



Press release – Friday 10 July 2020

The Psychological Society of Ireland calls for a move away from profession centric maternity services

- **Midwife-led initiatives including Cavan MLU must be protected**
- **Clearer guidelines needed on how Perinatal Mental Health Services will be reinforced**

The Psychological Society of Ireland's Special Interest Group in Perinatal and Infant Mental Health (SIGPIMH) has called for the National Maternity Strategy to be supported to the fullest extent and stressed that it is imperative that initiatives like the midwife-led unit in Cavan and the Perinatal Mental Health Teams are protected.

The National Maternity Strategy, developed in 2016, brought with it a hope that Ireland would begin to offer a service based on best practice, incorporating recognition of the importance of women's choice in their pathway of perinatal care. A core tenant in the Strategy is the normalisation of pregnancy and birth, as well as an overt move away from a profession centric model. The provision of Midwifery-led care when appropriate, as well as the development of the Perinatal Mental Health Services, have been some of the most promising initiatives. The SIGPIMH is very supportive of the Programme for Government with respect to Perinatal Mental Health Services; however, clearer guidelines on how services will be reinforced would be welcome.

The last number of years has seen the loss of ring-fenced funding set aside to implement the Strategy. Furthermore, recent developments include the potential loss of the Midwife-led Unit in Cavan, have indicated a worrying lack of commitment to the National Maternity Strategy at local and national level. A recent HIQA report (February 2020) noted that only limited progress has been made in the implementation of the plan since 2016.

Dr Eithne Ní Longphuirt (Senior Clinical Psychologist) of the Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI) said: *"The historical and unfortunately sometimes contemporary deficits in the care of women in the perinatal period have been well documented in the Irish public sphere. These deficits not only impact the health of women but often have long-standing implications for the emotional well-being of families. Children's development is often the silent casualty in less optimal care for women. The*

well-being of mothers and their partners is essential in supporting an optimal environment for infants' development.

“We are also aware there is a cohort of women and families for whom nuanced and well-informed services are required in the Irish context. Women of colour, women with religious and cultural beliefs that are not western-centric, same-sex families and those who are gender non-conforming will continue to use Irish maternity services. They require a model of care which at its core reflects principals of collaboration, consent, respect and communication.”

Dr Ní Longphuirt continued: *“Unfortunately, however, a risk-orientated model of care can often lead to the prioritisation of Consultant-led care over that of a more holistic model which acknowledges the predominant wellness of mothers and infants, and which views pregnancy and birth as normal physiological events. The move towards a normalisation of pregnancy and birth has significant implications for women’s perception of pregnancy, including their sense of self-efficacy during the perinatal period.*

“We would argue that an evidence-based service informed by international best practice would indicate the provision of both a medical and a holistic/social model of care. This provision of choice is essential to the psychosocial well-being of both women and their families”, concluded Dr Ní Longphuirt.

ENDS.

For further information, or to arrange an interview with Dr Eithne Ní Longphuirt, please contact:

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Note to Editor

- The Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI), with circa 3,100 members, is the learned and professional body for Psychology in the Republic of Ireland
- The PSI Perinatal and Infant Mental Health Special Interest Group (SIGPIMH) was officially launched in June 2015 as a response to the lack of perinatal and infant mental health psychology services within Ireland, when compared to international colleagues
- The PSI SIGPIMH aims to promote clinical practice, education and research regarding the health and development of parents and infants from conception and pregnancy through to five years postpartum, within both the discipline of psychology in addition to interdisciplinary cooperation with other medical and allied health professions
- The HIQA report referred to can be accessed via <https://www.hiqa.ie/sites/default/files/2020-02/Maternity-Overview-Report.pdf>