

Postpartum: a Critical Window in Women's Health A Call to Action

June 2025



Every Mother, Every Moment: Postpartum Care Saves Lives

Postpartum Call to Action

Vision

Our vision is that postpartum care becomes a global standard of comprehensive, continuous support that ensures every woman, baby, and family emerges from extended postpartum physically healthy, mentally resilient, emotionally connected, and socially supported. We envision a world where postpartum wellbeing is recognized as essential to lifelong health, family stability, and societal prosperity.

Mission

Our mission is to drive systemic review and reform of current postpartum standards, which fall critically short of meeting the full spectrum of mothers', babies', and families' needs physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. The global rise in preventable, life-altering postpartum outcomes underscores the urgent necessity of this work. We aim to ensure that postpartum care is no longer an afterthought, but a foundational pillar of maternal, child, and societal health worldwide.

About us

We are a team of European and Australian organisations and doulas active as integral clinical and non clinical birth professionals. This Call to Action is a result of a series of collective conversations during and after the **Postnatal rEvolution Summit** (2024-2025). We dedicate our expertise and time to contributing to positive birth and postpartum experiences and the empowerment of mothers.

This project is a collaboration between the **Postnatal Support Network**, the **Well Supported Mothers Collective** (Australia), the **European Doula Network** (EDN), and **Geboortenis Zutphen** (Netherlands). Expert advisors:

- Franka Cadée, midwife and President of the International Confederation of Midwives (ICM) (Denmark)
- Elizabeth Duff, previous senior policy adviser of the National Childbirth Trust (NCT, England)
- Tina Lavin, Adjunct Associate Professor, School of Population and Global Health, University of Western Australia, Perth, Australia

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- **Establish comprehensive continuity of clinical health care for postpartum women.**

Integrate support from prenatal through at least one year postpartum, addressing both physical and mental health, ensuring follow-up care, and fostering collaboration among healthcare providers.

- **Establish standards for postpartum education for all healthcare professionals.**

Emphasize culturally sensitive and trauma-informed care.

- **Recognize mental health as a priority.**

Prioritize education and resources for health practitioners and the community. Develop appropriate services and options for mothers experiencing (severe) postpartum anxiety, depression, or psychosis to receive time-appropriate support while keeping mother and baby together.

- **Launch public awareness campaigns.**

Normalize and make visible the discussions on the importance of postpartum challenges through national and local campaigns, storytelling initiatives, and workplace education. Highlight the essential nature of postpartum recovery for individual and community health and well-being. Display clear, stigma-free messages about postpartum recovery.

- **Establish local support networks.**

Accessible local community groups and resources are essential to postpartum recovery. Foster collaboration among parents and between generations. Recognize parenting as a societal responsibility.

- **Invest in incentives and support for review of maternity leave policies.**

Demonstrate that businesses benefit from nurturing new mothers. Create realistic reintegration plans, provide training for management on supportive leave practices, and promote flexible work arrangements to improve personal and professional well-being.

- **Invest in research.**

Designate funding for postpartum outcomes research. Fund and encourage research on the impacts of postpartum care, the incentives of receiving care, and the effectiveness and economic value of various support systems.

Why this Call to Action?

The postpartum period is a critical window for women's health, yet it remains a blind spot in public health discussions. Societal norms and stigma surrounding mental health contribute to this neglect, leaving women without the support they need. Isolation, lack of recognition of the critical importance of this critical period, inadequate healthcare, and political, social, and economic invisibility have placed new mothers in a precarious zone. We must change that.

We demand a transformative shift in postpartum care that prioritizes maternal health and well-being, recognizing that the first year is critical for both mothers and their children, and ensuring that every mother receives continued comprehensive postpartum support.

Psychological Aspects

"Postpartum deaths, which include deaths between 1 day and 1 year after birth, represent more than half of all maternal deaths" (Spelke & Werner, 2018). This means that a mother dies every two minutes (WHO, 2025). Shockingly, "suicide accounts for up to 26% of maternal deaths" (Cresswell et al., 2025). This period is pivotal - it encompasses both positive and negative aspects of motherhood. While it can be a time of joy, the intense emotional and physical adjustments, coupled with sociocultural pressures, significantly increase vulnerability to mental health disorders. Postpartum Depression affects up to 20% of mothers and possibly many more, as it is believed that up to half of cases remain undiagnosed (Carlson et al. 2025). Importantly, recent findings reveal that social support is a significant protective factor for postpartum depression, and the variety of support-giving providers in a woman's social network is important (Refaeili et al., 2024).

Physical Aspects

Physical health issues often persist or recur during the first 18 months postpartum, potentially leading to long-term consequences for women's health (Woolhouse 2012). The most prevalent conditions include dyspareunia/ lasting or recurrent genital pain that occurs just before, during or after sex (35%), low back pain (32%), urinary incontinence (8–31%), anal incontinence (19%), perineal pain (11%), and secondary infertility (11%) (Vogel et al. 2024). Less common conditions resulting from labor and childbirth, which can still have significant effects on women's health, include pelvic organ prolapse, thyroid dysfunction, nerve injury, and venous thromboembolism.

Why this Call to Action? (2)

Such challenges can also carry effects into later life stages for women, including impacts on menopause and overall quality of life. As emphasized in research, "these conditions are not mainstream in the global agenda or national health action plans of many countries," leading to a neglect of postpartum care (Vogel et al., 2024). Adequate postpartum care can significantly improve these outcomes by addressing physical health issues early, providing education and support for recovery, and ensuring access to necessary treatments, ultimately enhancing women's overall well-being and quality of life in the postpartum period and beyond.

Social

The effects of postpartum challenges extend beyond individual mothers; they can disrupt family dynamics, potentially leading to difficulties in relationships and family cohesion. Recent research indicates that **social support significantly improves postpartum outcomes** (see [Position Paper](#), Postnatal Support Network, 2024). Dr. Mercedes Bonet, Medical Officer with WHO's Department of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Research and the UN Special Programme, HRP, emphasizes the importance of dedicated postnatal services that deliver essential physical and mental health support (WHO, 2022).

This Call to Action aims to establish a universal standard for maternal care, advocate for policy changes, foster a cultural shift, engage all stakeholders, and develop resources to enhance postpartum support.

Click here for [Bibliography](#) & [Glossary of terms](#).

Disclaimer

We recognize that gender awareness and inclusivity are essential components of effective postpartum care, ensuring that the unique needs of all parents, regardless of gender identity or cultural background, are acknowledged and addressed in a compassionate and equitable manner. While we refer to mothers and breastfeeding throughout the document, we respect all alternative wordings and understandings.



How will it make an impact?

1. Address Neglected Health Needs

The postpartum period is often overlooked in maternal health discussions. By highlighting this critical window, the CTA brings attention to the urgent need for improved care and support for mothers during a time that significantly impacts their long-term health and well-being.

2. Reduce Maternal Mortality

With alarming statistics indicating that postpartum deaths are a significant part of overall maternal mortality, the CTA aims to implement measures that can prevent these tragedies. By advocating for better policies and practices, it seeks to reduce the number of mothers who lose their lives or face severe health challenges after childbirth.

3. Supporting Mental Health

The emotional and psychological toll of the postpartum experience can be profound. By emphasizing the importance of mental health support, the CTA aims to ensure that mothers receive the necessary resources and care to prevent and address conditions like postpartum depression and anxiety.

4. Strengthen Families and Communities

Healthy mothers contribute to healthier families and communities. Improved postpartum support not only benefits individual mothers but also strengthens family dynamics and community resilience, fostering environments where families can thrive.

5. Promote Policy Changes

The CTA advocates for policy reform and the establishment of comprehensive postpartum care standards. This can ensure that all mothers, regardless of their backgrounds, receive equitable support and resources, thereby addressing systemic inequalities in maternal health care.

6. Raise Awareness

By disseminating data, research, and personal testimonies, the CTA raises awareness about the challenges mothers face postpartum. This increased visibility can help combat societal stigma and change public perception, leading to broader support for maternal health initiatives.

Ultimately, the CTA is designed to catalyze a movement toward a healthier, more supportive environment for postpartum women, ensuring that their needs are met with urgency and compassion. By fostering collaboration among stakeholders, from policymakers to health care providers to communities, the CTA has the potential to transform the landscape of maternal health for the better.

How to Use this Call to Action

For Policy Makers:

1. Review the Evidence: Familiarize yourself with the research and data presented in this Call to Action to understand the importance of postpartum care.
2. Advocate for Policy Changes: Use the findings to support initiatives aimed at improving maternal health policies, including funding for comprehensive postpartum care programs.
3. Engage Stakeholders: Connect with healthcare professionals, community organizations, and advocacy groups to discuss the implementation of supportive measures outlined in the Call to Action.
4. Develop Training Programs: Create training initiatives for healthcare providers focusing on the unique challenges faced by postpartum women.
5. Monitor Outcomes: Establish metrics to evaluate the effectiveness of new policies and programs addressing postpartum health.

For Practitioners:

1. Integrate Best Practices: Utilize the guidelines in this Call to Action to enhance your clinical practice by incorporating comprehensive, continuous postpartum care into your services.
2. Educate Patients: Inform new mothers about the emotional and physical changes they may experience and offer resources for additional support.
3. Build a Support Network: Facilitate connections between clients and community resources, including support groups and mental health services.
4. Listen and Respond: Actively engage with mothers to understand their needs and tailor your support accordingly.
5. Advocate for Resources: Work within your organization to allocate resources for postpartum care and advocate for ongoing professional development in this area.

For Parents:

1. Educate Yourself: Review the information provided in this document to better understand the postpartum period and the challenges you may face.
2. Seek Support: Don't hesitate to reach out to family, friends, community, and professionals. Build a support network to help you during the onset of the postpartum period.
3. Communicate Openly: Share your feelings, concerns, and experiences with your partner, family members, other new mothers, or health professionals.
4. Utilize Available Resources: Access online platforms, tools, and community programs designed to provide postpartum support.
5. Participate in Advocacy: Engage in discussions about maternal health and postpartum care within your community to help raise awareness and promote change.

Postpartum Call to Action

Endorsements



WELL SUPPORTED
MOTHERS COLLECTIVE



Education, collaboration, advocacy &
innovation in Mothercare



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Photograph from the Postnatal rEvolution Summit, Amsterdam, 2025

By using this document, you can take tangible steps
to improve postpartum care and support for mothers,
families, and communities.

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