# UK's First Inquiry Reveals Critical Issues in NHS Maternity Care



On May 13, 2024, a report from the UK’s first inquiry into birth trauma unveiled critical issues within the NHS maternity services, disclosing a series of care failures during childbirth that have resulted in severe repercussions for both mothers and babies. These failures include stillbirths, premature births, babies born with cerebral palsy due to oxygen deprivation, and significant injuries to women due to severe tearing. The report, issued by the all-party parliamentary group (APPG) for birth trauma, also cited instances of negligent and insensitive treatment towards mothers in labor, such as mocking, shouting, and inadequate communication.

The inquiry shed light on historical problems within maternity care—a sector of NHS services known to be fraught with challenges, evidenced by three major inquiries since 2015 associated with maternity scandals at Morecambe Bay, Shrewsbury and Telford, and East Kent NHS trusts, and ongoing investigations into Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust.

The annual financial burden from settling legal claims for medical negligence in childbirth is substantial, costing the NHS in England approximately £1.1 billion. This alarming figure represents roughly one-third of the total annual expenditure for NHS maternity and neonatal services.

The APPG's 80-page report set out an ambitious 12-point plan aimed at overhauling the current maternity care framework to ensure quality and compassionate care, stating that poor care should be an exception rather than a norm. Recommendations include addressing the staffing crisis in maternity departments, particularly shortages of midwives and obstetricians, which are significant factors impeding the improvement of care services. Despite an overall growth in the NHS workforce, the number of midwives has actually decreased.

Pulling attention towards a systemic overhaul, the report suggests the implementation of a new national maternity improvement strategy, emphasizing the recruitment, training, and retention of more skilled staff to meet safe care standards. However, the achievement of these goals remains uncertain amidst ongoing staffing challenges and systemic failures within the NHS’s maternity services.