

8. We need safe maternity services

Every child and every mother needs safe maternity services and facilities at childbirth. Damaging government policies have resulted in cuts, privatisation, staff shortages and disrespect for women and babies. Outcomes are getting worse for Black and Asian mothers. **Many women are not receiving the safe, high-quality care they deserve; there are multiple reports of unnecessary baby deaths.** We must not emulate the US which has the highest infant and maternal mortality rates among high-income countries.

WHAT ARE THE FACTS?

- **Maternity services have been let down by the Government – 38% of maternity units are judged in need of improvement (2021)**
- Staff are under huge pressure - there are 2,500 midwife vacancies – 25% are looking for a job outside the NHS, citing excessive workload and stress
- Lack of professional support contributes to low breastfeeding rates
- Mental health and postnatal care services together with Health Visitors have been savagely reduced
- Deepening social inequalities, maternal deprivation and disadvantage result in higher rates of infant death - the UK has a higher infant mortality than most OECD countries
- Early poverty damages long term health; many families cannot afford formula feeds
- **Stillbirths and neonatal deaths rose across the UK in 2021 after seven years of reduction – twice as many black babies die than white**
- **Black women are four times more likely to die from childbirth than white and this is not improving**
- In 2019–20, the NHS paid out £2.3 billion in compensation for maternity claims (40% of all payments)

WHAT MUST HAPPEN NOW?

- Maternity care must be universal, publicly provided and free for everyone at the point of need
- Abolish charging undocumented and migrant people for maternity care and address racism
- Restore and improve postnatal care, breastfeeding support and maternal mental health services
- Invest in safe levels of qualified midwives and other staff as recommended in official inquiries
- Ensure all staff receive ongoing professional education and end replacement of midwives by less qualified staff

- Develop maternity services that address inequalities in access
- Restore fair pay for staff, full bursaries for NHS students; boost retention by improving pay and abolishing student debt
- Develop a no-fault compensation system
- Hold a public enquiry into the state of maternity services with direct trade union and patient input