



Craig Whittaker MP

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Health Visitors and Perinatal Mental Health

Thank you for contacting me about health visitors (HV) and perinatal mental health

I agree that health visitors play a very important role supporting parents and babies across the country. The Government wants people to be empowered to shape and manage their own health and care and make meaningful choices, particularly for maternity services.

To help achieve this, the Government has increased the number of midwives by over 1,800. Furthermore, by the end of the Health Visitor Programme in April 2015, it had delivered almost 4,000 more health visitors compared to May 2010, an increase of around 50 per cent, with 1,000 HV students in training. Health Education England is ensuring sustainable development of the HV workforce and there are presently over 800 HV student training places commissioned, which will offer more families the support they need in early years.

Protecting perinatal mental health is a key priority, and it is integral to both the Better Births strategy – launched in 2016 – and the Five Year Forward View for Mental Health. The HV programme funded the Institute of Health Visitors to train almost 600 perinatal mental health visitor champions to enable health visitors to identify and manage perinatal depression and other maternal mental health conditions. I am also happy to see that the Government will implement the continuity of carers, so new mothers will receive care from the same midwives throughout their pregnancy and birth, and into the postnatal period, to better guard perinatal mental health. The National Institute of Health and Care Excellence recommends a six week postnatal check to assess how a woman has experienced her transition to motherhood, which includes checks on her mental health.

In addition, the Government has invested £356 million in improving perinatal mental health in England over five years, providing support and care for at least 30,000 women by 2021; it has also invested £2.24 million in new safety equipment. I understand that £1 million has been invested in improved training for staff to help deliver healthy babies more safely. This is all part of the overall strategy to improve maternity services, and improve perinatal mental health services.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Kind regards,

Craig Whittaker MP