

Maternal Mental Health - Everyone's Business Campaign

The Maternal Mental Health Alliance (MMHA), a coalition of over fifty UK organisations committed to improving the mental health and wellbeing of women and their children in pregnancy and the first postnatal year, has been funded by Comic Relief to run a national campaign *Maternal Mental Health - Everyone's Business*. The £250,141 grant will run from 1/10/2013 to 30/9/2016.

The three **core messages** of the campaign are:

- **Everyone's Business** – everyone in contact with women during pregnancy and the postnatal year has an opportunity (and often a responsibility) to be aware of perinatal mental illness and play their role in supporting women and their families
- **Parity between mental and physical health care** - mental health is at least as important to the long term wellbeing of mother and child as physical health, but there is an unacceptable gulf between them in availability of services
- **Cost** - failing to support women in pregnancy and the postnatal year costs lives, and it also costs money. It makes economic sense to invest in better services.

Why is the campaign needed?

- Women across the UK are not able to access high quality care and support for mental illness in the perinatal period
- Perinatal mental illness not only affects women but also could affect the relationships they have with their babies, partners and close family members
- Perinatal mental illness can also affect the development and future wellbeing of a woman's child
- Most mental illness in pregnant or postnatal women goes unrecognised, undiagnosed and untreated in the UK
- Access to specialist care and support, even for women with the most severe life-threatening mental illnesses, continues to be a lottery. This is despite longstanding comprehensive guidance from Medical Royal Colleges, NICE and the Department of Health.

The campaign aims to **end the postcode lottery** in mental health care for women during and after pregnancy and **achieve parity between mental and physical health care**. It will use language that normalises perinatal mental illness and encourages women and their partners to speak out, ask for help and access support. National policy and guidance will provide entirely consistent, unequivocal and well established support for all the campaign outcomes sought. We are in a period of dramatic change within the health commissioning structures of the NHS in England and a General Election during this period may also bring changes in personnel and priorities; it is vital therefore that the campaigning approach continues to be flexible.

In order to achieve its aims, the campaign seeks to **raise the profile of perinatal mental illness amongst key stakeholders**; knowing the problem exists is an important first step in being able to address it. The campaign will help local decision makers, commissioners, service providers and professionals to understand what perinatal mental illness is; the case for change, and things they can do to make a difference. To do this the campaign is developing a website, brand, communications and media strategy; holding annual Roundtable discussions; creating a briefing pack including examples of best practice and results from service mapping and having a presence at relevant conferences and stakeholder meetings.

By **applying sustained pressure**, national and local decision makers will be increasingly held to account for their decisions relating to perinatal mental health care. The campaign will produce maps of available services; launch a report on the economic case for action; use the media to call for action from local stakeholders, and ask MPs and parliamentary candidates to make a public commitment to support improvements in services if they are elected.

The campaign will **showcase solutions and examples of best practice** that key stakeholders can use when commissioning health and social care. Relevant data, guidance and research will be collated in one place on the campaign website, providing local decision-makers with practical resources to improve perinatal mental health care in their area.

The campaign will be coordinated by a Campaign Manager and Campaign Communications Officer, who will work closely with Professor Ian Jones, (Chair of Action on Postpartum Psychosis) and the Chair of the MMHA, Dr Alain Gregoire. The Campaign Manager will also develop close working relations with the lead organisations for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland to shape the campaign for their national contexts and ensure the campaign is rolled out across the UK. A Campaign Working Group will review progress and give guidance.

Campaign success would be seen through the following outcomes:

- An increased number of local commissioners / providers with clear pathways of care for perinatal mental health or committing to these in the future
- Increased availability of services for perinatal mental health care and more women accessing these services
- Maternal Mental Health being given the same attention in local commissioning plans as maternal physical health
- Increased inclusion of maternal mental health and perinatal mental illness in national policies
- Increased awareness amongst national stakeholders and local decision-makers about perinatal mental illness, appropriate perinatal mental health care and the importance of taking action
- Increased knowledge amongst local decision-makers as to what good care looks like and how to re-create this in their own areas

It is highly likely that continuing pressure will be needed beyond the three years to ensure progress is sustained and developed. Part of the campaign will involve seeking commitments from key stakeholders to foster ongoing action after the end of this funding period. The MMHA itself has the commitment of over fifty national organisations to ongoing work to ensure this vision is delivered.

For further information or to discuss how your organisation could support the campaign please contact Maria Bavetta, Campaign Communications Officer

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To enquire about your organisation becoming a member of the Maternal Mental Health Alliance, please contact Sheelah Seeley, MMHA Membership Secretary

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