



Maternity in Focus:

First Action Plan 2022-2025



ACT Health



Canberra Health
Services



Contents

| | |
|------------------------------------|----|
| Introduction | 3 |
| Consumers | 5 |
| Best practice maternity care | 9 |
| Clinical governance and data..... | 12 |
| Workforce | 14 |

Disclaimer

Please be aware this document outlines goals and actions to reduce stillbirth rates and provide better supports to individuals and families experiencing perinatal loss including early miscarriage, stillbirth, and neonatal loss. We acknowledge this information may trigger emotional responses among those who have experienced perinatal loss.

Introduction

In the next four years, the ACT Government will commence implementation of *Maternity in Focus: The ACT Public Maternity System Plan 2022-2032*. The actions identified for implementation over this timeframe will deliver essential reform, create the foundation to evolve the public maternity system and deliver the Government's commitment to deliver better care when and where people need it.



Whilst there is a lot of work to be undertaken to deliver on the vision of *Maternity in Focus*, work is already underway to evolve the public maternity system and deliver better care, including:

- » Exploring opportunities to expand homebirth model of care options through Calvary Public Hospital Bruce to increase access and equity.
- » Working with ACT Ambulance Service and ACT Insurance Authority to expand the current geographical boundary for the homebirth service to meet community demand.
- » Working to deliver the new Early Pregnancy Assessment Unit at Centenary Hospital for Women and Children to support women and pregnant people experiencing complications in early pregnancy to receive prompt, compassionate care.
- » Working to implement midwifery and nursing ratios with maternity services in line within the ratios project.

This action plan has been developed through the consolidation of the recommendations from the following documents:

- » Woman-centred care: Strategic directions for Australian maternity services (NMS)¹
- » Australian National Breastfeeding Strategy 2020 (NBS)²
- » National Stillbirth Action and Implementation Plan (SAIP)³
- » Evaluation of the Publicly-Funded Homebirth Trial in the Australian Capital Territory (PFHB)⁴
- » Government's Response to the Report on Inquiry into maternity services in the ACT (Inquiry)⁵
- » Safer Baby Bundle (SBB).⁶



Consumers

| Goal # | Goal | Strategic Alignment | Action # | Action / Supporting Initiative |
|--------|--|--------------------------------|----------|---|
| 1 | Empowerment: Build capacity and confidence in women, pregnant persons, and families to meet the challenges of pregnancy and parenting, to make informed decisions and to advocate for their individual needs through relationships built on mutual trust. | 1. NMS 2. Inquiry 3. NBS | 1.1 | Expand and establish enhanced childbirth and parenting education programs that incorporate salutogenic principles to increase confidence, capability, and informed decision making in pregnancy, birth, and parenting. |
| | | | 1.2 | With consumers, identify opportunities to strengthen how and when information and education is received to ensure timely informed decision making and choice. |
| | | | 1.3 | Develop contemporaneous, evidence-based pregnancy information and education content for the consumer portal as part of the ACT Digital Health Record. |
| 2 | Optimise social and health outcomes: Identify opportunities to increase optimal care and wrap-around supports for people. | 1. Inquiry 2. SAIP | 2.1 | Work collaboratively across ACT Government directorates, consumers, non-government organisations (NGOs), and academics to identify, develop, and implement early-intervention initiatives that support women and pregnant or birth persons to keep families together. |
| | | | 2.2 | Work collaboratively across ACT Government directorates to strengthen the health response to domestic and family violence, including the Health Justice Partnership and Strengthening Hospital Responses to Family Violence. |



| Goal # | Goal | Strategic Alignment | Action # | Action / Supporting Initiative |
|--------|---|----------------------|----------|--|
| 3 | Holistic collaboration: Engage with consumers and utilise consumer feedback to demonstrate respect for individual choices, experiences, and outcomes. | 1. Inquiry | 3.1 | Establish a maternity reference group with consumers, NGOs, and key stakeholders to provide oversight of reform implementation and to identify future collaboration opportunities. |
| | | | 3.2 | Identify and implement maternal satisfaction tools across all models of care to ensure that the care provided is tailored to individual needs, is accessible, inclusive, respectful, and connected between service providers. The satisfaction tools will also inform future initiatives and direction of the public maternity services. |
| | | | 3.3 | Evaluate the Canberra Maternity Options Service and work with consumers and key stakeholders to implement the recommendations to continue to evolve the service to meet consumer and workforce needs. |
| | | | 3.4 | Review implementation of maternity services at Coombs Health Hub and incorporate learnings to enhance maternity care closer to home across the Territory. |
| 4 | Enabling and empowering breastfeeding: Promote, support, and normalise breastfeeding exclusively for six months and continue breastfeeding with appropriate complementary foods. | 1. Inquiry 2. NBS | 4.1 | Review and report on breastfeeding data collection measures to inform targeted engagement and education. |
| | | | 4.2 | Increase the number of lactation consultants across Canberra Hospital and Calvary Public Hospital Bruce to provide additional support for breastfeeding. |
| | | | 4.3 | Review accessibility of lactation clinics within hospital and community settings to ensure appropriate support is available for women and birthing persons to breastfeed. |
| | | | 4.4 | Increase peer and NGO support for breastfeeding to assist individuals to make informed decisions on infant and young child feeding and support them through breastfeeding challenges. |
| | | | 4.5 | Provide opportunities for the donation of breast milk to interstate milk banks to meet community interest and to support premature babies. |



| Goal # | Goal | Strategic Alignment | Action # | Action / Supporting Initiative |
|--------|---|--------------------------------|----------|--|
| 5 | Improve access to mental health and wellbeing support: Support individuals and families psychosocial wellbeing through increased early access to services and supports. | 1. Inquiry 2. NMS | 5.1 | Deliver a residential mental health service for the mother/birth person and baby unit to support mental health care and increase parental attachment following an initial scoping study and model of care development. |
| | | | 5.2 | Review psychological screening and supports within the maternity multidisciplinary team and the availability and accessibility of mental health services |
| | | | 5.3 | Improve referral pathways, including from primary care to mental health services to increase access to early support opportunities for women, birth persons and partners. |
| | | | 5.4 | Support NGOs to provide perinatal mental health supports to the mother/birth person and father/co-parent to minimise the escalation of mental health issues and impact on long term health. |
| | | | 5.5 | Initiate a dedicated Dialectical Behavioural Therapy Program to improve psychological wellbeing for parents with borderline personality disorder. |
| 6 | Improve access to postnatal care: Provide increased access to evidence-based postnatal care and support that meets the needs of consumers. | 1. NMS 2. Inquiry 3. HBT | 6.1 | Work with consumers and key stakeholders to review current community-based postnatal care to improve health and wellbeing of the woman, birth person and baby through long term support. |



| Goal # | Goal | Strategic Alignment | Action # | Action / Supporting Initiative |
|--------|---|---------------------------------|----------|--|
| 7 | Improving birth experience: Improve the birth experience by ensuring safe and supportive interactions and trauma informed approaches. | 1. Inquiry 2. NMS 3. SAIP | 7.1 | Review and enhance trauma informed approaches in maternity services to strengthen safe and sensitive woman- and person-centred care. |
| | | | 7.2 | Provide every woman or birth person who experiences a preterm, complex, and traumatic birth the opportunity for an individualised birth debriefing in the postnatal period with health professionals involved in their care. |
| | | | 7.3 | Ensure informed consent through updated information sharing and informed consent education for the maternity workforce, including working with women or pregnant people who decline recommended care. |



Best practice maternity care

| Goal # | Goal | Strategic Alignment | Action # | Action / Supporting Initiative |
|--------|--|---------------------------------|----------|--|
| 8 | Continuity of Care: Expand midwifery-led and midwifery-coordinated continuity of care models to improve access, increase equity and improve outcomes. | 1. Inquiry 2. NMS 3. SAIP | 8.1 | Expand continuity of care, with appropriate postnatal transition, to improve access for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples, individuals experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage, and those with complex medical issues or a disability. |
| | | | 8.2 | Work with consumers, relevant NGOs, community organisations and disability support services to ensure the maternity system can evolve to meet the needs of individuals with disability. |
| | | | 8.3 | Grow a sustainable continuity of care workforce through a clinical education plan that increases opportunities for upskilling and transition to practice in this model. |
| | | | 8.4 | Implement the system-level changes required to support endorsed privately practicing midwives to provide continuity of care within our public maternity system. |
| 9 | Homebirth: Increase access and improving equity to publicly funded homebirth options. | 1. HBT 2. Inquiry | 9.1 | Finalise work with ACT Ambulance Service and ACT Insurance Authority to expand the current homebirth geographical boundary to meet community demand. |
| | | | 9.2 | Expand homebirth model of care options to Canberra's northside to increase access and equity. |
| 10 | Birthing on Country: Strengthen outcomes and satisfaction for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander women and birth parents in maternity services to align with national benchmarks. | 1. NMS 2. Inquiry 3. SAIP | 10.1 | Work with consumers and community-controlled organisations to co-design a Birthing on Country model of care to provide the best start in life to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander babies and their families. |



| Goal # | Goal | Strategic Alignment | Action # | Action / Supporting Initiative |
|--------|---|---|----------|--|
| 11 | Culturally Appropriate Care: Promote access to maternity care that is genuinely respectful, inclusive, and culturally sensitive to improve health outcomes for all women, birth parents and babies. | 1. NMS 2. Inquiry 3. NBS 4. SAIP | 11.1 | Work with consumers and community organisations to co-design culturally sensitive and appropriate maternity services to provide the best start in life for women, pregnant people and families from cultural and linguistically diverse communities. |
| | | | 11.2 | Review and provide easily accessible culturally sensitive and appropriate information and resources to increase health literacy, confidence, and informed choice. |
| 12 | Shared Care: Strengthen collaboration with General Practitioners to ensure best practice care in the antenatal period. | 1. NMS | 12.1 | Review best-practice approaches to General Practitioner Shared Care models to determine opportunities for improvement in the ACT public maternity system. |
| 13 | Specialist care: Work collaboratively to ensure women, pregnant people and babies receive appropriate specialist care and support. | 1. NMS | 13.1 | Review access to specialist care and improve collaborative approaches for optimal health and wellbeing outcomes. |
| 14 | Reduction of stillbirth rates: Reduce stillbirth rates in the ACT by 20 per cent by 2025. | 1. SAIP 2. NMS 3. SBB | 14.1 | Implement evidence-based, holistic practice in stillbirth prevention to decrease stillbirth rates in the ACT, including equity in stillbirth prevention for individuals experiencing vulnerability and high-risk groups. |



| Goal # | Goal | Strategic Alignment | Action # | Action / Supporting Initiative |
|--------|---|---------------------------------|----------|--|
| 15 | Acknowledging and supporting bereavement: Ensuring psychologically safe and supportive environments for women, birth persons and families experiencing perinatal loss. | 1. Inquiry 2. SAIP 3. SBB | 15.1 | Enhance the provision of safe, sensitive, and holistic services through perinatal loss that support women and birthing persons, and their families. |
| | | | 15.2 | Provide midwifery-led continuity of bereavement care in collaboration with expert perinatal loss care providers that provides a safe and sensitive holistic service to support women and birthing persons, and their families. |
| | | | 15.3 | Implement a clinical education plan to provide additional education, information, and tools to empower maternity professionals to support and care for women, birthing persons and families who have experienced perinatal loss. |
| | | | 15.4 | Deliver the new Early Pregnancy Assessment Unit at Centenary Hospital for Women and Children to support women and pregnant people experiencing complications in early pregnancy to receive prompt, compassionate care. |



Clinical governance and data

| Goal # | Goal | Strategic Alignment | Action # | Action / Supporting Initiative |
|--------|---|---------------------|----------|--|
| 16 | System-wide ways of working: Ensure consistency in services and workforce through clear delineation of maternity care across public maternity services. | 1. NMS | 16.1 | Establish a joint policy committee responsible for nationally consistent, evidence-based public maternity guidelines to inform care delivery through consistency of information, maternity care practices, and collaborative practice. |
| | | | 16.2 | Review and implement Territory-wide care pathways to provide clarity for all maternity care professionals to enable individual, consistent quality care to all women and pregnant and birthing persons. |
| | | | 16.3 | Develop a local hospital network to create stronger linkages across public maternity services to allow facilities to complement and support each other through service provision. |
| | | | 16.4 | Review service models for both public hospitals to clearly outline role delineation and report on workforce requirements for the safe delivery of care. |
| | | | 16.5 | Develop a monitoring and evaluation framework for the implementation of Maternity in Focus goals and actions. |
| | | | 16.6 | Establish oversight mechanisms for the implementation of Maternity in Focus goals and actions. |



| Goal # | Goal | Strategic Alignment | Action # | Action / Supporting Initiative |
|--------|--|---------------------------------|----------|---|
| 17 | Data systems: Ensure technology systems within ACT public maternity services promote seamless and safe care while reliably informing the service to continually improve maternity outcomes. | 1. Inquiry 2. NMS 3. SAIP | 17.1 | Improve timeliness of data collection and access to enable greater planning and facilitate system improvements. |
| | | | 17.2 | Create an ACT maternity data dashboard to provide information on current public maternity outcomes, satisfaction and benchmarking for accountability and informed choice on maternal care options. |
| | | | 17.3 | Enable streamlined information sharing between maternity care providers and women and pregnant people to enhance and inform choice, including through the Digital Health Record. |
| | | | 17.4 | Collect data on demand for services and models of care to inform service delivery and workforce planning. |
| 18 | Research and innovation: Lead the nation in quality research and knowledge translation to support growth in our maternity system. | 1. NMS 2. SAIP | 18.1 | Promote, undertake, and embed high quality research and innovation into everyday clinical practice to support continual growth within our maternity services. |
| 19 | Accreditation: Ensure high level quality health services through maintaining accreditation and seeking opportunities for further growth. | 1. NMS 2. SAIP | 19.1 | Maintain accreditation with National Safety and Quality Health Service Standards, RANZCOG and the Breastfeeding Friendly Hospital Initiative and consider other accreditation affiliations as relevant. |

Workforce



| Goal # | Goal | Strategic Alignment | Action # | Action / Supporting Initiative |
|--------|--|----------------------|----------|--|
| 20 | Safe work environment: Ensure that maternity services are physically and psychologically safe for the health professionals providing care. | 1. NMS 2. Inquiry | 20.1 | Promote and improve positive maternity workforce culture through increased opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration, communication forums, interprofessional learning, leadership, and professional development through documented action plans for each service. |
| | | | 20.2 | Identify and remove barriers to ensure all maternity professionals can consistently access clinical supervision or deliver clinical supervision to facilitate reflection and professional development. |
| | | | 20.3 | Continue the implementation and evaluation of priority actions in Towards A Safer Culture for Nurses and Midwives in Maternity Services. |
| 21 | Sustainable and inclusive workforce: Plan, design, and deliver a sustainable maternity workforce to ensure maternity care services are woman- and person-centred and meet future demands. | 1. Inquiry 2. NMS | 21.1 | Develop a system-wide maternity workforce plan to anticipate future demands and respond to current workforce pressures. |
| | | | 21.2 | Deliver a Territory-wide Education and Training Framework to support a tiered approach to professional development and encapsulate all aspects of training to ensure a safe, competent, and confident workforce. |
| | | | 21.3 | Commence planning for implementation of phase 2 of nurse and midwife to patient ratios. |
| | | | 21.4 | Explore new scholarship opportunities for midwives and doctors, including training for midwives in perinatal loss, perinatal mental health and to become lactation consultants. |



References

1. COAG Health Council. Woman-centred care: Strategic directions for Australian maternity services. [Internet]. Canberra (AU): Department of Health; 2019. [Cited 6 August 2021]. Available from: <https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2019/11/woman-centred-care-strategic-directions-for-australian-maternity-services.pdf>
2. COAG Health Council. Australian National Breastfeeding Strategy 2019 and beyond. [Internet]. Canberra (AU): Department of Health; 2019. [Cited 6 August 2021]. Available from: <https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2022/03/australian-national-breastfeeding-strategy-2019-and-beyond.pdf>
3. Australian Government. National Stillbirth Action and Implementation Plan. [Internet]. Canberra (AU): Department of Health; 2020. [Cited 6 August 2021]. Available from [https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/1EA9D237C5483F12CA257BF0001FA12B/\\$File/National%20Stillbirth%20Plan.pdf](https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/1EA9D237C5483F12CA257BF0001FA12B/$File/National%20Stillbirth%20Plan.pdf)
4. Scarf V, Wilson W, Homer C. 2020. Evaluation of the Publicly-Funded Homebirth trial in the Australian Capital Territory [Internet]. Melbourne (AU); Burnet Institute; 2020. [Cited 10 August 2021]. Available from: <https://www.health.act.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-06/GBCHS20%20119%20-%20Attachment%20A%20-%20Publicly%20Funded%20Homebirth%20Trial%20Final%20Evaluation%20Report.PDF>
5. ACT Government. ACT Government Response to the Standing Committee on Health Ageing and Community Services Report 10: Report on Inquiry into Maternity Services in the ACT. [Internet]. Canberra (AU); ACT Government; 2020. [Cited 6 August 2021]. Available from: https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/1614278/9th-HACS-10-Inquiry-into-Maternity-Services-in-the-ACT-tabled-13-August-2020.PDF
6. Safer Baby Bundle Handbook and Resource Guide: Working together to reduce stillbirth [Internet]. Australia: Centre of Research Excellence Stillbirth, 2019. [Cited 6 August 2021]. Available from: https://stillbirthcre.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/SBB-Handbook_Final-1.pdf

