

[Increasing the number of new mothers in Scotland who breastfeed](#)

5 August 2017

Scottish Labour has today unveiled proposals to include breastfeeding equipment in Scotland's new baby box.



Breastfeeding rates are lower in more deprived areas and among younger mothers. Across Scotland, almost half of babies born in 2015/16 were being breastfed at their health visitor first visit, at around ten days of age. The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health this week said social stigma is a major barrier to breastfeeding, and more must be done to support women to continue breastfeeding beyond the first few weeks.

Inequalities spokesperson Monica Lennon has now written to SNP ministers to call for a pilot scheme to try and increase the number of new mothers in Scotland who breastfeed.

She has suggested the baby box could also include additional items, such as a breast pump, nipple shields and cream and a higher quantity of nursing pads, and other products that women may need to support them to breastfeed.

Consideration should also be given to assisting women to have access to nursing bras and supporting them to achieve a healthy diet.



Labour's proposal is part of the party's summer campaign, For The Many, which this week is focused on tackling inequality. You can read more about the campaign by clicking on the image below:



The full text of Monica Lennon's letter is as follows:

To Mark McDonald MSP and Aileen Campbell MSP

Minister for Early Years and Childcare/Minister for Public Health and Sport

Dear Mark and Aileen,

I am writing, ahead of World Breastfeeding Week which begins on the 1 August, to raise some ideas about how we can better support new mums in Scotland to breastfeed.

As you know, I have highlighted this issue several times in the Scottish Parliament and through parliamentary questions. I still believe that there is more that can be done to support and encourage breastfeeding in Scotland. Whilst welcome progress has been made over the last decade, rates of breastfeeding in Scotland at the 6 – 8 week review remain relatively low. The World Health Organisation recommends that babies should be exclusively breastfed for the first six months of their life, but, as you will know, only 28.2 per cent of babies in Scotland are still being exclusively breastfed at 6 – 8 weeks, according to ISD statistics. There is also wide variation across health boards, as well as depending on the age of the mother and areas of deprivation – with younger mothers and those from more deprived areas the least likely to breastfeed their children.

Breastfeeding may be natural, but it is not always easy. This is why I am writing to ask the Scottish Government to go further to help change the culture and conversation around breastfeeding so that individual women have the right support that is tailored for them. The evidence shows that breastfeeding has a positive impact on long-term health outcomes. It therefore makes sense that the Scottish Government should be doing all it can to promote awareness of these benefits, whilst also providing practical support to assist women in their choices.

The baby box, due to be provided to every new mum in Scotland from August 2017, presents a unique opportunity to improve breastfeeding support. This would be consistent with the stated intention of the baby box – to provide every child in Scotland with the best possible start in life.

This is why it has been my preference that aids to support breastfeeding are included in the baby box – such as nipple cream, nursing pads and breast pumps. In addition to signposting women to information about the benefits of breastfeeding, this would be an important way of changing the culture and conversation around breastfeeding in Scotland and could encourage more women to take it up. I know from our previous correspondence that nursing pads will be included in the baby box, which is very welcome.

I remain concerned, however, that women experiencing poverty or low-incomes and other economic, social or health barriers, are not getting enough targeted support.

Take Lanarkshire as an example. At the 6 – 8 week review in Lanarkshire in 2015/16 only 17.6 per cent of babies were being exclusively breastfed and just 24.2 per cent were receiving a mixture of breastmilk and formula. This is the second lowest rate in Scotland, second only to NHS Ayrshire and Arran which had respective rates of 16.8 per cent (exclusive) and 24.1 per cent

(mixture of breast and formula milk). These are some excellent projects being led by both NHS Lanarkshire and volunteers engaged in peer support but clearly more must be done.

So, I am proposing that the Scottish Government run a pilot scheme of including direct aids to support breastfeeding in the universal baby box. This could include additional items, such as a quality breast pump, feeding bags, nipple shields and a higher quantity of nursing pads, creams and other products that women may need. Consideration should also be given to assisting women with access to nursing bras and supporting them to achieve a healthy diet. Inclusion of breastfeeding aids in the baby box would be a very practical resource, in addition to existing advisory services.

I would love the baby box to have a greater focus on breastfeeding nationally and I am pleased that the Scottish Government will be keeping the scheme under review. It is in this spirit that I hope that you will consider implementing a targeted pilot scheme in Lanarkshire to assess the impact on breastfeeding rates over a set period of time.

I very much hope that you take this proposal on board and I would welcome the opportunity to have a meeting to discuss this matter further.

I look forward to hearing from you. Given the high level of public interest in these issues, I will also be making a copy of this letter publicly available.

Yours sincerely,

Monica Lennon

MSP for Central Scotland and Scottish Labour inequalities spokesperson