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Oifig an Stiúrthóir Náisiúnta Cúnta
Rochtain agus Comhtháthú: Seirbhísí
Meabhairshláinte FSS

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Deputy Sorcha Clarke.
Dail Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.

10th July 2025

PQ Number: 33951/25

PQ Question: To ask the Minister for Health the status of the rollout of the specialist perinatal mental health service and the establishment of an inpatient mother and baby unit, including projected timelines and measures in place to ensure equitable access across all maternity hubs and spokes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. -Sorcha Clarke

Dear Deputy Clarke,

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.

Perinatal mental health services are specialist services for women with a mental health problem. The service is available for all pregnant women in Ireland who may have an existing or new mental health problem. This service is also available for women with more severe mental health problems who are planning a pregnancy. Although as many as 1 in 5 women in Ireland have mental health problems in pregnancy or after birth, perinatal mental health services usually look after someone who has a more serious or complex mental health problem. Not every woman with a mental health problem during pregnancy, or after their baby is born, will require access to this service. The GP and public health nurse (PHN) can also provide care and support to women experiencing mild mental health problems in pregnancy and after birth. If the mental health problem is moderate to severe, the GP can make a referral to a specialist perinatal mental health service.

The Specialist Perinatal Mental Health Services (SPMHS) Model of Care (MOC) was launched in 2017 and provided a national framework for the development of mental health for women in the perinatal period. It has been very successfully implemented with the establishment of a hub and spoke model covering the 19 maternity hospitals across the country. All the hub sites have appointed full consultant led multidisciplinary teams providing a comprehensive range of services to women with moderate to severe perinatal mental health problems. In addition, an innovative aspect of the MOC was the development of Perinatal Mental Health Midwife posts in all of the maternity hospitals who provide care to women with milder mental health problems. A [National Framework document to support PMH Midwives](#) was launched in 2021.

A Steering Group to refresh the MOC for SPMHS led by Dr. Colm Cooney, National Clinical Lead, Specialist Perinatal Mental Health Services commenced in 2024. The Group is looking at extending directly provided specialist perinatal mental health services to all the maternity hospitals nationally.



In terms of the future development of Mother and Baby Unit (MBU), a feasibility study was commissioned by HSE Dublin and South East to determine whether extension of the existing Mental Health Unit at St Vincent's University Hospital (SVUH) could accommodate a MBU in addition to other mental health beds required by the service. The outcome of this study, reported in 2025, found that Elm Mount Unit would need to be demolished and rebuilt in order to accommodate a MBU and additional inpatient beds. The provision of an alternative site for a new build Mental Health Inpatient unit within SVUH is currently under examination. The plan is that this unit will have an 8 bedded MBU.

The provision of inpatient MBU is a highly specialist area of practice. Adapting an existing inpatient facility to accommodate mothers and their babies would be extremely challenging and would be associated with substantial risks. To date, the focus has been on developing the first MBU in Ireland at SVUH as recommended in the current MOC for SPMHS. The current timelines for completing the second feasibility study of an alternative location on the SVUH site is expected to be completed by HSE Estates by end of Q4 2025.

Currently, mothers who require admission in the post-natal period continue to be admitted to an acute adult mental health unit. The HSE continues to work with all key stakeholders to ensure that the planned MBU development is completed as soon as is possible.

Further information on Specialist Perinatal Mental Health Services can be found here:

[Download the Specialist Perinatal Mental Health: Model of Care for Ireland](#) and here

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/mental-health-services/specialist-perinatal-mental-health/what-are-perinatal-mental-health-services-print-version.pdf>

Information on a Mother and Baby unit can be found here:

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

https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/docs/default-source/improving-care/ccqi/quality-networks/perinatal/pqn-standards/pqn-inpatient-standards-6th-edition.pdf?sfvrsn=784c9e16_4

I trust this information is of assistance to you.

Yours sincerely,

Tony McCusker
General Manager
Access and Integration; HSE Mental Health Services