



ASSOCIATION FOR INFANT MENTAL HEALTH (NORTHERN IRELAND)

PRESS RELEASE

The Association for Infant Mental Health Northern Ireland welcomes the recent announcement that NHS England is investing an additional £365 million in specialist perinatal mental health services, including four additional Mother and Baby Units so that new mothers requiring residential mental health treatment will not be separated from their infants. This helps support attachment and vital bonding, as well as ensuring unwell mothers are fully supported.

The investment promises that “by April 2019, new and expectant mums will be able to access specialist perinatal mental health community services in every part of the country”. AIMH (NI) said, although the investment proposals are positive, it is very disappointing that the same proposals and investment are not being made in Northern Ireland. There are currently fifteen mother and baby units in England, soon to increase to nineteen, and two in Scotland, however there are none in Wales or Northern Ireland. A Welsh mother can avail of a Unit in England; however a mentally unwell mother in Northern Ireland has no alternative than admission to a general psychiatric ward, resulting in separation from her baby for often weeks or months at a time.

AIMH (NI) Chairperson, Roberta Marshall, said “we welcome that there has been some investment locally to purchase equipment that will make mental health hospitals more ‘family friendly’, but this is simply not enough in 2019”.

There are approximately ninety women a year in Northern Ireland who are pregnant or have a baby under one year old who are admitted to a general psychiatric ward, requiring treatment for severe and sometimes life threatening conditions such as post-partum psychosis, debilitating depression and anxiety disorders. In emergency situations these women will be taken to the nearest available hospital with a psychiatric bed. This can often be many miles away from their home, babies and family. This places additional pressure on the whole family at what is already an extremely stressful time for them and disrupts the bonding and attachment between mother and infant in this crucial period of the infant's development.

For further information contact:

Roberta Marshall – Chairperson at
Roberta.marshall@barnardos.org.uk or

Telephone 02892607537 or 07834106142

Joy Poots – Treasurer at joypoots@surestartsb.org or
telephone 02890942525 or 07815162026

Notes

The Association of Infant Mental Health in Northern Ireland (AIMHNI) is a member body made up of individuals and organisations from the statutory, voluntary and community sector. AIMHNI was established in November 2009 with an aim to promote the mental health, wellbeing and healthy development of infants and their parents. We seek to campaign for high quality services to support infants and families in the prenatal and early years. We aspire to create a society in Northern Ireland where all families and individuals are supported by practitioners and professionals from all relevant fields so that Northern Ireland becomes the best place in the world to be born.