

The Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP  
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care  
Department for Health and Social Care  
39 Victoria Street  
London  
SW1H 0EU

16 May 2022

Dear Secretary of State,

New parents experiencing mental health problems risk being overlooked, because of the rapid deterioration of universal health visiting services. This compounds the unprecedented strain COVID-19 has put on parents' mental health. Today, parents and professionals are in Westminster to present you with a petition signed by almost 22,000 people across England. Together, we urge you to improve access to perinatal mental health support, to rebuild health visiting services and to invest more in family help.

Health visitors play a vital role in identifying parents experiencing mental health problems and providing or arranging for support. But the health visiting workforce in England is at an all-time low and there are not enough health visitors to meet the level of need. Many families are not receiving the five health visiting reviews they are entitled to, or these vital checks are being delivered remotely, which makes it harder for professionals to identify perinatal mental health problems.

In 2021, one in five babies in England did not receive their 12-month health visiting review, with a total of over 106,000 babies missing out. Since 2016, there has been a 10% decrease in the proportion of babies receiving this important check.

Natalie, a mother from Nottinghamshire experienced postnatal depression which made her feel stressed, paranoid and frightened, she said: "I thought I was alone and I didn't want anyone to know that I wasn't really holding it together. The health visitors are so rushed, they haven't got time to sit and chat about everything and they don't know you, so they don't know if the behaviour you're exhibiting is normal for you, and it will probably be someone different next week. It's difficult for the mother and for the health visitor, because there just isn't enough time or consistency."

The 'Fight for a Fair Start' campaign aims to improve access to mental health support for the one in five mums and one in ten dads who experience perinatal mental health problems during pregnancy and in the first year after birth. With the right support parents can continue to develop a healthy relationship with their baby, but without this support problems can worsen and leave parents struggling with day-to-day tasks.

COVID-19 restrictions have had a serious impact on perinatal mental health. Mums have attended antenatal appointments alone, with dads and partners often shut out. New parents have been cut off from loved ones, while many have experienced illness,

bereavement, and financial strain. At a time when services supporting families were needed most, they were reduced or forced to close.

We welcome the Government's 'Best Start for Life' vision, the £100 million announced for perinatal and infant mental health, and the focus on family help in the Independent Review of Children's Social Care. However, we are deeply concerned that under-resourced health visiting services are causing a postcode lottery of access to support. It takes real courage for parents to open up about mental health, and when they do, a helping hand should be there. Together, we are fighting for a fair start for every family.

Yours sincerely,

Sir Peter Wanless  
Chief Executive  
**NSPCC**

Lynn Perry MBE  
Chief Executive  
**Barnardo's**

Melanie Armstrong  
Chief Executive  
**Action for Children**

Gwen Hines  
Chief Executive  
**Save the Children**

Anna Feuchtwang  
Chief Executive  
**National Children's Bureau**

Alison Morton  
Executive Director  
**Institute for Health Visiting**

Laura Seebohm  
Chief Executive  
**Maternal Mental Health Alliance**

Keith Reid  
Chief Executive  
**Parent-Infant Foundation**

Sharon White OBE  
Chief Executive  
**School And Public Health Nurses Association**

Sarb Bajwa  
Chief Executive  
**British Psychological Society**

Peter Grigg  
Chief Executive  
**Home-Start UK**

Alison Baum OBE  
Chief Executive  
**Best Beginnings**

Kathy Evans  
Chief Executive  
**Children England**

Cathy Ashley  
Chief Executive  
**Family Rights Group**

Beatrice Merrick  
Chief Executive  
**Early Education**

Kadra Abdinasir  
Strategic Lead  
**Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition**

Simon Kitchen  
Chief Executive  
**Bipolar UK**

Anne Fennell  
Chair  
**Mothers at Home Matter**

Nikki Wilson  
Chief Executive  
**Make Birth Better**

Zillah Bingley  
Chief Executive  
**Rainbow Trust**

Anita Grover  
Chief Executive  
**Auditory Verbal UK**

Anna -Louise van der Merwe  
Director

**Foundation Years Trust**

Clare Meynell and Helen Gray  
Joint Coordinators

**World Breastfeeding Trends Initiative UK**

Juliette Rayner  
Chief Executive

**ERIC - The Children's Bowel & Bladder Charity**

Jane Harris  
Chief Executive

**I CAN - The children's communication charity**

Tim Loughton MP for East Worthing and Shoreham

Ed Davey MP for Kingston and Surbiton

Sarah Champion MP for Rotherham

Sarah Olney MP for Richmond

Bell Ribeiro-Addy MP for Streatham

Dan Carden MP for Liverpool Walton

Munira Wilson MP for Twickenham

Daisy Cooper MP for St Albans

Andy McDonald MP for Middlesborough

Kim Johnson MP for Liverpool Riverside

Wera Hobhouse MP for Bath

Caroline Lucas MP for Brighton

Virendra Sharma MP for Ealing Southall

Tony Lloyd MP for Rochdale