

**MP Letter briefing**

**wHAT IS THE ISSUE?**

In 2021, MBBRACE 2020 (Mothers and Babies: Reducing Risk through Audits and Confidential Enquiries across the UK) published a report which concluded that **there remains a more than four-fold difference in maternal mortality rates amongst Black** **women** compared to White women.[[1]](#footnote-1) This is not a new finding, these results have been consistent for over 20 years.

**ABOUT THE CAMPAIGN**

Five x More is a grassroots awareness campaign committed to changing the fact that Black women are five times more likely to die during pregnancy and after childbirth than White women.

The campaign was launched in 2019 and currently has over 30,000 Black women in support of it. It seeks to improve maternity mortality rates and health care outcomes for Black British women.

**What do we want?**

1. We want decision makers to acknowledge **the disparity between Black women and their white counterparts in their pregnancy and childbirth experiences with the NHS and commit to addressing this issue and closing the gap.**

The MBBRACE analysis has also highlighted concerns with neo-natal deaths and stillbirths, by drawing attention to how black babies have a 121% increased risk for stillbirth and a 50% increased risk of neonatal death. These risks have been exacerbated by issues surrounding poverty (deprived areas having a 30% increased risk neo-natal mortality) and racism within the healthcare system. [[2]](#footnote-2)

1. We want decision makers and NHS to recognise that **Black Women are often not given the right information to make informed decisions about their pregnancy and childbirth.** On this, we want them to ensure more is done to ensure Black Women can advocate for themselves in healthcare.

Knowing what procedures can best improve the birthing experience of black people starts with understanding what advice and guidance prospective mothers are given prior or during pregnancy in relation to their birthing choices, as well as questioning what safety precautions mothers take, such as filling out a patient safety concern to the Health Care Safety Branch (HCSB).

The campaign recently ran a consultation with 415 participants which found that Black women felt they were not given advice to make an informed decision about choices aside from standard vaginal birth. The other choices presented were:

* **Home Birth: 78% of Black women did not receive advice or guidance** to make an informed decision of whether they wanted this.
* **Water Birth: 70% of Black Women did not receive advice or guidance** to make an informed decision of whether they wanted this.
* **Caesarean Section: 73% of Black women were not presented this as an option/potential intervention**, and did not receive advice and guidance on this to make an informed decision.
* **Assisted Birth: 85% of Black women were not given advice or guidance** about having an assisted birth and so would not have been in the position to understand what this entails.
* The consultation also found that **94% of respondents were unaware** of the role of the Healthcare Safety Investigation Branch. They were unsure of **how to make a complaint when they had bad experiences during their pregnancies and after childbirth**.

1. We want decision makers to meaningfully engage Black women in improving their experiences of maternal health services.
2. We want decision makers to **examine the role the NHS plays in perpetuating the issues faced by Black women e.g. quality of treatment, institutional racism and ethnic coding.**

The government’s response to the petition on 22 Oct 20192 has highlighted the role of the NHS in combating these health inequalities. Namely, they have prioritised the necessity of a continuity of carer plan through the NHS Planning Guidance 2019/20. They believe that through this plan 19% of women are less likely to have a miscarriage, 24% less likely to experience pre-term birth and 16% less likely to lose their baby.

The government have also advised that they intend to provide funding for the National Institute of Health Research’s Policy Research Unit (PRU) to investigate excess risk of maternal health implications for Black and Asian women. This will include improving efficiently of ethnic coding on data systems, furthering interviews with parents, exploring the deprivation index through the Health Safety Investigation Branch (HSIB), and developing clinical quality indicators as part of the NHS Long Term Plan.

**HOW CAN YOU GET INVOLVED?**

On a local level, you can participate by writing to your MP or health councillors about your concerns with the issue.

**HOW TO FIND YOUR MP AND THEIR CONTACT INFORMATION:**

Type your postcode here: [**https://members.parliament.uk/members/Commons**](https://members.parliament.uk/members/Commons)

**HOW TO STRUCTURE YOUR LETTER?**

MPs respond better to personalised letter as opposed to template letters (imagine getting the same letter thousands of times!). They also have a duty to respond to their constituents, as their job is to represent you in Parliament and raise your issues to the Government. Below is an outline of what 4 key sections/ paragraphs that the text of your letter/email should include, outside of the standard letter bits.

**1 –Include your own address when you write to your MP so that they will know you live in their constituency.**

**2- Your name, inform them that you are one of their constituents, who you are and the reasons you are writing to them**

**3- An introduction to the issue and why this is important to you. Share your experiences wherever you feel comfortable.**

**4- A call to action. Ask them to sign the Five X More Pledge on Black Maternal Health because this might change the experience of another black woman:**

**Five X More MPs Pledge on Black Maternal Health**

To sign the pledge please email: [fivexmore@gmail.com](mailto:fivexmore@gmail.com)

*Black women are four times more likely to die during pregnancy and childbirth. We need urgent action to tackle this staggering health disparity.*

*I pledge to:*

*1.                   Speak to my local health regulators, providers, and clinical commission groups about improving outcomes locally*

*2.                   Call on the Secretary of State for Health to implement a plan to improve maternal outcomes for Black women*

*3.                   Support further debates and inquiries in Parliament on Black Maternal Health*

*4.                   Meet with Black women in my Constituency to discuss their experiences and concerns*

*5.                   Call on the Government to implement the recommendations of Human Rights Select Committee report “Black people, racism and human rights”, on Black Maternal Health*

**5 – Tell them you look forward to hearing from them.**

1. Knight M, Bunch K, Tuffnell D, Shakespeare J, Kotnis R, Kenyon S, Kurinczuk JJ (Eds.) on behalf of MBRRACE-UK. Saving Lives, Improving Mothers’ Care - Lessons learned to inform maternity care from the UK and Ireland Confidential Enquiries into Maternal Deaths and Morbidity 2016-18. Oxford: National Perinatal Epidemiology Unit, University of Oxford 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://petition.parliament.uk/archived/petitions/259256> (also see footnote 1) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)