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# Improving Maternal Mental Health while Fostering Positive Mother-baby Attachment and Parenting Skills

Initiative Type

Model of Care

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Deliver

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## Summary

To support new mothers requiring specialised perinatal assessment and treatment, the Lavender Mother-Baby Unit was opened at Gold Coast University Hospital in March 2017. This is a statewide

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public service and the first of its kind in Queensland catering for women with severe mental illnesses (and their infants under 1 year old) requiring admission to an inpatient program. The Lavender Mother-Baby Unit has four adult beds, and treatment is provided by a multidisciplinary treatment which facilitates the improvement in maternal mental health, as well as foster positive mother-baby attachment and parenting skills.

### Key dates

Mar 2017

Mar 2018

### Implementation sites

Gold Coast University Hospital

## Key Contacts

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## Aim

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Inpatient admission aims to improve maternal mental health, facilitate the development of favourable mother-baby relationship and parenting skills, and support the daily functioning of mothers.

## **Benefits**

A variety of group and individual sessions are provided to the mother-infant dyads, such as infant massage groups, mother-infant interaction, sensory modulation and cooking skills.

## **Background**

At least 20 per cent of women have significant mental health problems, with suicide being the leading cause of maternal death during pregnancy and the first twelve months after birth. Maternal mental illnesses have been linked with a range of longer-term adverse outcomes, such as difficulties with daily functioning, decreased mother-infant bonding, and suboptimal infant development.

## **Solutions Implemented**

Establishment of a 4 bedded Mother and Baby Mental Health Inpatient Unit.

## **Evaluation and Results**

The unit has admitted mothers with a variety of mental health diagnoses including postnatal depression, postnatal psychosis and postnatal anxiety. Approximately 57 mothers have been admitted in the unit during the first twelve months of opening. Mothers stay in the unit for approximately 21 days (Min = 4 days, Max = 74 days). Referrals are received from all around Queensland and from a variety of practitioners. Majority of babies that are admitted are under 6 months old. Following discharge, mothers generally return home and are discharged to a range of services such as public mental health services, private psychiatrists, private psychologists, community child health, family support services, and general practitioners. Results on clinical outcomes measures indicate that there are significant positive effects from admission to the Lavender Mother-Baby Unit regarding mental health, mother-baby bonding and parental confidence.

## **Lessons Learnt**

The Lavender Mother-Baby Unit is the first, public psychiatric unit that admits new mothers from

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around Queensland with severe mental illness and their baby. Prior to the implementation of this service, mothers and infants were routinely separated when women with severe mental illnesses were admitted to public psychiatric units. The Lavender Mother-Baby Unit focuses on providing treatment and management to a mother's mental illness whilst also supporting the mother-baby relationship and infant mental health. The data and information indicates that the Lavender Mother-Baby Unit is beneficial in managing the mental health and well-being of new mothers with young infants. This innovative new service will continue to establish linkages with non-governmental and governmental agencies both intra-state and nationally.

## References

Austin M-P, Highet N and Expert Working Group (2017) *Mental Health Care in the Perinatal Period: Australian Clinical Practice Guideline*. Melbourne: Centre of Perinatal Excellence.

## Further Reading

[Lavender Mother Baby Unit Gold Coast Bulletin - Gold Coast new mental health unit delivers for mothers](#)

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