



# It's not a game:

the very real costs of  
having a premature  
or sick baby in Scotland

**Bliss**  
Scotland

for babies born too soon,  
too small, too sick

## Introduction

One in every seven babies is born premature or sick in Scotland each year. While some babies admitted to neonatal care go home within hours, others face stays of weeks or months. This places a huge emotional strain on their parents but it also leads to financial pressure. Parents have to suddenly cover daily travel costs, food and drink at the hospital or time away from work. These extra costs mean parents are struggling to meet essential bills and in some cases the financial pressure is even affecting parents' mental health.

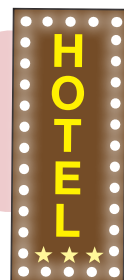
Helping parents meet these costs will not remove the anxiety that comes with having a baby in neonatal care, but it will leave parents free to focus on the one thing that matters – their baby.

## Our data

This report is based on research carried out by Bliss in 2013. 85 Scottish parents shared their experiences about the extra costs they faced while their baby was in neonatal care. We also asked all 14 units about the support they provide with 13 responding.

**£218** average extra weekly spend for families

## Staying with your baby



**11 hospitals** offer somewhere for parents to stay

**1 hospital** provides parents with free meals

**£61** is spent by parents on food and drink each week while at the hospital



**3 hospitals** offer some help with food and drink costs

**1 in 3** parents said that travel costs affected how often they could visit their baby

**100 miles+** some parents travel over 100 miles a day to be with their baby



**35 miles** is the average round trip faced by parents



**£74** is the average weekly cost to parents of travelling to the hospital

## Travelling to the hospital

Despite free parking being introduced in Scotland in 2008, one of the hospitals responding to our survey reported that they still have parking charges, including for parents visiting their baby in neonatal care



**79%**

of parents said that their family finances were worse as a result of their baby's stay in neonatal care

## The financial impact

**51%**

of parents said work commitments affected how much time they could spend with their baby



**1 in 11**

parents said the extra costs affected their ability to pay the rent or mortgage



**£2,045** average extra total costs for families

## Supporting families

**1 in 3**

parents were offered information about financial support



**58%**

of parents reported that their mental health had worsened as a result of the financial burden

**£81**

was the average weekly cost for childcare for older children



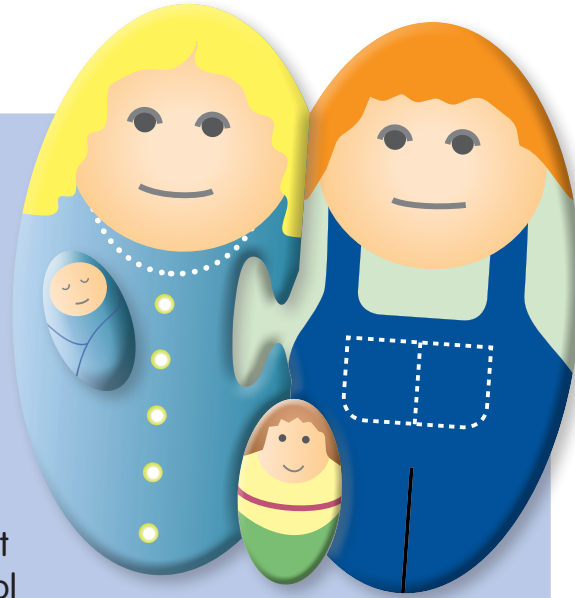
## Conclusion

Scotland has already taken some significant steps in helping parents. Nearly all hospitals now provide free parking and accommodation, removing some of the extra costs and helping parents be with their baby. What this report shows is the need for further action and help with the other costs faced by parents; travel, food and drink and childcare all remain significant barriers. It also shows the need for information and support; making sure that all parents are able to access the help available.

We have all played games with paper money, but for the parents of premature and sick babies, this is not a game; it's real life and it's their baby's life. There are many things parents will worry about when their baby is admitted to neonatal care, whether they can afford to be there shouldn't be one of them.

## One parent's experience

"My daughter was born at 28 weeks at a local maternity hospital in Dumfries. Being a rural community, it has no neonatal intensive care unit, so she was transferred to Glasgow, 80 miles away. Being far away from my newborn, who was so unwell, was one of the worst experiences possible. We were only able to see her a couple of times a week because of how much it cost to get there; we were spending over £100 a week in petrol and parking. We'd have loved to be with her, but we just couldn't afford it. She stayed in Glasgow for eight weeks before she was well enough to be cared for nearer to home, they were the longest eight weeks of our lives."



## One unit's example

"Our unit offers free parking for parents (for two cars in case they come separately). We don't have purpose built accommodation, but we try our hardest to find somewhere for parents to stay onsite and always manage to find somewhere for at least one parent to sleep over. We have somewhere where parents can make themselves a tea or coffee and simple meals. We also provide nappies, which might seem like a small thing, but nappies for premature babies are expensive and it's something that can really add up for parents. Finally, and probably most importantly, we have a parent-to-parent support worker to make sure someone's there for families."



## Recommendations for hospitals and the NHS

Parents travelling 20 miles or more to visit their baby to have their costs reimbursed.

Parents to be provided with meal vouchers or hospital meals.

All parents of babies in neonatal care to be offered free accommodation.

Parents to be provided with a welcome pack upon arrival at the neonatal unit, including information on the support available with accommodation, parking, transport and food.

A designated person on each neonatal unit responsible for ensuring parents understand the support available and are able to access this.

Parent facilities to include an area for making drinks and preparing simple meals.

Parents to have access to free supervised childcare at the hospital.

[bliss.org.uk/scotland](https://bliss.org.uk/scotland)

Scottish registered charity SC040878

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