



Department
of Health &
Social Care

*From Maria Caulfield MP
Minister of State for Health*

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Caroline Nokes
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By email to: caroline.nokes.mp@parliament.uk

4th August 2022

Dear Caroline,

I am writing to you following Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, James Morris's MP appearance at the committee's oral evidence session on Black Maternal Health where he committed to provide a written response regarding the Tommy's medical device, the Maternity Disparities Taskforce and research into near misses. I will now be the ministerial lead on maternity.

I would like to start by thanking all members of the Women and Equalities Committee for your work on improving women's health and rights.

I hope the evidence that Minister Morris gave to the committee along with Matthew Jolly (NHS England National Clinical Director for Maternity and Women's Health, Consultant Obstetrician at East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust) and William Vineall (DHSC Director of NHS Quality, Safety, Investigations) underlined the department's continued commitment to reduce maternal disparities in health outcomes and improve the experience of care for Black women, babies and families.

Tommy's Medical Device

The committee asked for an update on the piloting of a new pregnancy screening tool. Tommy's have developed a pregnancy medical device in a form of an app which aims to both significantly improve the accuracy of antenatal risk assessment for personalised care planning and support clinicians in providing the right care at the right time. Shared between maternity healthcare providers and women, Tommy's device uses externally validated digital health technology to provide accurate risk assessments and point-of-care decision support.

This means clinicians no longer need to scroll through pages of digital or paper notes looking for the right information, and then apply the right recommendations from the right national clinical guidelines. Instead, the device optimises the relevant information for the assessment being undertaken and offers care recommendations, in line with best practice national clinical guidelines and tailored to each woman's individual needs.

The Tommy's device also gives women direct access to their care information. Women can create their own personal profiles, access their medical and obstetric history, and see their care pathway timelines and recommendations updated at each appointment. The device also includes an information hub which links to the latest pregnancy information and guidance published by trusted resources such as the NHS, Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, Royal College of Midwives and Tommy's.

This device will provide more consistent maternity care across the UK, meaning more women will benefit from best practice care and fewer women face a postcode lottery. The device also helps with overstretched maternity health workers to be able to dedicate their time to genuinely high-risk cases and women are empowered by having direct access to information about the care they can expect.

The Tommy's device has so far been implemented and tested in four NHS early-adopter sites: s Sheffield, Ashford & St Peters, Greenwich and Lewisham. This autumn Bolton will be joining to implement and test the device. A larger scale implementation of the Tommy's device across NHS Trusts will be rolled out over the next few years.

Maternity Disparities Taskforce

As you will be aware, I established the Maternity Disparities Taskforce in February 2022. It was important to me that the Taskforce has diversity in its membership of both experts and service users. This allows for a breadth of women's voices and experiences to be heard and represented.

Therefore, during the development and establishment of the Taskforce, officials engaged with a range of organisations from across the health system, other Government departments, academic institutions and the voluntary sector. This included NHS England, Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, MBRRACE-UK and the Health and Wellbeing Alliance Maternity Consortium. These bodies in turn then nominated individuals to represent their organisations at the Taskforce. Some of these individuals are women from ethnic minority backgrounds. The discussions with these organisations and individuals informed the development of the objectives, the membership, and terms of reference for the Taskforce.

Addressing the disparities between the different ethnic groups

The taskforce aims to tackle disparities for mothers and babies and reduce maternal and neonatal deaths by improving access to effective pre-conception and maternity care for women from ethnic minorities and those living in the most deprived areas. The taskforce will also focus on improving cross-government working to address the social determinants

of health for women and babies from ethnic minorities and those living in the most deprived areas.

It has already been acknowledged and discussed in the meetings that there is no “one size fits all” approach to eliminating disparities, and that each group has its own care needs, and faces different access constraints. This underlies the difference in outcomes and experience between the ethnic groups. The Taskforce will look to explore and consider evidence-based interventions with this key fact in mind.

The Terms of Reference for the Taskforce has now been published and can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/maternity-disparities-taskforce-terms-of-reference/maternity-disparities-taskforce-terms-of-reference>

Near misses and Maternal Morbidity Outcome Indicator

The research into near misses and the development of an English maternal morbidity outcome indicator is being led by the Policy Research Unit in Maternal and Neonatal Health and Care at the University of Oxford which is exploring morbidity risk factors that put women at an increased risk of maternal deaths. The research and English maternal morbidity outcome indicator are still under development.

I hope the above is a helpful update on the Tommy’s medical device, the Maternity Disparities Taskforce, and the research into near misses.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Maria'.

**MARIA CAULFIELD MP
MINISTER OF STATE FOR HEALTH**