

Questions:

Under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, I request the following information in relation to postnatal community midwifery services across Northern Ireland:

1. Copies of any regional guidance, policy, direction, circulars, memos or correspondence issued by the Department of Health to any HSC Trusts since 1 January 2020 concerning the provision of postnatal home visits and/or the centralisation of postnatal appointments into clinic settings.
2. Whether the Department of Health has approved, endorsed, or directed any change to the regional model of care for early postnatal community midwifery services since 1 January 2020, and if so, the date and nature of that change.
3. Copies of any Equality Screenings or Equality Impact Assessments (EQIA) carried out by the Department of Health relating to postnatal home visits or clinic-based postnatal appointments since 1 January 2020. If none have been carried out, please confirm this.
4. Copies of any monitoring reports, analyses, reviews or briefings held by the Department that refer to variation between Trusts in the provision of postnatal home visits and clinic-based care since 1 January 2020.
5. Copies of any correspondence between the Department of Health and any HSC Trusts since 1 January 2020 referring to postnatal home visiting, clinic attendance for postnatal care, or the centralisation of community midwifery services (limited to formal letters, memos, briefing papers or guidance rather than routine operational emails).

Responses:

1. The Department of Health in Northern Ireland has a formal link with the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) under which NICE Clinical Guidelines are reviewed locally for their legal and policy applicability here, and where found to be applicable, they are endorsed for implementation within Health and Social Care (HSC) organisations. This link has ensured that Northern Ireland has access to up-to-date, independent, professional, evidence-based guidance on the value of health care interventions.

In October 2021, the Department endorsed NICE Clinical Guideline NG194 on Postnatal care for implementation in Northern Ireland (<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/doh-sqsd-ng-194.pdf>).

A full current list of NICE guidance endorsed for application in Northern Ireland can be found on the Department's website at <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/topics/safety-and-quality-standards/national-institute-health-and-care-excellence-nice>

Note: The documents held by the Department relating to the endorsement of NG194 are exempt from disclosure under section 21(1) of the Freedom of Information Act. Section 21 exempts the disclosure of any information held if it is deemed to be reasonably accessible to the applicant by other means.

2. The only relevant change during the period is the endorsement of NICE NG194: Postnatal Care on 14 April 2022, following local review and equality screening.

It is important to note:

- The endorsement of NG194 did not mandate any change in the model of postnatal community midwifery care.
- NG194 does not direct the use of postnatal clinics, nor does it recommend the centralisation of postnatal contacts.
- NG194 provides guidance on what postnatal care should include, not where it should be delivered.

There have been no Departmental directions altering the regional postnatal community midwifery model since 1 January 2020.

The Department also published a refreshed Healthy Child, Healthy Future (HCHF) framework on the 25th September 2025, which covers the 0–19 public health pathway. While the Framework emphasises early intervention and the first 1,000 days, it does not direct any changes to postnatal community midwifery models.

A copy of the Framework is available on the Department's website at the following link: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/healthy-child-healthy-future-health>

3. The Department carried out an Equality Screening as part of its consideration of NICE NG194 during the consultation process in 2021.

The Department has not carried out any Equality Impact Assessments (EQIA) specifically relating to postnatal home visits or clinic-based postnatal appointments as far as we are aware.

4. We are not aware of the Department holding any monitoring reports, briefings or analyses that evaluate variation between Trusts in their delivery of postnatal home visits or clinic-based care during the period specified.

Data on postnatal contacts is collected and held at Trust level. No Departmental review of variation in postnatal community midwifery models has been undertaken that we are aware.

5. We are not aware of any formal correspondence (letters, memos, briefing papers or guidance) issued since the 1st January 2020 that instruct Trusts to change, reduce or centralise postnatal home visiting, or to introduce clinic-based postnatal care.

The only relevant communication is the endorsement and implementation of NICE NG194.

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