



ASSOCIATION FOR INFANT MENTAL HEALTH (NORTHERN IRELAND)

Dear Members,

As 2020 draws to a close (and what a year it has been!!) we wanted to write to you to update you on what AIMHNI has been doing on your behalf since March when Covid-19 changed all of our lives and our best laid plans.

Since then AIMHNI have focussed on bringing the specific needs of infants and their families in NI to the attention of our local leaders as we move through, and out of, this pandemic

In May we sought your support for this statement [AIMH NI COVID Response & Recovery Statement](#) – thank you to all who voiced your support.

We launched the statement on 08-06-20, as part of Infant Mental Health Awareness week, and subsequently brought it to the attention of the Minister of Health, Health Committee and Interim Mental Health Champion.

We have had ongoing communication with these leaders since then and more recently included the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People in our correspondence.

The following reports have been sent and responses received.

Babies in Lockdown report

babiesinlockdown.info

Ofsted Report – Increase in number of babies harmed and killed during first lockdown <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-54827702>

'Babies and the coronavirus crisis: learning from first national lockdown'
<https://www.isospartnership.com/blog/babies-and-the-coronavirus-crisis-learning-from-first-national-lockdown>

Response from the First 1001 Days Movement to the Ofsted Report <https://parentinfantfoundation.org.uk/f1001d-responds-to-ofsted-report-on-rise-in-neglect-and-abuse-of-babies-during-covid-19/>

Connecting IMH to Mental Health throughout the Lifespan

[Connecting the Brain to the Rest of the Body: Early Childhood Development and Lifelong Health Are Deeply Intertwined](#)

On 17th September, 2020 the AIMHNI committee met with Siobhan O'Neill (Interim MH Champion for NI) and some of her policy team. At this meeting we raised the concern that there is no acknowledgement of the Importance of the First 1001 days in the Draft Mental Health Action Plan for NI. These concerns were heard and noted by Siobhan. Following this meeting AIMHNI were one of a group of stakeholders asked to submit a response to the DOH Consultation on

the Mental Health Strategy. This was submitted on 17th November, 2020. A representative from AIMHNI then attended a Stakeholders event on the Mental Health Strategy and again raised the First 1001 days at this.

On 20-11-2020 the AIMHNI Committee also met with Orlaithi Flynn MLA (SF) and Robbie Butler MLA (UUP) ahead of a conference they were both chairing: *Policy Forum for Northern Ireland keynote seminar: Priorities for improving mental health provision in Northern Ireland - implementing the Mental Health Action Plan, responding to COVID-19, and developing a mental health strategy*. Again we raised the issue of IMH and the importance of the First 1001 Days when considering Mental Health and Well-being throughout the lifespan. This meeting went extremely well and both MLAs have agreed to support us in taking this agenda forward.

Following the meeting Orlaithi Flynn tweeted:
Thank u @aimhni 4 a great meeting! **The mental health + emotional development in the 1st 3 yrs of a baby's life is critical + must be factored into gov policies + strategies.** A baby's brain makes 11 million connections every second - Strong bonds + building resilience is so imp!

Robbie Butler tweeted: **Brilliant discussion with @aimhni first thing this morning on developing Infant Mental Health strategies that will help us change the MH landscape and future for our babies. Prevention and early intervention are absolutely key.**

So, although we have not been communicating with you in our usual way, we hope you can see from this that we have been working hard to make sure our infants and their families are 'kept in mind' and that their needs are included at Policy/Strategy level in NI.

On a more personal note, for all of us who are working with infants and their families, this pandemic has presented many challenges. Our families need our support more than ever and we are trying to do this in new and innovative ways within a landscape that is ever changing. None of this is easy and the pressure of adjusting in these ways on an ongoing basis should not be underestimated. So we just want to remind you all about the importance of looking after yourselves in all of this – it is not selfish to make time for yourself – in fact it is quite the opposite – if we are to care meaningfully for others we must care for ourselves first.

An empty lantern provides no light

Self-care is the fuel that allows your light to shine brightly. (Visual of a lantern?)

With best wishes,
AIMHNI Committee