

Did you know that more than **600,000** babies are born in the UK each year?

For more information about this manifesto, or about the work of the National Childbirth Trust, please contact Susan Solanki, Parliamentary Officer on [manifesto@nct.org.uk](mailto:manifesto@nct.org.uk) or on 020 8752 2332

## The NCT: putting pregnancy & parenthood first



Did you know that the NHS spends around **£1 billion** a year on maternity services?

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*The NCT's manifesto for the new Westminster Parliament outlines seven recommendations to improve maternity services for women and families in your constituency.*

*We need your support and commitment to make these changes happen.*

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*The National Childbirth Trust (NCT) is a charity working to improve the experience of pregnancy, birth and the transition to parenthood for all parents and parents-to-be in the UK.*

*We want every parent to have access to the maternity care, information and support they need to have a positive start to life as a parent and feel confident in their new role.*



The National Childbirth Trust



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## Supporting Parents

The NCT wants all pregnant women and their partners to feel prepared and supported in the transition to parenthood. Women who join a group, drop-in or class during pregnancy have ready-made contacts and support to help reduce the risks of feeling lonely, isolated and depressed after having a baby. Supportive groups can be particularly important for new parents from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, helping them to develop confidence as parents. The NCT wants all parents to be able to access peer support groups within their community. We welcome the introduction of Children Centres, which will provide a full range of accessible, community based maternity services.

**The NCT calls for all new and expectant parents to have the opportunity to meet other local families with babies through drop-in groups, antenatal and postnatal classes.**



## Involving Parents

The NCT wants all maternity services to be tailored to local parents' needs and priorities. We welcome commitments requiring commissioners and providers of maternity services to involve parents in planning and monitoring. It is crucial that parents' voices are heard so that the NHS can respond to their needs. Maternity Services Liaison Committees (MSLCs) involving NHS managers, service providers and parents can play a key role in ensuring that services are responsive to local requirements. Investment is needed to provide further opportunities for MSLCs to share good practice and to function effectively.

**The NCT calls for the Government to honour commitments in the Children's National Service Framework to involve users in the planning, review and delivery of services.**

## Normal Birth

The NCT wants all pregnant women to have a positive experience of birth and the transition to parenthood. Women who have experienced a straightforward birth have the best opportunity to start motherhood feeling fit and well and able to cope with the challenges of being a parent. The environment in which a woman labours and gives birth can affect the type of birth she will experience. Access to midwife-led units and the opportunity to give birth at home

help to increase normal birth, reducing unnecessary medical interventions and significantly contributing to public health. However, the full range of maternity choices is only available to a minority of women in the UK. We welcome commitments within the new Children's National Service Frameworks in England and Wales to support normal childbirth 'wherever possible'. Currently, statistics reveal that more than half of births in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland involve induction, epidural, or other anaesthetic, instrumental delivery or caesarean section.

**The NCT calls on the NHS to increase access to home birth and birth in a midwife-led unit, and to improve birth environments as part of a strategy to increase choice, ensure woman-centred services and increase normal births.**

## Baby Feeding

The NCT wants breastfeeding to be a normal part of everyday life and for women to feel comfortable, confident and supported to breastfeed. Breastfeeding is one of the simplest and most effective ways of improving children's health and tackling health inequalities. Research suggests that on average, children who are formula-fed as babies have higher blood pressure, a greater risk of developing obesity and childhood diabetes. Babies in poorer families are less likely to be breastfed than babies in better off families. Most mothers want to breastfeed, but 9 out of 10 women who stop in the first six weeks would have liked to continue for longer.

**The NCT is calling for a Breastfeeding Action Plan to coordinate:**

- **Improved training for health professionals**
- **Implementation of Baby Friendly Standards in all NHS facilities caring for babies**
- **Investment in peer support groups and breastfeeding counsellors specifically to support women from disadvantaged communities**
- **The statutory provision of breastfeeding breaks at work as in other European countries**
- **Full implementation of the International Code including a complete ban on advertising of formula and follow-on milks**
- **Legislation, as in Scotland, to ensure that women are entitled to breastfeed wherever they are with their babies.**

## Staffing

The NCT wants all women to have safe, supportive and accessible maternity care. This can only be provided if midwife and consultant obstetrician numbers increase. The Royal College of Midwives' annual staffing survey (2004) suggests an extra 10,000 midwives are needed to address staff shortages, tackle long-term vacancies and to relieve the heavy workloads of those currently in post. The crisis in midwifery staffing prevents many women from having continuity of care from a small number of midwives throughout pregnancy, birth and the postnatal period and the opportunity for one to one care during labour. Women need access to the same standards of consultant obstetric care in hospital during the day and night. More consultant obstetricians must be recruited to achieve the long-term aim of 168 hours of consultant cover each week.

**The NCT calls for greater investment from Government, the NHS and commissioners in the recruitment, training and retention of midwives, consultant obstetricians and maternity care assistants. A long-term strategy to encourage the sustainable growth of midwifery and obstetric staffing needs to be developed and implemented.**

## Maternity and Paternity Leave and Pay

The NCT wants all parents to have the opportunity to make real choices around returning to paid work or staying at home to care for their children. Current levels of

maternity and paternity pay mean that many parents cannot afford to take up their full entitlement of leave and go back to work much earlier than they would like to. The NCT welcomes recent proposals to extend paid maternity leave from six to nine months by 2007, with the long-term goal of an entire year of paid leave. The NCT believes mothers should have the option of transferring leave to the father after the first six months. However, the current levels of pay mean this is an option only available to those that can afford it. The NCT wants statutory maternity pay to be paid at a 'living wage'\*. Fathers should also be provided with greater opportunities to care for their children: paternity leave should be extended from two weeks to six weeks with the first two weeks paid at 90% of average earnings; the remaining four weeks should also be paid at a 'living wage.'

Parents of premature and sick babies currently have the same level of leave as parents with a healthy baby born at full term. However, their needs are very different, and there should be greater flexibility within the amended proposals to ensure that parents with babies in special situations do not lose out on time with their baby.

**The NCT calls for maternity leave to be extended, for the flat rate of maternity and paternity pay to be increased, and an extension of leave entitlements for parents of premature and sick babies.**

\*In 2005, TELCO Citizens define a 'living wage' as an hourly rate of £6.40 per hour for a 35-hour week.

## Mental Health

The NCT wants pregnant women and new mothers who are at risk of developing serious mental health problems, to have the relevant support and access to preventative psychiatric services. The recent Confidential Enquiry into Maternal and Child Health (CEMACH) report found that psychiatric illness and suicide were the leading causes of maternal death. Women who have had a previous serious mental health problem are particularly vulnerable to have a recurrence during pregnancy or after having a baby.

**The NCT calls for investment in specialist psychiatric services so that all women with a previous history of serious psychiatric disorder have an agreed appropriate care plan. Investment in specialist mother and baby units is needed so that all women needing residential care can be offered accommodation with their baby within a reasonable distance of their home.**

