

Legislative
Assembly
of Ontario



Assemblée
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Bill 44

**An Act to proclaim Perinatal Mental Health Day and
to require a review of perinatal mental health in Ontario and
the preparation of a Provincial Framework and Action Plan**

Ms B. Karpoche

Private Member's Bill

1st Reading November 4, 2021

2nd Reading

3rd Reading

Royal Assent



EXPLANATORY NOTE

The Bill proclaims the first Wednesday of May in each year as Perinatal Mental Health Day.

The Bill requires the Minister of Health to conduct a comprehensive review of perinatal mental health in Ontario and prepare a Provincial Framework and Action Plan on the issue. The Bill requires the Minister to report to the Assembly periodically about the progress of the review and to table the Provincial Framework and Action Plan in the Assembly.

**An Act to proclaim Perinatal Mental Health Day and
to require a review of perinatal mental health in Ontario and
the preparation of a Provincial Framework and Action Plan**

In Ontario, many new birthing parents and new and bereaved birthing parents experience some type of perinatal mental illness, such as perinatal mood and anxiety disorder, during pregnancy and in the first 12 months following childbirth. Frequently, perinatal mental illness goes unnoticed and untreated, causing negative impacts for the mental and physical health and wellbeing of the birthing parent, child and partners.

People who give birth can experience perinatal mental illness. Birthing parents of every culture, age, income level and race can develop perinatal mood and anxiety disorders. However, marginalized populations, such as LGBTQ2S+ people, members of the Indigenous community, the Black community and other racialized communities, adolescents, those with histories of substance use, immigrants, refugees, and individuals with disabilities, may experience perinatal mental illness at higher rates.

Perinatal mental illness is impacted and compounded by the social determinants of health such as income, housing, employment, education, early childhood development, perinatal health care, community and social supports and by structural determinants such as family policy, employment policy, income support, social insurance policy and education policy.

Newcomers who are removed from traditional family and cultural support tend to experience higher levels of perinatal depression. Cultural factors have been found to have a strong influence on promoting positive perinatal mental health outcomes.

In Ontario, universal perinatal mental health screenings are not mandated and timely access to treatment is not always available. Perinatal mental illness is treatable and the negative impacts can be mitigated with specialized training of health practitioners, mandatory screening and timely access to diagnosis, treatment and support services. Up to 85 per cent of birthing parents with perinatal mental illnesses go untreated. The stigma of mental illness prevents families from seeking assistance and many birthing parents are not aware they are suffering from a mental illness. Therefore, it is important to heighten awareness of the prevalence of perinatal mental illness and the effective and well-researched prevention and treatment options available.

By proclaiming the first Wednesday of May in each year as Perinatal Mental Health Day and by requiring the Minister of Health to review the state of perinatal mental health in Ontario and implement a Provincial Framework and Action Plan, the Province of Ontario highlights the importance of perinatal mental health with the goal of enhancing the quality of care and improving the mental health outcomes.

Therefore, Her Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Ontario, enacts as follows:

Perinatal Mental Health Day

1 The first Wednesday of May in each year is proclaimed as Perinatal Mental Health Day.

Minister's review of perinatal mental health

2 (1) The Minister of Health shall, within two months after this Act comes into force, begin a comprehensive review of perinatal mental health in Ontario.

Progress reports to Assembly

(2) Within six months after this Act comes into force, and at least once every six months after that, the Minister shall report to the Assembly respecting the progress of the review during the relevant reporting period.

Provincial Framework and Action Plan

3 (1) Using the results of the review described in section 2, the Minister of Health shall prepare a Provincial Framework and Action Plan for improving perinatal mental health in Ontario with particular focus on improving health care services relating to perinatal postpartum depression.

Tabling in Assembly, publication

(2) The Minister shall table the Provincial Framework and Action Plan in the Assembly and shall publish it on a website of the Government of Ontario.

Implementation

(3) The Minister shall ensure that the Government implements the Provincial Framework and Action Plan.

One-time review

(4) The Minister shall review the Provincial Framework and Action Plan within five years after it is published and shall make any amendments the Minister determines are necessary in order to improve perinatal mental health in Ontario.

Tabling in Assembly, publication

(5) The Minister shall table the amended Provincial Framework and Action Plan in the Assembly and shall publish it on a website of the Government of Ontario.

Commencement

4 This Act comes into force on the day it receives Royal Assent.

Short title

5 The short title of this Act is the *Perinatal Mental Health Act, 2021*.