

# Transforming maternity care: National expansion of the ABC programme to protect newborns

13 May 2025  Kelly Buckley

The Health and Social Care Secretary, the Rt Hon Wes Streeting MP has announced the nationwide rollout of the ABC Programme.

This programme, set to begin in September, is designed to enhance maternity safety and reduce brain injury in childbirth as part of the government's broader strategy under its [Plan for Change](#). It is hoped that this plan will ensure all women receive safe, personalised, and compassionate care.

## Overview of the ABC Programme

The ABC programme is designed to equip maternity staff with the necessary tools and training to better identify signs of distress in babies during labour and to respond more effectively to obstetric emergencies. Such emergencies include scenarios where the baby's head becomes lodged deep in the mother's pelvis during a caesarean birth and recognising and responding to a baby who may be deteriorating during labour.

The programme is split into two modules to address these two contributors to harm with clear clinical practice standards with supporting resources, including high quality training.

## The pilot scheme

Between 2021-2025, the programme was developed and tested by hundreds of maternity staff, including obstetricians, midwives, and anaesthetists, in collaboration with the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG), the Royal College of Midwives (RCM), and The Healthcare Improvement Studies (THIS) Institute.

The pilot scheme started in October 2024 in 12 maternity units including:

- Countess of Chester Hospital NHS Foundation Trust.
- East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust.
- Lancashire Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust.
- Liverpool Women's NHS Foundation Trust.
- Warrington and Halton Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust.
- Wirral University Teaching Hospital NHS Foundation Trust.
- Croydon Health Services NHS Trust.
- Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals NHS Trust.
- St George's University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust.
- Barnsley Hospital NHS Foundation Trust.
- Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust.
- Hull University Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust.

The success of the pilot has paved the way for the national rollout, aiming to standardise high-quality maternity care across the country.

# Expected outcomes and future plans

The ABC programme is expected to reduce the number of avoidable brain injuries during childbirth, which can lead to lifelong conditions such as cerebral palsy. It also aims to address unacceptable inequalities in maternity outcomes, ensuring that most maternity units can achieve outcomes comparable to the highest-performing 20% of trusts.

Wes Streeting emphasised the importance of the programme, stating that it will provide peace of mind to expectant mothers and give staff the right tools and training to deliver better care. Whilst there has been recent criticism in relation to the ring fencing of NHS funds for maternity care in 2025/26, the government has said it is committed to training thousands more midwives and closing the Black and Asian maternal mortality gap, with an additional £57 million allocated for Start for Life services.

## Support from maternity organisations

Leaders in the maternity field have praised the ABC programme for its collaborative and evidence-based approach. Ranee Thakar, President of RCOG, highlighted the programme's support for multidisciplinary teams to deliver safer, more personalised care. Gill Walton, RCM Chief Executive, noted the crucial role of training and teamwork in providing good, safe care. Professor Mary Dixon-Woods from THIS Institute added that the programme's design focuses on reducing unwarranted variation and improving outcomes through standardisation and comprehensive improvement resources.

## Conclusion

The ABC programme represents a transformative step towards improving maternity services in the NHS. By focusing on training, collaboration, and evidence-based practices, the programme aims to enhance the safety and quality of care for women and their babies, reducing the devastating impact of brain injuries during childbirth. As the programme rolls out nationally, it holds the promise of setting new standards in maternity care across the UK.

We welcome this announcement and any support for improvements in maternity care. Our specialist maternity team sees firsthand how vital it is for both families and maternity staff to feel supported, valued and safe.

We are committed to assisting NHS Resolution, NHS Trusts and other healthcare organisations with delivering on their strategy to improve maternity outcomes. Please do get in touch to discuss how we may be able to help your organisation.

Browne Jacobson's [Maternity Resources Hub](#) also provides resources and information about our specialist team and includes our contact details.

## Contact



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