive step in the right direction.

Professor Mary Dixon-Woods, Director of The Healthcare Improvement Studies Institute, said:

The outstanding feature of the Avoiding Brain Injury in Childbirth (ABC) programme is that it's co-designed with maternity staff and those using maternity services. By combining clinical expertise, lived experiences, and the best possible scientific evidence in this area, ABC will support better identification of when babies are deteriorating and the right escalation and action when babies need it. ABC will also address the challenges of impacted fetal head at caesarean section – a problem that needs to be addressed through high quality training and support.

This is a wonderful chance for maternity staff and those using maternity services to get involved at thiscovery.org/abc in co-designing education, training and a cultural toolkit.

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

The NHS is committed to improving safety for women and babies in maternity services, and this second phase of the Avoiding Brain injuries in Childbirth programme is the next step in making the NHS the best place in the world to give birth.

These new tools – to spot warning signs at an earlier stage – will help keep families and their babies safe from life-changing brain injuries and achieve our goal to halve brain injuries during birth by 2025. In addition, the government previously provided almost £450,000 to the RCOG to develop a new workforce planning tool to improve how maternity units calculate their medical staffing requirements, to better support families and babies.

Due to be freely available to NHS Trusts across the country next year, the tool will calculate the number of obstetricians at all grades required locally and nationally to provide a safe, personalised maternity service within the context of the wider workforce.

The programme will help achieve the government's ambition to make the NHS the best place in the world to give birth and halve the rate of brain injury during or soon after birth by 2025. NHS England is investing £95 million,

announced earlier this year, to deliver 1,200 midwives and 100 consultant obstetricians.