

# Standards for maternity care

Scope

October 2024

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October 2024**

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# 1. Background

## Title

Standards for maternity care.

## Healthcare Improvement Scotland standards and indicators

Healthcare Improvement Scotland is the national health and social care improvement organisation for Scotland and part of NHSScotland. It provides the expertise and resources to co-produce health and social care standards which are developed, informed and shaped by people who commission, deliver and use services. It uses well established and robust methodology to underpin standards development.

Standards are informed by:

- people with lived experience
- formally collected person-reported outcomes
- evidence relating to effective clinical practice, feasibility and service provision.

The role of standards is to:

- reflect current national policy
- state the expected level of service required to demonstrate the delivery of safe, effective and person-centred care
- address inequalities of access and outcomes
- promote understanding, comparison and improvement of care
- support national consistency and/or local improvement.

Throughout the standards for maternity care, the terms **woman** and **women** are used to refer to people who are pregnant or have recently been pregnant, as well as people who have experienced pregnancy loss or baby loss. This includes transgender, non-binary and intersex people.

## Policy context

The Scottish Government recognises the need to improve maternity services in Scotland. This commitment is set out in a number of key Scottish Government policies, including [The best start - A five year forward plan for maternity and neonatal care in Scotland](#), [Women's health plan](#) and [Programme for Government](#). These policies outline the importance of providing the right care for every woman and baby, giving all children the best start in life and continuity of care.<sup>1-3</sup>

NHS maternity services within Scotland are provided by an integrated team of healthcare professionals.<sup>1</sup> The emphasis is on care that meets the needs of each woman and her baby, which includes her social, cultural, physical and emotional needs. Provision of safe, effective and person-centred maternity care is essential for all women and their babies. This includes timely access to

relevant information in an appropriate format and language, to enable people to make informed decisions.

There are significant variations in maternity services across Scotland.<sup>1</sup> All women who access maternity services should receive consistent, high-quality care and support, regardless of their circumstances.<sup>4</sup> There is evidence that women from ethnic minority groups, and women living in poverty or with mental health issues, experience poorer health outcomes.<sup>5,6</sup>

The standards emphasise the importance of a multidisciplinary, person-centred, coordinated and consistent approach to maternity care.<sup>7</sup> They will also contribute to improvement in outcomes and support implementation of [Value based health and care - realistic medicine](#).

## 2. The scope of the standards

### 2.1 Population covered by the standards

#### a. Population that will be covered

- all women who are pregnant and access maternity services in Scotland. This includes transgender, non-binary and intersex people
- women who access obstetric pre-conception care to improve pregnancy outcomes
- women who have experienced pregnancy loss or baby loss
- women who require postnatal care (up to six weeks postpartum)
- all babies receiving routine care, until transfer of care to the universal health visiting service (usually at ten days old)

#### b. Population that will not be covered

- women who are currently accessing fertility services and/or treatment to become pregnant
- women who access women's health services other than maternity services
- neonates with additional care needs requiring specialist care and support.

### 2.2 Setting

The standards will apply to all services that provide maternity care in Scotland, regardless of where this care is delivered.

### 2.3 Areas for standards development

#### a. Areas that will be covered

The standards will cover the following themes:

- service co-design and quality management system
- person-centred care
- ensuring equity of experiences and reducing inequalities in outcomes
- mental health and emotional wellbeing
- obstetric pre-conception care
- pregnancy loss and baby loss
- early pregnancy
- antenatal care, scheduled and unscheduled
- antenatal parental education
- labour and intrapartum care
- postnatal care

- care of the healthy neonate.

The importance of audit, internal quality assurance within services and addressing health inequalities will be woven throughout the standards.

### b. Areas that will not be covered

In line with existing Healthcare Improvement Scotland standards, these standards will not cover the following areas:

- details of treatment, therapy options or clinical pathways
- development of Healthcare Improvement Scotland quality indicators or key performance indicators
- implementation, which is for local determination
- pregnancy screening.

## 3. Related development sources: key publications

### 3.1 Key sources (cited 30 September 2024)

This work will be informed by evidence, pathways and practice. The standards will build on and align with a range of Scottish Government policies and priorities, including but not limited to:

1. Scottish Government (2017) [The Best Start - A five year forward plan for maternity and neonatal care in Scotland](#)
2. Scottish Government (2021) [Women's health plan](#)
3. Scottish Government (2024) [Programme for Government](#)
4. Scottish Government (2017) [Health and social care standards: my support, my life](#)
5. Scottish Government (2011) [A refreshed framework for maternity care in Scotland](#)
6. Healthcare Improvement Scotland (2023) [Scottish patient safety programme - Maternity and children quality improvement collaborative](#)
7. Scottish Government (2023) [Value based health and care: action plan](#)
8. Scottish Government (2017) [Health and social care standards: my support, my life](#)
9. Healthcare Improvement Scotland (2023) [SIGN 169 - Perinatal mental health conditions](#)

## 3.2 Related Healthcare Improvement Scotland standards or indicators:

- Healthcare Improvement Scotland (2024) [Draft pregnancy screening standards](#)
- Healthcare Improvement Scotland (2023) [Standards for congenital heart disease](#)

## 4. Timelines

Development of the standards for maternity care will begin in autumn 2024, with publication of the final standards scheduled for autumn 2025.

## 5. Proposed development group membership

The membership of the standards development group will reflect service provision from across NHSScotland and, where appropriate, the independent healthcare sector within Scotland. The proposed specialist representation for developing the maternity care standards will include:

- advanced nurse practitioners
- ambulance service representatives, including ScotSTAR neonatal transport
- anaesthetists
- assurance managers
- family nurses
- fetal medicine specialists
- general practitioners
- health visitors
- hospital nurses, including neonatal and outpatient
- infection control specialist
- inspectors
- maternity clinical/service manager
- mental health practitioners
- midwives, including community and prison midwives
- neonatologists
- nurse directors



- obstetricians
- paediatricians
- people with lived experience
- pharmacist
- psychologists
- Public Health Scotland representative
- quality management and improvement lead
- Scottish Perinatal Network
- sonographers
- third sector representatives.

The Healthcare Improvement Scotland standards and indicators project team will include:

- administrative officer
- programme manager
- project officer
- team lead.

## 6. What happens next

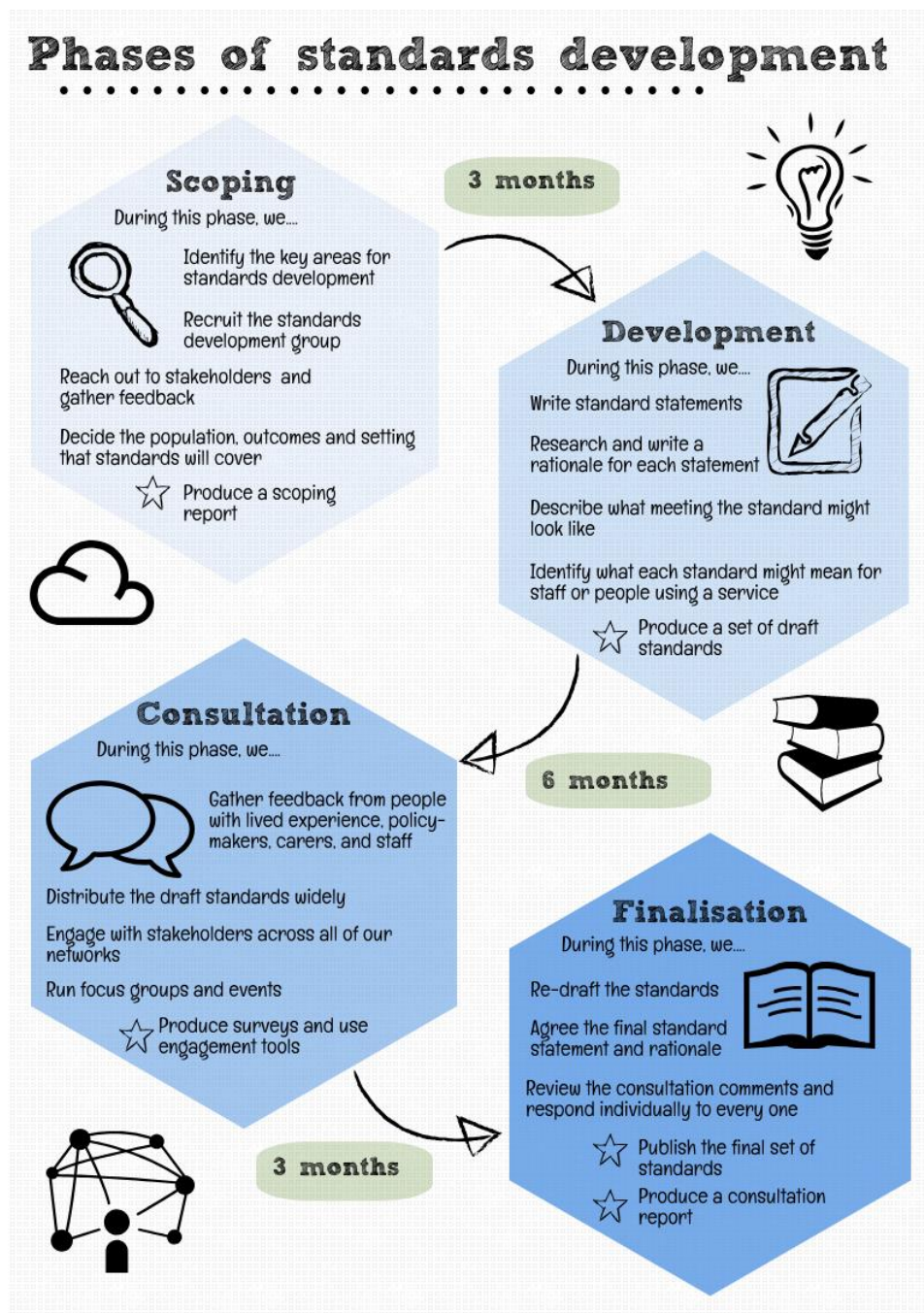
The process used by Healthcare Improvement Scotland to develop standards is outlined in Appendix 1.

The next phase of the project is development of the standards, which will begin in autumn 2024. If you would like to find out more about the process, please contact the project team at:

[his.standardsandindicators@nhs.scot](mailto:his.standardsandindicators@nhs.scot)

# Appendix 1: Standards development methodology

The standards and indicators team have an established and internationally recognised methodology in the development of standards. The phasing of all Healthcare Improvement Scotland standards development is illustrated in the figure below. For further information on our methodology see [https://www.healthcareimprovementscotland.org/our\\_work/standards\\_and\\_guidelines/standards\\_and\\_indicators.aspx](https://www.healthcareimprovementscotland.org/our_work/standards_and_guidelines/standards_and_indicators.aspx) or contact the standards team.



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