

Use the law to back maternity plans, says human rights in childbirth charity Birthrights

Birthrights (the human rights in childbirth charity) welcomes the publication of The National Maternity Review today. Speaking in advance of the report's release, Birthrights Director Rebecca Schiller said, "the National Maternity Review report has a powerful message for all interested in improving maternity care. Birthrights agrees with the Review team's vision that safe maternity care is personalised care and welcomes the recommendation that women should be in control of their care through the introduction of personal maternity care budgets. In our August 2015 letter to the Review team we set out that safe maternity care is contingent on respectful care and that a rights-based approach offers the best means of improving maternity services in the UK. We are therefore delighted to see that innovations to support women's autonomy have been included in the plans. We echo the insistence throughout the report that genuine choice and unbiased information should be supported by healthcare professionals and service infrastructure.

It is now crucial that these ideas become a reality. We believe that the human rights legal framework and the values it promotes are vital tools in seeing this vision come to life. Many of the report's recommendations are supported by rights women should already enjoy. These rights arise from human rights law and existing policy and could provide a strong platform from which to demand that changes are made. The report's ambition that all women are offered choice of place of birth by 2020 is a reality women should already expect, based on long-standing Department of Health policy which stipulates that women should be able to choose where to give birth. It is time for action to match rhetoric."

Elizabeth Prochaska, Chair of Birthrights and human rights barrister adds, "As Birthrights set out to the Review team in our 'Right to Choice in Maternity Care' submission, legal protections on existing rights to choice could be strengthened and clarified by the simple step of amending the NHS Constitution and the 2012 Regulations so that maternity services are included in the right to choose a provider in the same way that choice is guaranteed to recipients of other health services. This would give women the confidence that they were entitled to receive choice and oblige providers and commissioners to accept their responsibilities for providing it.

Birthrights welcomes the Review's recommendation that the Department of Health establishes an insurance scheme to provide redress to parents whose babies have suffered harm during birth. Families would obtain financial support without having to prove that a professional was at fault during the birth, sparing them years of litigation and emotional trauma, and the NHS would be freed from the devastating consequences of a litigation culture which has spread fear and defensive practice.



The Review has provided a once in a lifetime opportunity to get maternity care right. We hope that the government seizes the chance."

ENDS

For further information please email press@birthrights.org.uk or call 07793084945

We can provide spokespeople.

Notes to Editors:

More information on the National Maternity Review is available from:

england.maternityreview@nhs.net www.england.nhs.uk/ourwork/futurenhs/mat-review

You can read Birthrights August 2015 letter to the National Maternity Review Team here: <http://www.birthrights.org.uk/2015/08/letter-to-the-national-maternity-review/>

Birthrights submission on the right to choice in maternity care is available here: <http://www.birthrights.org.uk/2015/12/the-right-to-choice-in-maternity-services-our-submission-to-the-national-maternity-review/>

Birthrights is the UK's only organisation dedicated to improving women's experience of pregnancy and childbirth by promoting respect for human rights. We believe that all women are entitled to respectful maternity care that protects their fundamental rights to dignity, autonomy, privacy and equality. We aspire to advance the human rights and lawful treatment of all child-bearing women.

What we do:

- Provide free, accurate and accessible legal information and advice on human rights and the law relating to childbearing women.
- Campaign on respect for women's rights in childbirth as fundamental human rights that maternity-service providers are legally obliged to respect and fulfil.
- Offer advice, assistance and training to caregivers, professional or otherwise.

Birthrights promotes women's right to receive evidence-based care that conforms to the best medical and midwifery standards. We do not hold views on clinical issues arising in maternity care.

Birthrights is a charitable incorporated organisation. Our registered charity number is 1151152. You can read more about our work on our [website](#) and read our press coverage [here](#).

