



February 8, 2021

Dear Members of the Preventive Health Division:

NAMI Minnesota strongly supports HF 521 which would extend the eligibility for Medical Assistance for women for 365 days postpartum. This is an important step to ensuring the health of the woman and the baby.

Many women experience the “baby blues” after giving birth but it only lasts a few days. Some women develop more serious symptoms associated with anxiety and depression after giving birth. These symptoms can have a profound impact on the mother and lead to great sadness, difficulty sleeping, exhaustion, or disturbing thoughts. This also has an impact on the baby if the new mother cannot respond consistently and cannot care for the baby as she would like to. Some mothers feel unconnected to their babies and worry that they will not be able to love them. It is important to understand that postpartum depression and anxiety can occur before birth and up to a year after birth. It is recommended that pediatricians screen mothers for postpartum depression up to 6 months after giving birth.

New research published in 2020 from NIH asked women about symptoms of postpartum depression at different intervals. “The women’s experiences with postpartum depression fell into four main trajectories. In the most common, women had levels of symptoms that remained low over time. Almost three-quarters of the participants fell into this category. A second group, making up 8% of participants, had low levels of symptoms at four months after birth that grew worse over time. Another 13% had moderate symptoms that decreased over time. And about 5% experienced high levels of depressive symptoms that stayed higher than the other groups, even years after giving birth in some women... Women with persistently high symptoms were also more likely to be younger and have less education.” They recommended longer screening periods after birth.

Another study found that women who gave birth during the pandemic were more likely to have a traumatic birth experience and to have symptoms of depression and anxiety. “The increased stress reported by the women—who did not have COVID-19—may hinder a woman’s adjustment to motherhood, mother-infant bonding, and successful breastfeeding. The researchers theorized that the women’s heightened stress levels likely stem from hospitals drastically limiting visitors to reduce the spread of the virus, leaving patients alone during a critical life event.”

Thus, knowing that women can experience postpartum beyond 60 days and up to a year or more, and knowing the impact of COVID-19 on new mothers, it is critical to the health of the mother and the baby that she be able to access health and mental health care. NAMI Minnesota urges your support of HF 521.

Sincerely,

Sue Abderholden, MPH
Executive Director

Trajectories of Maternal Postpartum Depressive Symptoms. Putnick DL, Sundaram R, Bell EM, Ghassabian A, Goldstein RB, Robinson SL, Vafai Y, Gilman SE, Yeung E. *Pediatrics*. 2020 Nov;146(5):e20200857. doi: 10.1542/peds.2020-0857. PMID: 33109744.

Mayopoulos, G.A. et al. COVID-19 is associated with traumatic childbirth and subsequent mother-infant bonding problems external link. *Journal of Affective Disorders*. 2021.



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