

PREPARING FOR HEALTHIER PREGNANCIES, BETTER LIVES

The best predictor of birth outcomes is the physical and mental health of a woman at the time of conception. Women who are already well-prepared and well-supported are far more likely to have healthy babies. Antenatal care truly matters, but preconception preparation matters even more. The Queen's Nursing Institute Scotland (QNIS) – with support from The National Lottery Community Fund and Cattanach – is focusing on the earliest causes of inequalities and injustices that continue to impact individuals, families and communities. Healthier Pregnancies, Better Lives is a new initiative to prevent harm at the outset rather than treating avoidable issues.

Every parent wants a safe pregnancy, a thriving baby and a fulfilling parenthood.

That's a great starting point. No one needs to 'sell' prospective parents on the desirability of these three results. The unwelcome news is that roughly one in four pregnancies in Scotland will end in a termination, miscarriage, stillbirth, significant birth defect or a child facing compromised life chances from their first breath.

Many unwelcome outcomes are preventable.

The key to success is preparing well for pregnancy far enough in advance. Many concerns and actions are best tackled before pregnancy, rather than during it. Some crucial preventative actions – from taking Vitamin B9

(folic acid) - to stopping teratogenic medications that can cause birth defects – are only powerful if they happen months before pregnancy begins. We need to consider women's health in the period before conception, whether there is an intention to become pregnant or a desire to avoid pregnancy.

You can help people get what they already want.

Preconception health, education and care is vitally important. Supporting potential mothers and fathers throughout the course of their lives will enable them to make well-informed decisions about whether to become parents, and if so, when. It will require a concerted effort to achieve healthier, happier lives for the next generation of parents and children.

We must make the effort to implement preconception health improvements. Local, regional, and national action is required.

Partner with QNIS to create Scotland's Coalition for Healthier Pregnancies, Better Lives.

Neither the wellbeing of prospective parents nor the futures of Scotland's babies should be left to chance. The individual and collective choices we make will have as much impact on these new Scots as their postcodes or their genetic codes. Only together can we succeed.

No one can do everything, but everyone can do something to create Healthier Pregnancies, Better Lives. Please explore the possibilities of becoming a partner in this emerging Scottish Coalition by contacting: lisa.lyte@qnis.org.uk