

Women review maternity care in NSW public hospitals

A new report by the Bureau of Health Information (BHI) shows women in NSW have rated their experiences of maternity care highly.

BHI's *Patient Perspectives: Experiences of maternity care in NSW public hospitals* report summarises survey results from around one in 20 (4,739) women who had a baby in a NSW public hospital in 2015.

The Maternity Care Survey was completed approximately three months after the birth of their baby.

BHI Chief Executive, Dr Jean-Frederic Levesque, said most women had very good experiences of maternity care, and almost eight in 10 said they would speak highly about the hospital where they had their baby.

"Women were particularly positive about the care they received during labour and birth with 95% saying it was either very good or good," Dr Levesque said.

"The birth of a baby is a time when women want to be engaged in their care. The report shows that more than two thirds of women felt involved in decisions during labour and birth and about leaving hospital, however 13% said the length of their hospital stay was too short."

The majority of women said they had confidence and trust in the healthcare professionals providing antenatal care and in the midwives or doctors taking care of them during their labour and birth.

Results were less positive for questions about consistency of information. Almost one third of the women surveyed said they received conflicting information after the birth, either about feeding their baby, or about caring for themselves and their baby.

Although 88% of women said the postnatal care they received in hospital was very good or good, this result was less positive than those for antenatal care, labour and birth or follow-up care at home.

"The report shows that improvements could be made in the experience of hospital care in the days after birth, however this is a finding we see in other jurisdictions as well," Dr Levesque said.

Other areas of strong performance:

- Almost all women said they had skin to skin contact with their baby shortly after birth; had a follow-up visit in the two weeks after going home from hospital; and were asked how they were feeling emotionally after the birth
- Nine in 10 women said midwives helped establish breastfeeding.

Other areas for improvement:

- Four in 10 women said they had their first antenatal appointment within the first 14 weeks of pregnancy, as recommended
- A sizeable proportion of women reported not being given advice about healthy weight gain (29%); the risks of alcohol consumption or exposure to tobacco smoke (13%) during pregnancy
- Following the birth, just over half of women said they were 'completely' given enough information about how to care for their baby (52%); this was lower for first-time mothers (47%)
- Approximately one in five women said they experienced a complication or problem during, or shortly after, their hospital stay; this was higher for women who had a caesarean section (28%).

The report and data from the Maternity Care Survey are available at bhi.nsw.gov.au