



Synopsis

Models of perinatal care for women using drugs and their infants: synopsis of The Stepping Stones Study

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Published January 2026
DOI: 10.3310/GJPR0411

Plain language summary

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Health and Social Care Delivery Research 2026; Vol. 14: No. 2
DOI: 10.3310/GJPR0411

NIHR Journals Library www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk

Plain language summary

The Stepping Stones Study used research and consulted experts to look at ways to improve services for women who use or are in treatment for using drugs in pregnancy and up to a year after giving birth. Experts included those working in the field and those using services.

The study had three parts:

1. We reviewed 111 UK guidelines for good care to improve outcomes and reduce inequalities. Documents recommended that staff in drug treatment and maternity services work more closely together. We also reviewed 197 research studies that looked at how to improve support for women who use drugs in the perinatal period and found that women appreciate services that are in one place and easy to access.
2. We carried out up to five interviews, approximately 4 months apart, with 36 women from maternity services in four sites in England and Scotland to explore experiences of support. Many women were anxious about social services' involvement. Women often felt stigmatised in hospital following the birth of their baby. Access to residential treatment services and mental health support was uneven, and support for women who had lost care of their babies was poor. Focus group interviews with staff found that they had high numbers of patients to treat, and staff turnover and training gaps contributed to the challenges to providing care.
3. We identified what changes might be needed for better care. We developed a framework to describe key requirements to deliver improved services for women and their babies. These mainly related to how organisations work together, training and support and how resources are prioritised.

Health and Social Care Delivery Research

ISSN 2755-0079 (Online)

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Health and Social Care Delivery Research (HSDR) was launched in 2013 and is indexed by Europe PMC, DOAJ, INAHTA, Ulrichsweb™ (ProQuest LLC, Ann Arbor, MI, USA), NCBI Bookshelf, Scopus and MEDLINE.

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Editorial contact: journals.library@nihr.ac.uk

This journal was previously published as *Health Services and Delivery Research* (Volumes 1–9); ISSN 2050-4349 (print), ISSN 2050-4357 (online)

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This article

The research reported in this issue of the journal was funded by the HSDR programme or one of its preceding programmes as award number NIHR130619. The contractual start date was in October 2021. The draft manuscript began editorial review in April 2025 and was accepted for publication in April 2025. The authors have been wholly responsible for all data collection, analysis and interpretation, and for writing up their work. The HSDR editors and production house have tried to ensure the accuracy of the authors' manuscript and would like to thank the reviewers for their constructive comments on the draft document. However, they do not accept liability for damages or losses arising from material published in this article.

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