



Royal College of  
Obstetricians &  
Gynaecologists

Rt Hon Harriet Harman QC MP  
Chair, Joint Committee on Human Rights  
House of Commons  
London SW1A 0AA

13 August 2020

Dear Ms Harman

**Joint Committee on Human Rights inquiry: Black people, racism and human rights**

During the Committee's oral evidence session on 20 July, at which Professor Jacqueline Dunkley-Bent OBE, the Chief Midwifery Officer (CMidO), NHS England and NHS Improvement, appeared as a witness, you rightly highlighted the shocking racial disparity in rates of maternal mortality. Black women are five times as likely to die in pregnancy than white women (38 per 100,000 compared to seven per 100,000), according to figures published by MBRRACE-UK<sup>1</sup> in December.

We welcome the action being taken by the Government, such as the four steps (the lower threshold for admission and referral for BAME women and their babies; better, more tailored communications; nutrition; and more accurate ethnicity data) that the CMidO and the National Clinical Director for Maternity and Women's Health, Matthew Jolly, set out in mid-June. We do however want to see the NHS and Government go further. The wide disparity in rates of maternal mortality demand it.


**The RCM and the RCOG supports an explicit target on racial disparity in maternal mortality. We would propose an initial target of halving the disparity within five years, with the expectation of a further target once that has been achieved, perhaps of eliminating disparity by the end of the 2020s.**

As you suggested in the session on 20 July, such targets focus minds and efforts on a problem, and this is something that must be addressed as a matter of urgency. I do hope that this is a recommendation the Committee can make to Government.

Yours sincerely

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.npeu.ox.ac.uk/assets/downloads/mbrance-uk/reports/MBRRACE-UK%20Maternal%20Report%202019%20-%20Infographic%20v1.0.pdf>



Gill Walton

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cc:  
Members of the Joint Committee on Human Rights  
Professor Jacqueline Dunkley-Bent OBE