



# It's not a game:

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

**Bliss**

for babies born too soon,  
too small, too sick

## Introduction

One in every nine babies is born premature or sick in Wales 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.

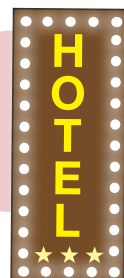
Helping parents meet these costs will not remove the anxiety that comes with having a baby in neonatal care, but it will leave parents free to focus on the one thing that matters – their baby.

## Our data

This report is based on research carried out by Bliss in 2013. 63 Welsh parents shared their experiences about the extra costs they faced while their baby was in neonatal care. We also asked all 12 units about the support they provide with 10 responding.

**£260** average extra weekly spend for families

## Staying with your baby



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

**6 hospitals** provide parents with free meals

**£59**

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



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

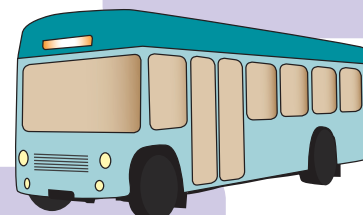
## Travelling to the hospital

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



**£90** is the average weekly cost to parents of travelling to the hospital

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



**43%** of parents said that travel costs affected how often they could visit their baby

Despite the introduction of free parking across Wales, two 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

**60%**

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



**1 in 9**

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



**£1,920** average extra total costs for families

## Supporting families

**1 in 4**

parents were offered information about financial support

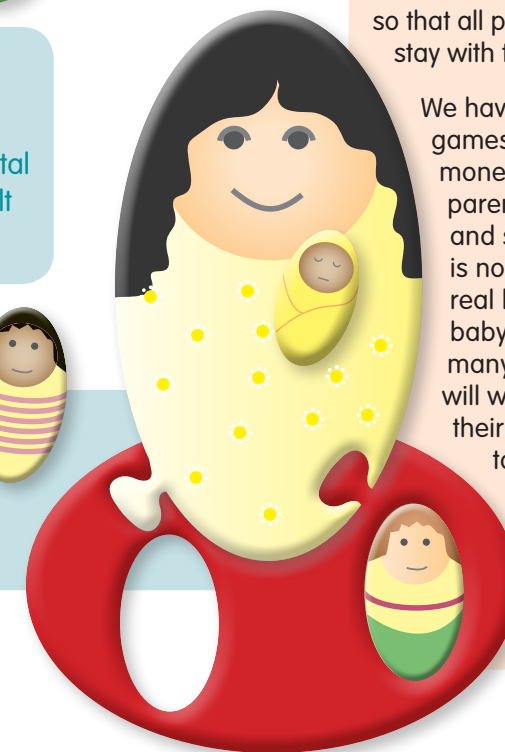


**1 in 2**

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

**£64**

was the average weekly cost for childcare for older children



## Conclusion

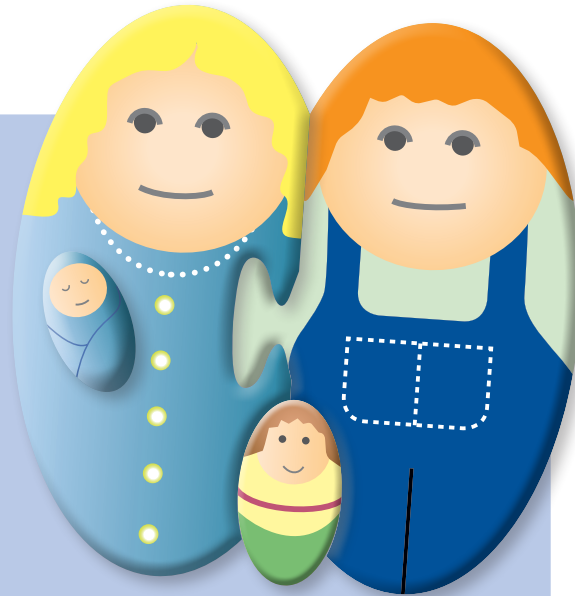
Parents in Wales face longer average journeys to be with their baby than anywhere else in Britain. While the priority is the best care for every baby, part of achieving this is ensuring their parents are there with them. Where services become more focused at specialist centres of excellence, more support needs to be put in place for parents facing increasingly lengthy journeys. This includes help with travel costs and accommodation at every unit so that all parents are able to stay with their baby.

We have all played games with paper money, but for the parents of premature and sick babies, this is not a game; it's their 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

"I was transferred to a hospital over four hours away after going into labour at 25 weeks. Sadly we lost one of our sons, and the distances involved meant my partner nearly missed the chance to say goodbye to him. Our baby was moved closer to home, but the hospital was still over an hour away. They offered us some help with meals and we could stay over, but it wasn't ideal – there were no shower facilities. It wasn't until three months in that our little boy was moved to our local hospital and we could really be together as a family."



## One unit's example

"We offer free parking for parents and for those on a low income there's help with travel costs. We have purpose built accommodation where the whole family can stay and parents can get discounted meals in the canteen. We make sure all our staff understand the different kinds of support parents might need and have information displayed on the unit so every parent knows where to go for help."

## Recommendations for hospitals and the NHS

Parents to be provided with meal vouchers or hospital meals.

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

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/wales](https://bliss.org.uk/wales)

Registered charity no 1002973

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