



Improving information and guidance about babies' movements in pregnancy: a Sands horizon scanning project

Progress and Impact Report
July 2026



Saving babies' lives.
Supporting bereaved families.

Content warning

This report covers areas that can be difficult to read about, including baby loss.



Sands' support channels are for anyone who has been affected by pregnancy loss or the death of a baby before, during, or shortly after birth.

Whether your baby died long ago or recently, we are here for you.



The telephone helpline is free to call from landlines and mobiles on **0808 164 3332**.



You can also email the team at helpline@sands.org.uk, or use Sands support chat via our website sands.org.uk

Use of language and key terms

Bereaved parents and families are terms used throughout this report to describe participants, as we know they are acceptable to many of the people we support at Sands. However, we understand that not everyone who experiences pregnancy loss or the death of their baby wishes to be referred to as a parent.

Women and birthing people are terms used when discussing the whole birthing population to include individuals who do not identify as women.



At Sands we believe that change happens when you listen deeply to lived experience, and use those experiences, with evidence and research, to challenge practice and turn grief into action.

We can make the change we want to see, because our vision connects us. These are shared goals, because we're united – we speak up for babies, everywhere.

Clea Harmer, Chief Executive, Sands

[Read Sands' Strategy 2026-2031](#)



What I need everyone to understand is that valuable, life-saving information cannot just be hidden in a leaflet, it needs to be shown and explained at all times... You just don't know who you will be saving from a lifetime of empty dreams, memories and so much more. My daughter deserved more and so did many other babies, and the ones to come, let's give them a chance to live.

Suehelen, mother to baby Miracle
who died at 39 weeks of pregnancy

Introduction

Feeling a baby's movements is an important part of any pregnancy, and this experience of movement links strongly to the baby's wellbeing.

A reduction in movements can be a sign that a baby is not getting enough oxygen or nutrients, and it is associated with poor pregnancy outcomes, including stillbirth.¹

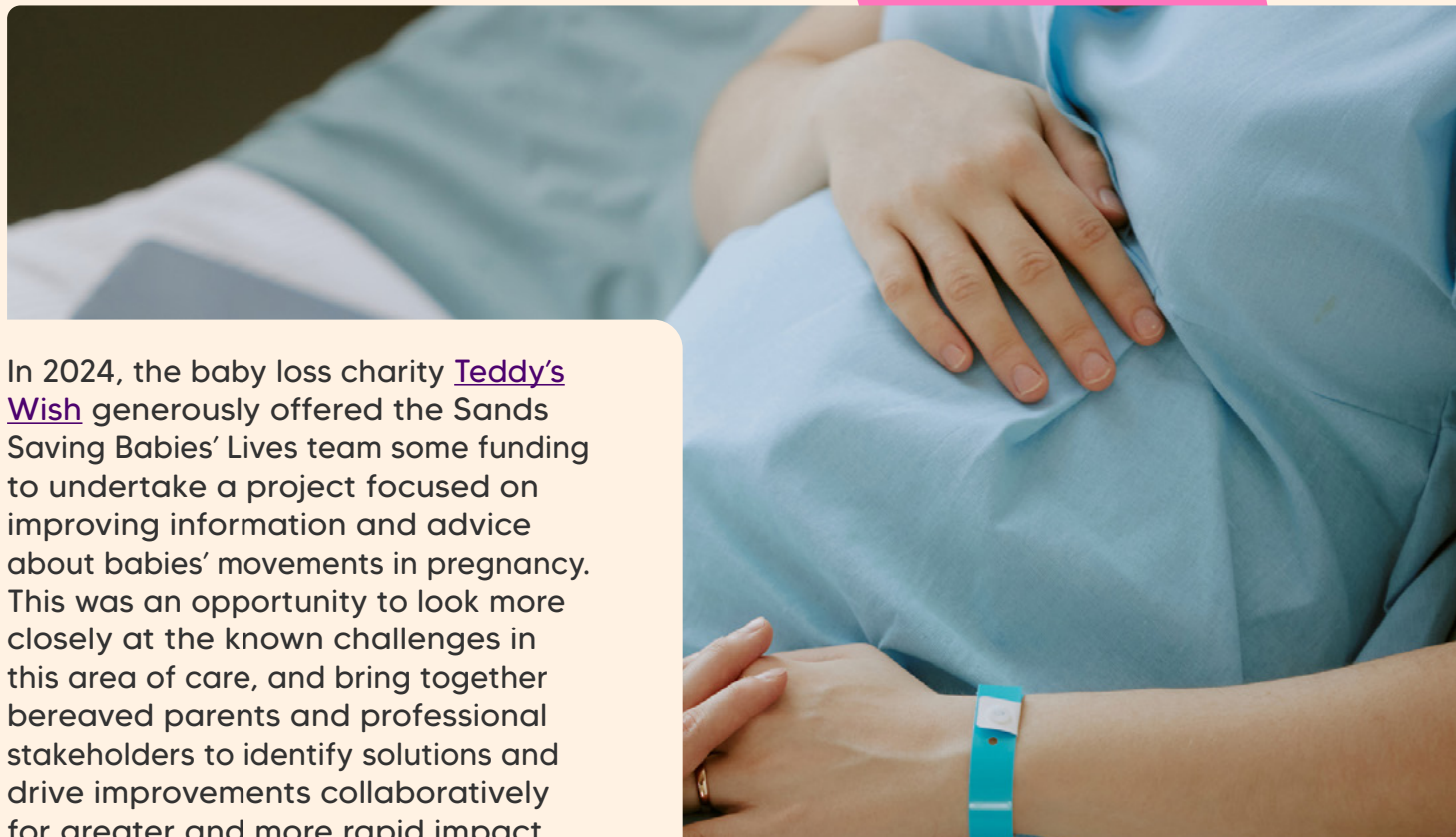
Raising awareness of reduced fetal movements is an important part of work to reduce stillbirth in the UK.² However, the information shared by healthcare professionals can be varied and is not always evidence-based.³ At Sands, bereaved parents have described feeling anxious and confused because of the 'vague' and sometimes conflicting information they received about movements in their pregnancies.

If they had just given more information about what to look out for... what the differences are between the types of movement... Because how can we as first-time mums know what to expect.

Mother to a baby who died at 37 weeks

My doctor only ask: do you feel movements. I say: yes. That's it. ... Just asking if I can feel movements is not enough. Same like just asking a friend: are you ok? ... It is a yes or no answer but it doesn't give you specific details to make a good decision.

Mother to a baby who died at 40 weeks



In 2024, the baby loss charity [Teddy's Wish](#) generously offered the Sands Saving Babies' Lives team some funding to undertake a project focused on improving information and advice about babies' movements in pregnancy. This was an opportunity to look more closely at the known challenges in this area of care, and bring together bereaved parents and professional stakeholders to identify solutions and drive improvements collaboratively for greater and more rapid impact.

The Sands horizon scanning project

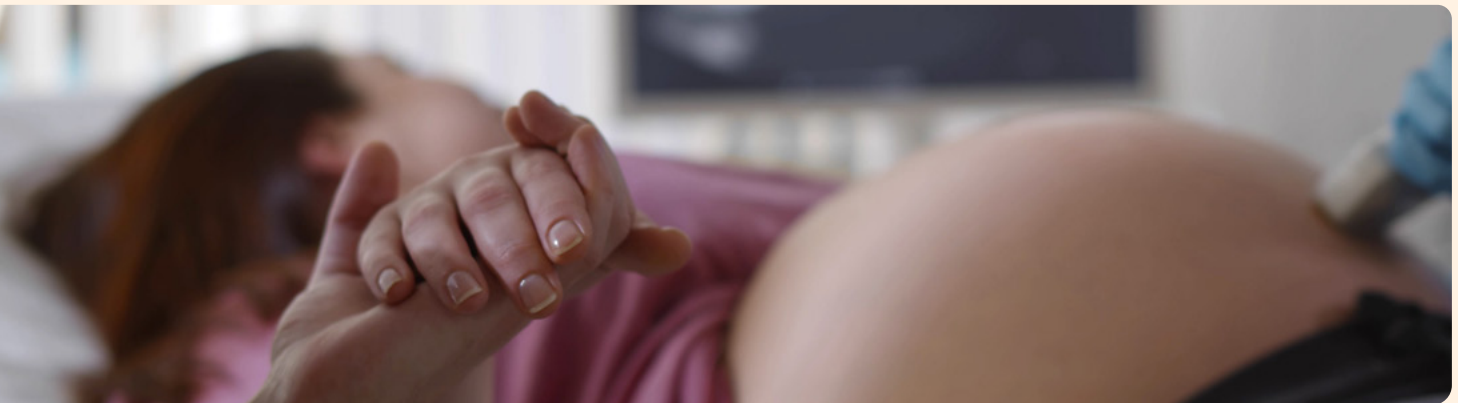
In partnership with Dr Tomasina Stacey from King's College London, the Sands Saving Babies' Lives team launched a [horizon scanning project focused on improving information and guidance about babies' movements in pregnancy](#).

The team's approach was based on a modified version of the [NHSE horizon scanning tool](#) (2022).



Working in a dynamic and responsive way made this a really exciting project to be a part of. It was clear that the work we were doing was having immediate impact.

Dr Tomasina Stacey, King's College London



By reviewing the evidence and listening to bereaved parents and healthcare professionals, we wanted to get a clearer understanding of what was working well in conversations about babies' movements and what needed to improve.

A stakeholder event involving bereaved parents and representatives from practice, policy, research, mortality reviews and investigation, and the third sector was an opportunity to share learning and work towards a consensus on key challenges and potential solutions. Overall, there was wide agreement that UK families need clear, consistent and more detailed information about babies' movements in pregnancy, shared in a way that works for them. Such information is not yet reliably reaching families.

Following this event, we published an initial [Learning and Impact Report \(2025\)](#), which provides an overview of the evidence-base, our approach, key learning, and suggestions for next steps. The report describes the following three key areas of challenge, with **accessibility, equity and trust** cross-cutting themes:



How information is shared and received.



Accessibility of care.



Response on accessing care.

The report also sets out **eight** priority actions agreed by stakeholders:

Developing a national triage policy, including a fetal movement element.



Integrating existing evidence into clinical guidelines.



Developing clear, consistent, detailed information in multiple formats.



Offering training for healthcare professionals, including around communication.



Developing the evidence base around placental factors and identifying babies most at risk.



Developing wearable devices and trackers for remote care.



Developing digital communication on all aspects of fetal movement information.



Developing guidance on what information and advice should be included in the fetal movement care encounter.



Summary of progress and impact

Since we shared the first Learning and Impact Report, there has been some very welcome progress. This is thanks to focused, effective collaboration among families and stakeholders with a shared aim. Sands has been fully committed to initiating and driving this work, collaborating on individual workstreams, monitoring progress, and making sure the voices of bereaved parents are heard.

In this final Progress and Impact Report, we outline some key developments in this area since April 2025. Of note, there have been updates to clinical guidelines for reduced fetal movements from the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG), a new NHS England National Maternity Triage Specification, and a detailed review and update of information for families

led by the charity Tommy's and informed by learning from the Sands horizon scanning project.

We look at the eight priority actions identified at the stakeholder event in 2024, and share examples of progress and impact mapped against each one. We also highlight where more work is needed, to ensure all families have access to consistent, high-quality information and guidance about babies' movements in pregnancy.



Some of the work described in this report has been supported by Sands and emerged from our own horizon scanning project. We also share examples of initiatives that are not directly connected to activity at Sands, but which align closely with the priority actions for improvement.

We know that there will be other examples of excellent practice across the UK, where committed teams are working hard to share information and advice effectively and in a way that meets the needs of local families.

We hope this report will encourage those leading this work to come to us with more examples of progress and impact, so we can continue to raise awareness of 'what works' to improve safety and experiences and save more babies' lives.





1 **Developing a national triage policy, including a fetal movement element**

NHS England National Maternity Triage Specification

In 2025, NHS England convened a national stakeholder Maternity Triage Task and Finish Group to develop a service specification for effective triage care and an associated strategy to measure quality and performance in this area. This was a highly collaborative process, with NHS England leaders welcoming contributions from diverse professionals and family voices.

The [NHSE National Maternity Triage Specification](#) sets high-level principles for what good maternity triage services should look like; they aim to reduce inequalities by making access and care consistent. While the specification does not include detailed guidance for the management of specific conditions, it does establish that local units should have clear, up-to-date and evidence-based guidelines and care pathways in place to support common reasons for coming in, including reduced fetal movements.

Sands has fed into this work, sharing the experiences of bereaved parents from our horizon scanning project who were put off going to triage because of staff

behaviours, practical barriers, or thinking their concern about movements was not important enough for 'emergency' care. Along with other stakeholders, Sands strongly supported an 'open door' approach to triage to make it easier for all families to access safe and rapid care, and this is reflected in the final document.

We look forward to supporting the specification's implementation and learning from the new data to understand how triage services are working across the country and where improvements are needed.

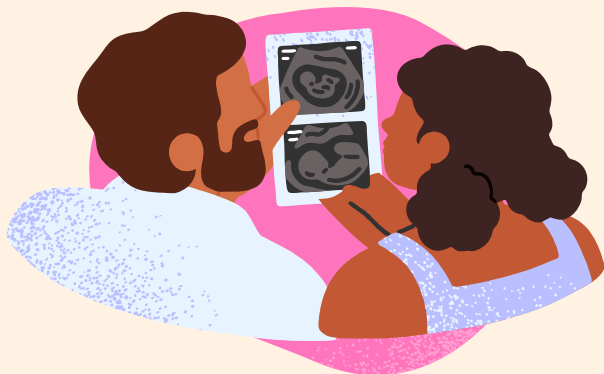
Other funding and initiatives linked to maternity triage

In March 2026, the UK Government announced the launch of a taskforce and a £25 million funding boost to improve maternity care in England. £11 million of this funding is for trusts to improve triage services, including through new equipment and changing how NHS spaces and facilities are used to support better assessments for families with unexpected complications or concerns.

Governments in Scotland and Wales have recognised the need for urgent improvements to maternity triage services. We will be monitoring progress across all four nations, with a particular interest in removing barriers to access and the triage of concerns linked to babies' movements in pregnancy.

2 Integrating existing evidence into clinical guidelines

In April 2026, the long-awaited second version of the [Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologist's \(RCOG\) Green Top Guideline for Reduced Fetal Movements](#) was published, providing a key source of evidence for local guidelines and protocols, resources, training, and care pathways across the UK.



Based on the best available evidence, the guideline advises midwives and doctors on how to care for women and birthing people whose baby's movements are reduced in pregnancy. It includes information about risk factors for reduced movements and some of the factors that can affect how individuals feel their baby's movements in pregnancy. With recommendations for care in community and hospital settings, the guideline aims to provide a broad, evidence-based, and practical guide, while recognising the importance of individualised care.



Improving information and guidance about babies' movements in pregnancy: a Sands horizon scanning project

3 Developing clear, consistent, detailed information in multiple formats

Updates to Tommy's leaflets and online resources for families

Sands has collaborated with Tommy's on [important updates to their information about reduced fetal movements](#), along with the NHS, Kicks Count, FiveXMore, Mama Academy and other stakeholders.

The new resources are based on learning from research, families and Sands' horizon scanning work. They explain clearly that women and birthing people should call their maternity unit and get checked straight away if:

- **Baby is moving less.**
- **Movements feel weaker.**
- **Movements have stopped.**

The new resources move away from more general language about 'changes' in patterns or movements. We know from our own work that this information is too unclear to be helpful to many women and birthing people.

The resources highlight the importance of paying attention to maternal intuition, and there is a clear explanation of the link between reduced movements, reduced oxygen to the baby, and stillbirth. We know this will mean a lot to many of the families we work with. Bereaved parents often tell us that they did not know about stillbirth or that it could happen to them.

Tommy's fetal movements leaflets are available in over 40 languages with more translations on the way. The charity is committed to making sure these resources work for families and healthcare professionals and will be evaluating their effect on care and experiences over the coming months.

4

Offering training for healthcare professionals, including around communication

Over the last few months there have been events and new resources to make sure information about updated messaging reaches the healthcare professionals responsible for implementing it on the ground.

Tommy's webinars and resources

To support the roll out of their updated resources, Tommy's has organised webinars for healthcare professionals with contributions from Sands and researchers in the field. [Watch the recorded webinar to find out more about the evidence behind the changes.](#) On the Tommy's website, there are webinars for professionals and trusts and additional guidance on using the information in practice, including a [conversation guide and FAQs.](#)

Midwifery and Maternal Health Research Group webinar

Dr Julia Clark, from our Saving Babies' Lives team, presented with Dr Tomasina Stacey from King's College London on learning from bereaved parents and updated evidence about babies' movements in pregnancy at the [Midwifery and Maternal Health Research Group Webinars.](#) These webinars run by King's College London aim to boost the impact of the group's academic work by sharing research findings widely and raising awareness among professional groups. The information about babies' movements was well received by midwives attending from the UK and overseas.

Monitoring May 2026

A 2026 Monitoring May webinar was an opportunity for Sands to share learning from our horizon scanning work with over 330 dedicated maternity professionals.

Improving information and guidance about babies' movements in pregnancy: a Sands horizon scanning project

Professor Alex Heazell also took part, explaining the evidence behind the updates to guidelines and key messaging. Monitoring May is an initiative co-founded by midwives Catherine Hopley from Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and Sarah Blackwell from Leicester University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. It aims to improve recognition, escalation, communication and action in relation to fetal monitoring concerns by making sure maternity professionals have access to up-to-date evidence and information.

Workshop at the 34th International Confederation of Midwives (ICM) Triennial Congress, Lisbon

In June 2026, Dr Tomasina Stacey and Rebecca Daley from King's College London and Dr Robin Cronin from the University of Auckland travelled to Portugal to take this conversation to an international audience of midwives. Through an interactive workshop, they supported midwives from around the world to:

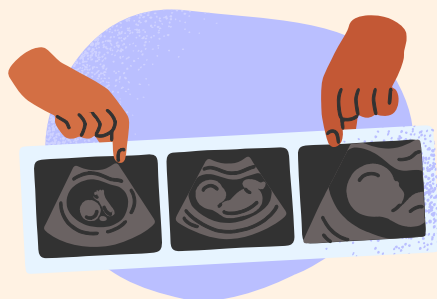
1. Gain a deeper understanding of the evidence base associated with maternal awareness of babies' movements in pregnancy.
2. Build confidence in sharing information and advice about what is normal and 'what to expect' in relation to babies' movements in pregnancy.
3. Identify challenges in sharing information and advice about babies' movements in pregnancy and develop strategies to overcome them.



5 Developing the evidence base around placental factors and identifying babies most at risk

Innovations from the Wellcome Leap In Utero programme

Led by Sands Ambassador and former Trustee, Professor Sarah Stock, the Wellcome Leap In Utero programme has developed cutting-edge technologies with realistic potential to identify risk early in pregnancy, detect developing problems when there is still time to intervene, and show when urgent action is needed. The programme is now moving into its next phase, collaborating with key stakeholders to develop an ambitious route map for validating the use of these technologies jointly to implement next generation antenatal care.



A new wearable device to monitor dynamic interactions in pregnancy

At the University of Nottingham, a team of researchers led by Professor Penny Gowland are investigating dynamic interactions in pregnancy between the mother, baby and placenta. Using new technologies including a new wearable device, they will analyse fetal and maternal information, as well as placental oxygenation and placental and uterine contractions, to improve predictions about pregnancy outcomes and more accurately identify which babies are at risk. Sands is pleased to be supporting this important Wellcome-funded research and looks forward to sharing updates as the project progresses.

Improving information and guidance about babies' movements in pregnancy: a Sands horizon scanning project

6 Developing wearable devices and trackers for remote care

Research supported by Sands

Sands is working with a number of UK researchers to make sure the views and experiences of bereaved parents feed into work focused on developing wearable fetal movement devices and trackers for remote care. Our support includes participating in steering groups, developing funding applications, and facilitating the involvement of bereaved parents and family members at every stage.

The Maternitec fetal movement tracker

Linked to the In Utero programme of research, a team led by Professor Niamh Nowlan at University College Dublin has incorporated a university spin out company called [Maternitec](#) to develop a wearable fetal movement tracker designed to support fetal movement awareness and empower pregnant women and birthing people with insights into their baby's activity. The group are hoping to launch the product, which will be a consumer health medical device, in four years.



7

Developing digital communication on all aspects of fetal movement information

The charity [Kicks Count](#) has launched a major update to its mobile app to provide better support for expectant parents when monitoring their baby's movements. New features include the ability to access tailored week-by-week pregnancy information, and view a breakdown of movement patterns by time of day. These updates are aligned with learning from Sands' horizon scanning work and aim to ensure clearer, more accessible information.

8

Developing guidance on what information and advice should be included in the fetal movement care encounter

A concern raised at the 2024 stakeholder event was that current clinical guidance does not set out clearly what information and advice healthcare professionals should share with parents when they come into maternity services with concerns about their baby's movements.

Many of the bereaved mothers who took part in our horizon scanning project recognised the importance of 'making each contact count'. They felt that appointments relating to movement concerns should be used to share in-depth information tailored to individual needs and circumstances. We know that what is said during these care encounters can have a significant effect on how families make sense of their baby's movements moving forward, and whether they will come back for help if they need it.

The NHS England [Saving Babies' Lives Care Bundle](#) (an initiative aimed at improving maternity care and reducing

baby loss in England) recommends that all women and birthing people should get an evidence-based leaflet about reduced fetal movements by 28 weeks of pregnancy. We know that Tommy's leaflets are used across the UK to support conversations about babies' movements in pregnancy.



This is a great starting point. But more work is needed to embed the updated evidence, information and guidance into clinical guidelines - local and national - to drive greater consistency in the quality of information that families receive across the UK. This should include:

- **Key 'topline' messages about babies' movements in pregnancy.**
- **Simple explanations of the underlying physiology - for example, how babies rely on oxygen and nutrients from the mother via the placenta, and why it matters if this supply is reduced.**
- **Potential problems if a baby is moving less, movements feel weaker or movements have stopped.**
- **When and how to seek care in the future.**

This priority action requires further work, and getting it right is a vital next step in improving care and experiences. Sands will continue to monitor progress and push for improvements in this area.

Conclusion

It has been extremely positive to collaborate so closely with bereaved parents and stakeholders in this project. This model of identifying a problem and bringing key people together around a shared aim has proved agile and effective in driving change rapidly.

We are very grateful to Teddy's Wish whose funding has made this work possible.

We have been impressed by the commitment of stakeholders, who have taken forward actions in their own areas to implement improvements for families and staff.

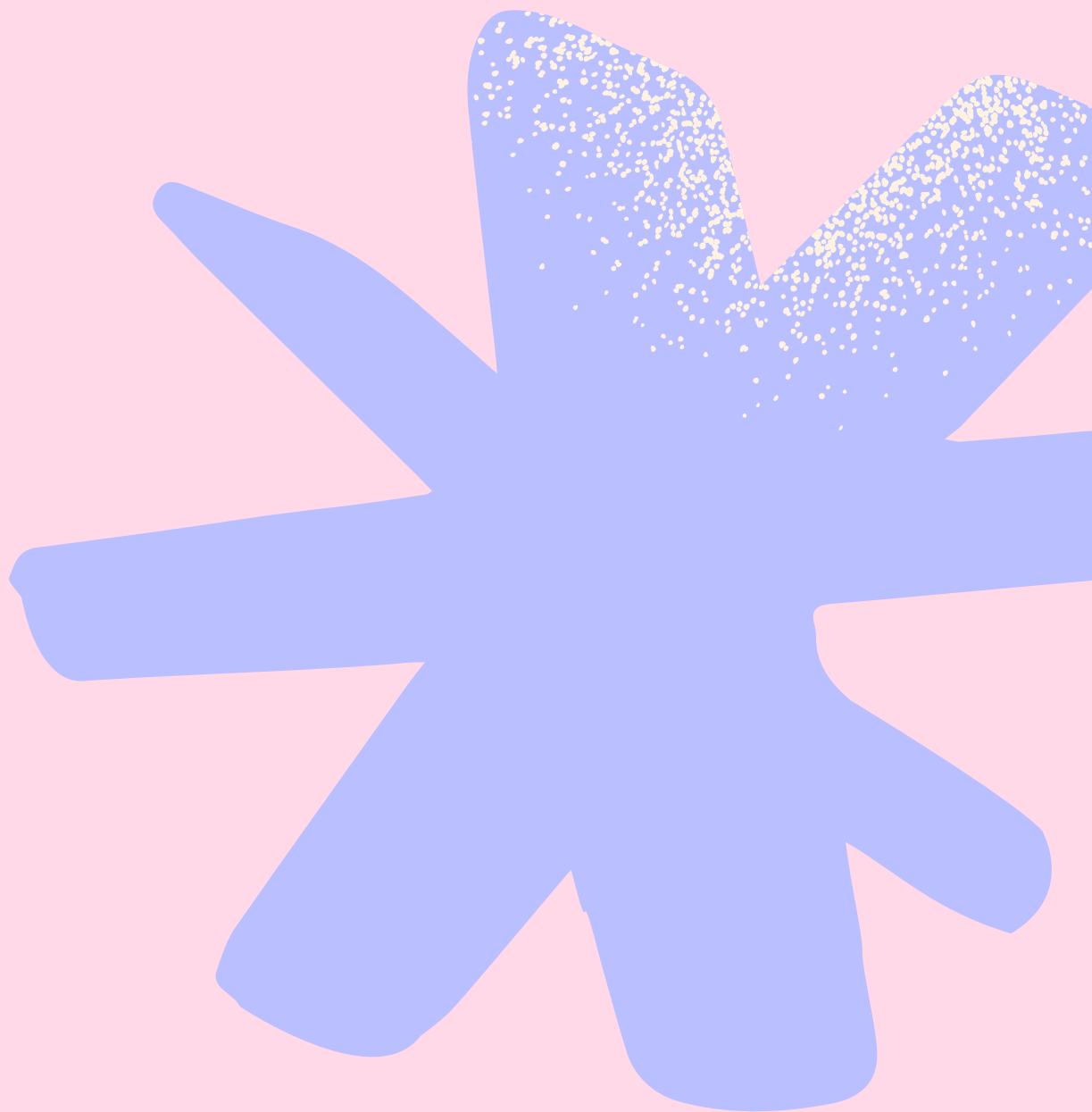
We would like to thank to everyone who has taken part, in particular the bereaved parents who so generously shared their stories and insights. Because of their commitment to making care better - so that other families do not have to experience what they have - we have already seen real changes.

This report shows that, while there have been important developments, work is still needed to make sure learning from this project translates into further improvements on the ground. Sands is committed to supporting this aim and will continue to track activity across all four nations and share updates and opportunities to get involved. By working together, we can make sure all UK families get accurate and personalised information and advice about babies' movements in pregnancy - building safe and positive maternity experiences and saving more babies' lives.



References

1. Carroll, L., Gallagher, L., Smith, V. (2023). [Pregnancy, birth and neonatal outcomes associated with reduced fetal movements: A systematic review and meta-analysis of non-randomised studies.](#)
2. Whitworth, M., Fisher, M., Heazell, A. (2026). Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, [Reduced Fetal Movements Green-Top Guideline No. 57.](#)
3. Bradford, B.F., Cronin, R.S., Warland, J., Akseelsson, A., Rådestad, I., Heazell, A.E.P., McKinlay, C.J.D., Stacey, T., Thompson, J.M.D., McCowan, L.M.E. (2023). [Fetal movements: A framework for antenatal conversations.](#)



Sands saves babies' lives through supporting and funding research and by working with the NHS and many other organisations across the UK to make care safer and more personalised for all families.



Find out more about our life-saving work by visiting sands.org.uk/saving-babies-lives

Sands supports anyone who has been affected by pregnancy loss or the death of a baby before, during or shortly after birth.



For more information visit: sands.org.uk/support-you



**Saving babies' lives.
Supporting bereaved families.**



Sands. Charity Registered in Scotland SC042789, England and Wales 299679. We also operate in Northern Ireland. Company Limited by Guarantee Number: 2212082. Registered Address: 10-18 Union Street, London, SE1 1SZ.