



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive

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Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor.  
Dail Eireann,  
Dublin 2.

30<sup>th</sup> May 2022

**PQ Number: 25177/22**

**PQ Question: To ask the Minister for Health the estimated full-year cost to deliver Ireland's first in-patient mental health mother and baby unit without delay - Jennifer Murnane O'Connor**

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Dear Deputy Murnane O'Connor,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question, which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response. I have examined the matter and the following outlines the position.

Since the launch of the National Specialist Perinatal Mental Health Programme (SPMHS) Model of Care launched in November 2017 is based on the maternity networks recommended in the National Maternity Strategy and aligned to hospital groups, developed in a 6 hub and 13 spoke format with all 19 maternity services included. Staffing for specialist perinatal mental health services increased from 4.0WTE (2017) to approximately 74.0WTE nationally (2022). Specialist Perinatal Mental Health Services (SPMHS) are led by a Consultant Perinatal Psychiatrist who has specific perinatal mental health training to support women usually with moderate to severe mental health problems who require this service.

There are up to 10 staff multidisciplinary staff in 6 SPMHS Hub Sites as well as perinatal mental health midwives in all 13 spoke sites. The 6 hub sites each have approximately 10.0WTE members in the Multidisciplinary team consisting of a Consultant Perinatal psychiatrist, Senior Registrar, Senior Psychologist, Senior OT, Clinical Nurse Specialists x2, PMH Midwife x2, Administrator and Senior Mental Health Social Worker.

**Funding:**

- Working with DOH, the HSE National Clinical Programmes Mental Health and Community Operations Mental Health have provided funding for the SPMHS hub teams over a number of years to a total of €3.6m (MH Community Operations) a further €1.2m (NWIHP) for Perinatal Mental Health Midwives in both hub and spoke sites. These are both recurrent funding as they relate to staff salaries.
- A successful proposal submitted by the Programme to the Women's Health Taskforce in 2021 aligned with its key priorities and areas for attention and resulted in a further investment of €377k

in 2021. This allowed for a further 4 perinatal mental health midwives and a 0.4WTE Consultant Perinatal Psychiatrist for Galway University Hospital.

The specialist teams and perinatal mental health midwives work jointly to ensure that all women attending the maternity service will have information on positive mental health. Since June 2020 the 12 PMH leaflets developed by the experts in the PMH service are available to order free of charge to the public and frontline healthcare services such as GPs, PHNs and maternity units/hospitals, these are available to order from [www.healthpromotion.ie](http://www.healthpromotion.ie).

Whilst the focus of the Model of Care (MOC) was on the specialist component of a perinatal mental health strategy, it is hoped and expected that this will act as the catalyst for all relevant service areas in the HSE to come together to implement a comprehensive mental health strategy. For this reason the MOC also included a section on the clinical pathway for a complete perinatal mental health response.

### **Phase II of the Specialist Perinatal Mental Health Service:**

The National Model of Care was developed in 2016 and launched in 2017 and based on the very sparse amount of data available on the number of women who may have mental health problems in pregnancy and the first postpartum year. While the implementation of the Model of Care has been successful in the recruitment of staff as funding became available there are a number of areas that will need additional investment and support which includes a national Mother and Baby Unit.

- Each of the 6 hub sites in GUH, UMHL, CUMH, Rotunda, Coombe and National Maternity Hospital have challenges with accommodation for their Specialist Perinatal Mental Health Teams, and in particular the HSE Hub Sites, that is, UMHL, CUMH and Galway University Hospital where it is stopping the service from being able to see new postnatal women as they have no clinic space to see the women.
- A need has developed for additional Consultant Perinatal Psychiatrists in some hub sites in particular to support their spoke perinatal mental health midwives
- No specific data system to collect specific PMH information and measure outcomes at patient level.
- No national Mother and Baby Unit to support women who have a severe mental health problem requiring admission and who currently are admitted to general adult psychiatric wards without their babies.

Three of the main areas to be addressed in 2022-2023 include appropriate accommodation for Hub site teams, in particular in the three HSE hub sites, that is, UMHL, CUMH and GUH. The continued development of the Ireland's first Mother and Baby Unit. The development of a bespoke data system to collect data at patient level from all sites. All of this will require additional funding and commitment of other key stakeholders such as HSE Estates, the OoCIO and Mental Health Operations.

Currently there are no Mother and Baby Units in Ireland. This means that any woman developing a severe mental illness within a year of having a baby is invariably separated from her baby, if she requires admission for inpatient care and treatment. Women eligible for admission to an MBU are those in the later stages of pregnancy (last trimester) or up to one year post- partum meeting the following clinical criteria:

- Postpartum Psychosis
- Bipolar Affective Disorder
- Schizo-affective Disorder and other psychosis
- Severe Depressive Illness

- Other serious/complex conditions

Given the overwhelming clinical and economical evidence against separating mothers and babies during the postnatal period, the National Model of Care recommends that one mother and baby unit be developed in Dublin in the Ireland East Hospital Group at St. Vincent's University Hospital campus. This would serve as a national tertiary referral unit. As the MBU will provide for mothers with the most serious forms of mental illness, it must be sited within a mental health facility. It should be part of but separate from an acute adult inpatient unit. This will ensure there is mental health expertise available at all times, including the on-call period. There is also back-up immediately available to respond to the needs of any women becoming acutely disturbed as part of her mental illness. Such expertise and back up would not be available in an alternative setting such as a maternity hospital.

At the moment women with these conditions who need admission are admitted to adult mental health units and are therefore separated from their babies. Where in the pre-covid times inpatient units made every effort to accommodate daily visits with their baby, in covid times this is not now possible. Women sometimes need several weeks inpatient care to recover and not having their baby with them can be a reason to rush recovery.

There will be a significant capital cost involved in building Irelands first Mother and Baby Unit as well as a WTE staffing cost of approximately €1.5m (based on 2021 payscales).

The MBU is part of HSE CHO6 Department of Psychiatry located on the campus of St. Vincent's Hospital. This reflects its primary purpose of treating mothers with severe mental illness whilst not separating them from their babies.

To date CHO6 Mental Health Services had convened a group comprised of HSE Estates, CHO6 Mental Health, the Specialist Perinatal Mental Health Services and representatives from St. Vincent's Hospital.

A joint business case was developed and agreed within the group. It was then to go to the Executive Management Team of St. Vincent's Hospital for review. The current Adult Mental Health Unit on the grounds of St. Vincent's Health Campus may need to be repurposed and a new building built at a different location on site if it's to accommodate an Adult Mental Health Team, Eating Disorder Inpatient Unit and a Mother and Baby Unit.

More information on what an MBU is can be seen here:

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/publications/mentalhealth/what-is-a-mother-and-baby-unit-mbu.pdf>

For more information on the Specialist Perinatal Mental Health Service please see the following link [here](#).

I trust this information is of assistance to you. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any further queries.

Yours sincerely,



**Dr Amir Niazi**  
**National Clinical Advisor & Group Lead for Mental Health**  
**Clinical Design and Innovation**  
**Health Service Executive**

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