

The Community REACH project

Antenatal care is the first step in providing maternity services to pregnant women. It is recommended that antenatal care begins early in pregnancy so that women can get the full benefits from care and be supported to have a healthy pregnancy and birth. The first appointment with the maternity service for antenatal care is referred to as the 'booking appointment'. It involves a health check and information on screening tests, nutrition, and exercise. This first appointment is also important for identifying women who may need additional medical or social support in pregnancy. The 'Community REACH' project aims to support women to have their first antenatal appointment with maternity services by the 12th week of pregnancy, in line with national guidelines.

For this project, we have chosen 20 electoral wards in North and East London, and Essex, where women are more likely to delay the start of antenatal care. **In 10 of these electoral ward areas we will work in partnership with a local community organisation and local, trained community volunteers to engage with women and their families about the value and benefits of early antenatal care. The project will also raise awareness in these areas about how women can access antenatal care early in pregnancy.**

In the other 10 electoral ward areas the community project will not take place. We will then look at anonymous hospital data from local maternity services to see whether pregnant women living in the areas (wards) where the project took place begin their antenatal care earlier, and see greater benefits for both themselves and their babies, than those living in the other 10 areas. We will look at whether the community project provides good value for money. We will also interview local people who are involved with this project as volunteers, in order to explore any challenges or successes they experienced in communicating the messages about antenatal care within their communities. Finally, we will survey pregnant women to see whether or not the project influenced their decision about when to begin antenatal care.

The Community REACH project is part of a wider programme of research funded by the National Institute for Health Research that aims to improve access and experience of antenatal care for pregnant women living in socially deprived and ethnically diverse areas (the REACH Pregnancy Programme).