

UK maternity services are in crisis.

The health of a nation depends on the health of pregnant women, mothers and babies yet morbidity and mortality have risen in recent years. Black and Asian women and those living in more deprived areas have worse outcomes including higher maternal death, stillbirth, preterm birth and restricted fetal growth. Several enquiries have highlighted failures of care and compassion.

Midwifery is key to quality care yet UK midwives face barriers to practising the full range of their professional standards. Longstanding underfunding has resulted in shortages of midwives and unsustainable working pressures. Too many midwives are leaving the profession because they cannot give the skilled and compassionate midwifery care they know is needed. In the higher education sector, there has been a decline in midwifery applications and in experienced midwives choosing to develop the next generation working in teaching and research.

Our values inform this manifesto.

We value the safety, health, and wellbeing of mothers and babies through:

1. Universal and equitable access for women to quality midwifery care, especially women from marginalised groups and those experiencing socio-economic vulnerabilities
2. Continuity of midwifery care over fragmented care
3. Individualised, evidence-informed, respectful and holistic care that promotes maternal and newborn health and well-being
4. Midwives' well-being and their right to be supported to work to their full scope of practice to provide the care needed
5. Midwives' role in advocating for women, midwifery and maternal and newborn services in all settings
6. Care that recognises that what happens during childbirth has long term consequences that influence the life course for mother and child, and into future generations
7. Effective leadership in midwifery practice, education, research and policy
8. Midwife educators having appropriate experience, teaching and academic qualifications for the programmes they facilitate

Manifesto for Midwifery 2024 UK Network of Professors of Midwifery and Maternal and Newborn Health

Action is needed now to make substantial, sustained and fully funded improvements to UK maternity services.

We call on each of the UK governments to deliver on the following priority initiatives to strengthen midwifery and enable midwives to provide safe and high-quality care for all women and their families.

1. Develop a fit-for-purpose funding model for maternity services using a social model of health and a life course approach to support safe personalised care.
2. Ensure universal access for women to a midwife who is enabled to practise the full scope of midwifery as per NMC standards:
 - across pre-pregnancy, pregnancy, labour and birth, after birth and up to 6 weeks postpartum
 - with equitable access, according to need and regardless of citizenship/residency status, geography, and ethnicity
 - with better balance between safe physiological labour and birth and essential interventions for those who need or wish to have them.
3. Promote universal access to midwifery continuity of care for women, prioritising women from marginalised backgrounds and those experiencing socio-economic vulnerabilities.
4. Ensure informed choice and consent through respectful partnership between women and healthcare professionals.
5. Tackle inequalities and improve public health through quality midwifery care.
6. Ensure student midwives receive education and experience in the full scope of midwifery practice according to the NMC Standards - with access to appropriately trained and supportive practice and academic educators and assessors, within safe and culturally sensitive learning environments.
7. Provide a restorative salary for all midwives that reflects the value society places on their vital work in clinical practice, education or research, with improved working conditions that include support for flexible carers leave.
8. Ensure appropriate structural and funding support for midwife-led research and research careers to contribute to practice development, improvement, and innovation.
9. Include midwives with experience of practice, education, and research in all investigations of maternity services.
10. Initiate a public conversation about the future of maternity services, acknowledging areas of current good practice as well as failings, and ensuring recommendations are informed by evidence, to reach a new national consensus and plan for action to build high quality, safe and personalised maternity services across the UK.