



BRINGING FATHERS IN

Our strategy for 2025 - 2030

**FATHERHOOD
INSTITUTE**

Laying the foundations for a
National Paternity Service

www.fatherhoodinstitute.org

BACKGROUND

The UK's health, education and social care systems are not set up to support men's involvement as involved/nurturant fathers. Rather, from the perinatal period onwards they position mothers as the sole or lead caregiver. Fathers are relegated, at best, to a supporting role; and, at worst, to invisibility.

Maternity and health visiting services focus almost exclusively on mothers and babies – even though fathers, too, are almost all 'in the room'[1]. If perinatal services engage with fathers at all, they tend to do so only in terms of the men's role as 'mother supporters', rather than also as independent, caregiving parents in their own right[2].

Other health and education services, including GPs, early years settings and schools, also fail to 'see' or value men's fatherhood, doing little or nothing to disrupt the 'mother default' in their engagement with families[3].

Even 'harder end' services, like children's social care, whose work involves understanding, supporting – and where necessary challenging – the whole network of adults around the child, tend to treat fathers and paternal relatives as marginal[4].

The UK is thus missing important opportunities to show that it cares about fathers – and to capitalise on the benefits they can bring to families through their active involvement as caregivers.

In this paper we share our vision for what a better future could look like, and the work we plan to do over the next five years to support our leaders to specify and invest in transformative change across systems and sectors; and to prepare the professionals on the frontline to deliver a better, more father-inclusive service.

OUR VISION FOR A NATIONAL PATERNITY SERVICE



A core obstacle to more responsive tax-funded systems is our parenting leave system, which is the most gendered in the world[5] and one of the least generous to fathers[6]. Through our 6 weeks for dads campaign, we are pushing for a substantially improved statutory paternity offer[7].

Giving all fathers an individual right to substantial, affordable paternity/ parental leave in their baby's first year, would bring multiple benefits to children, mothers and wider society, as well as to fathers themselves[8].

It would also, for the first time, make unacceptable family services' failure to engage with men's roles and impacts as hands-on parents – as described above.

That's why, alongside our work to secure an improved statutory paternity offer, our aspiration is to go further. Over the next five years (2025-2030) we aim to work with colleagues across the Government, the NHS and local partners – including Family Hubs - to prepare the ground for a National Paternity Service.

What the National Paternity Service would provide

Routine, 'light touch' engagement with all fathers and father-figures – including those who don't live full-time with their children – by relevant professionals across health, education, social care and other relevant services, 'bringing them in' to services and providing them with high quality, evidence-based information and support

Health checks for all expectant and new fathers, to help them adjust to fatherhood and look after their health; and to identify any concerns and refer them to additional support as needed

High quality, nationally mandated information and optional, facilitated support for fathers' safe early involvement as confident, active and sensitive caregivers

Father-inclusive relationship support for co-parenting couples

Targeted help for fathers at higher risk for low, poor quality and/or risky paternal involvement - including 'own household' fathers, fathers who abuse substances, and fathers who have perpetrated and experienced domestic abuse

To achieve such a service will require sustained focus and leadership from many different actors – including Government Ministers, NHS infrastructural bodies, professional organisations, local agencies and individual leaders, managers and practitioners within them – and the will to make change happen.

It will also require substantial core funding, to allow us to focus on advocacy alongside delivery of training and other project-funded work. If you are a funder and would like an informal discussion about our work, please contact our Chief Exec (see 'contact us' at the end of this strategy document)



OUR STRATEGY FOR GETTING THERE

In our **Theory of Change** we set out in visual form how the Fatherhood Institute's work can help bring benefits for fathers, mothers and children.

During 2025-30 we will focus on three main strands of work, aimed at strengthening and embedding our influence in UK policy and services.

- ➔ Developing a new 'Father-Inclusion Training +' package
- ➔ Implementing 'Father-Inclusion Training +' in local authorities
- ➔ Working with Government to develop a National Paternity Service



Developing a new 'Father-Inclusion Training +' package

Designed to provide local authorities across England with opportunities to develop and progress their father-inclusive service provision

Build our marketing and fundraising capacity, to develop a more coordinated approach to identifying and pursuing sales of workforce development and intervention training, and associated services

Provide opportunities to learn about father-inclusive practice and service redesign, including free quarterly 'Think Fathers' webinars (launched in October 2024)

Develop improved promotional materials, to set out clear pathways for professional workforce development, and the design, delivery and evaluation of father-inclusive services – including existing 'offers' set out in our **Paternal Support Pathway**

Create new resources to support universal professional engagement with fathers and father-figures at key stages, linking to an enhanced range of Fatherhood Institute resources for fathers (see notes)

Develop, nurture and promote our national Fatherhood Champions network, and create an enhanced local offer including ongoing delivery, evaluation and communications support

Implementing 'Father-Inclusion Training +' in local authorities

Helping them to build their capacity through workforce development and intervention training, supported by direct-to-father resources, systems change, and optional support to evaluate and promote local father-focused work

Identify a 'hit list' of local authorities and funders to target with tailored bids for the 'training plus' offer. Where possible we will create local pilots, supporting partners to evaluate the impact of our training and interventions, and disseminate findings to Government

Work with Fatherhood Champions to develop a national best practice network

Partner with commissioning authorities to support local evaluations and systems change

Provide opportunities to amplify best practice, via case studies and a new National Father-Inclusive Practice Awards programme

Scoping, lobbying for, and working with Government and national leaders to develop a National Paternity Service

To sit alongside a reformed Statutory Paternity and Parental Leave and Pay offer

Campaign for the Government's Men's Health Strategy to incorporate a strong fatherhood strand, through our **Looking out for dad campaign** (launched in October 2024)

Seek funding to lead a Commission on Fathers and Early Childhood, working with politicians, academics, professional bodies, employers, family sector leaders, activists and parents

Work independently and with others, through parliamentary lobbying and public campaigns, to advocate for 'step changes' in policymaking, funding and systems to support the creation of a National Paternity Service

Collaborate with employers to promote father-inclusive parental leave and employment packages, to help create a more level playing field for working fathers – thus enabling them to play a greater role as active caregivers

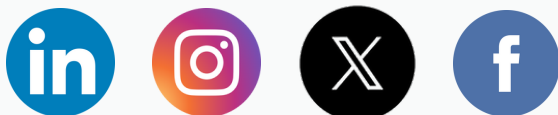
CONTACT US

To discuss our strategy, funding and partnership opportunities:
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Stay in touch

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NOTES

*Subject to funding, these may include:

- Evidence-based guide and SMS service for expectant/ new fathers
- [Looking out for dad](#) practitioner resources – including a toolkit for health professionals, guidance on linking of father-child records and a ‘health check for new dads’ template
- Father-engagement packs for early childhood education providers, schools and social care
- New [Fatherhood Factsheets](#) and videos

REFERENCES

[1] Around 90% of men accompany their partners to antenatal appointments (in many cases, their first contact with the NHS since childhood), and 95% attend their baby's birth. Source: Fatherhood Institute (2018) [Who's the bloke in the room?](#)

[2] NICE antenatal, postnatal and breastfeeding support guidelines encourage support for 'partners', but there is no requirement for father-engagement apart from, in theory, in cases where mothers have a [postnatal mental health diagnosis](#). The Fatherhood Institute/Fathers Network Scotland poll, [How was it for you?](#) (2018) found 65% of fathers reporting that maternity professionals had rarely or never discussed their roles as parents. More than half (56%) said they had rarely or never been addressed by name. Fewer than a quarter had been asked about their physical health (22%) or diet and exercise (18%). And although fathers' mental health is closely correlated with mothers', only 18% had been questioned about it. Around half (48%) had not been asked about smoking, despite the risks of passive smoking to babies, and fathers' key role in supporting pregnant mums to give up

[3] Our 2022 survey of 248 fathers for the [PIECE study](#) found half (49%) saying their child's school or nursery always or mostly contacted the mother if the child was sick, and 39% did so about home learning activities

[4] For more on men's invisibility in children's social care, see [The Myth of Invisible Men](#) (DFE, 2021)

[5] Employed mothers have an individual right to 52 weeks' maternity leave, the first six of them paid at 90% of their average earnings; eligible employed fathers get just 2 weeks

[6] The two weeks of paternity leave are paid at less than half the minimum wage, and self-employed fathers are not eligible. For an international comparison see Fatherhood Institute (2024). [Paid leave earmarked for fathers \(number of weeks at 100% salary equivalent\): international comparison](#)

[7] In January 2024, more than 14,000 UK citizens signed our petition calling for such an offer. Since then, working closely with colleagues from other key organisations, including Pregnant Then Screwed and Joseph Rowntree Foundation, we have ensured that '6 weeks for dads' is a widely understood and costed option for consideration in the Government's parental leave review (expected to start later in 2025), and we look forward to working with Parliamentary and other colleagues to make it a reality

[8] These include a reduced gender pay gap, improved child outcomes, lower couple separation rates, better maternal and paternal mental health, and an estimated £2.6 billion boost to long-term economic growth for the UK. For more details, read our [evidence to the Women & Equalities Committee Equality at work: Paternity and shared parental leave inquiry](#).

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