



Government Policy

An overview of maternity policy showing growing commitment to the improvement of maternity care

1993 - Changing Childbirth: Report of the Expert Maternity Group

The 1993 'Changing Childbirth' report confirmed that women value continuity of care, a feeling of control and choice. It found a growing demand for midwifery centred care outside of the model of hospital-based obstetrics. However, in the past 10 years both public and professional bodies have found that recommended changes have been limited in scope and implemented slowly. Many pilots were started but later closed primarily due to lack of funds, commitment and poor management.

2004 - National Service Framework

The National Service Framework is the plan for healthcare over the next 10 years.

- Flexible individualised services ... with emphasis on ... vulnerable and disadvantaged women.
- Women being supported and encouraged to have as normal a pregnancy and birth as possible
- Midwifery and obstetric care being based on providing good clinical and psychological outcomes

Standard:

Women have easy access to supportive, high quality maternity services, designed around their individual needs and those of their babies.

National Service Framework (NSF), p4

2006 - Modernising Maternity Care

This is a commissioning toolkit to develop birth centres which has been part of a steady stream of policies and guidelines supporting the development of this style of care. At the beginning of the document it identifies one of the key benefits of promoting midwifery care and the normalisation of child birth.

Improving patient safety and reducing litigation are a key priority.

Modernising Maternity Care, p3

2006 - Our health, our care, our say

This White Paper understands that women want choice, more information and a feeling of being cared for as an individual and not being treated as a medical problem on a hospital conveyor belt.

...women and their partners have also identified being treated as an individual and being provided with more information as important.

Our health, our care, our say, p96

There have been a number of local studies showing a commitment to implement national guidelines and the desire from staff and the public for the obvious service improvements. However, repeatedly changes have not been made or have been tried and failed.



The government has made a manifesto commitment to give all women choice by 2009. PCTs have the task of making this commitment a reality. The White Paper says that this will be done and the Children's National Service Framework must be fully implemented by 2014 with interim targets for maternity by 2009.

It will mean all women will be offered a choice of pain relief appropriate to the setting in which they choose to give birth. It will mean all women having continuity of care before and after birth provided by a midwife they know, and being individually supported throughout the birth. **This will be in place by 2009.**

Our health, our care, our say, p97 (text emphasis as in original source)

To achieve such a world-class maternity service, we commit to three actions. **Firstly, we need to raise the profile of maternity services in both the public and the commissioning agenda. Then we must ensure that Payment by Results supports the choices women make during pregnancy. And finally, we will work with PCTs to review the current maternity workforce and identify where more staff are needed to deliver these commitments.**

Our health, our care, our say, p97 (text emphasis as in original source)

2007 – Maternity Matters

This policy document again confirms the importance of good maternity care and the government's desire to give women choice. In the introduction Patricia Hewitt acknowledges the long term health implications of good maternity care:

Good maternal health and high quality maternity care throughout pregnancy and after birth can have a marked effect on the health and life chances of newborn babies, on the healthy development of children and their resilience to problems encountered in later life.

Maternity Matters, 2007, p2

The government's commitment to choice for all women by 2009 in their maternity care are outlined in four key areas:

1. Choice of how to access maternity care
2. Choice of type of antenatal care
3. Choice of place of birth
4. Choice of place of postnatal care

Maternal Link exists to make these objectives as straightforward for the NHS to implement as possible by providing a commissionable service to develop these choices.