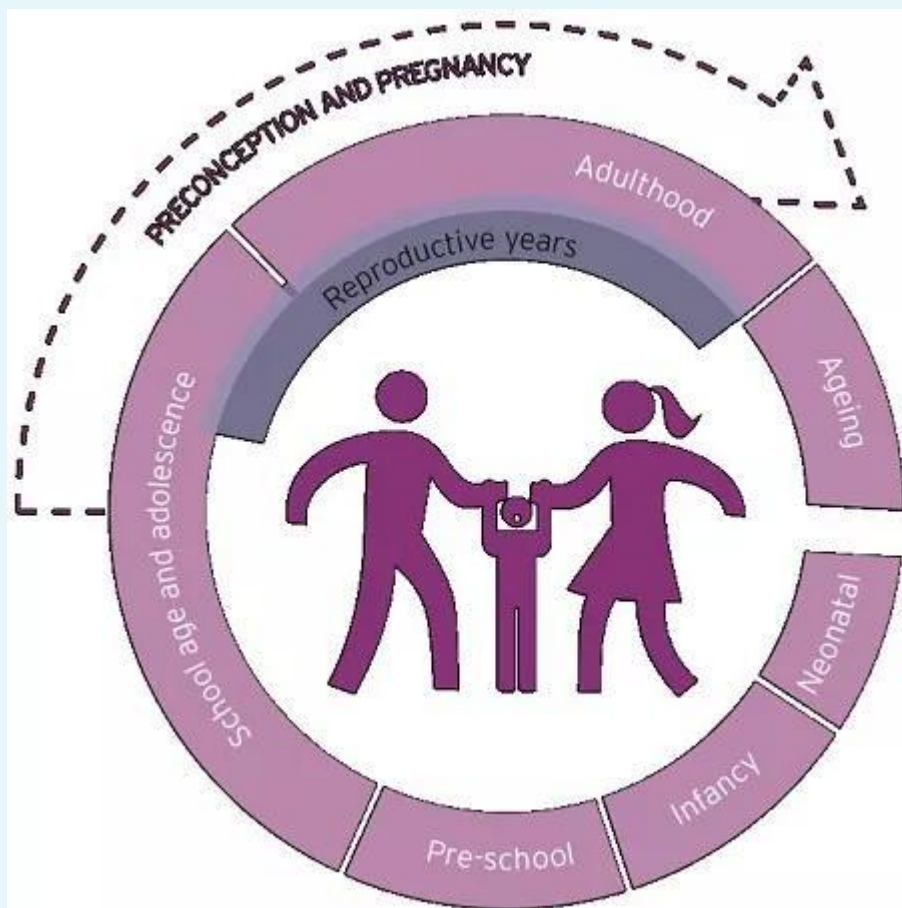


Preconception Engagement Project

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This presentation will cover ...



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Why is pre-conception important?

Preconception Health

Health before pregnancy – Improving outcomes for mothers and babies



Planning pregnancy



Fit for pregnancy



Healthy behaviours

Include: a healthy diet, folic acid supplements, regular physical activity, promoting emotional wellbeing, and ensuring cervical screening, sexual health checks and immunisations are up to date



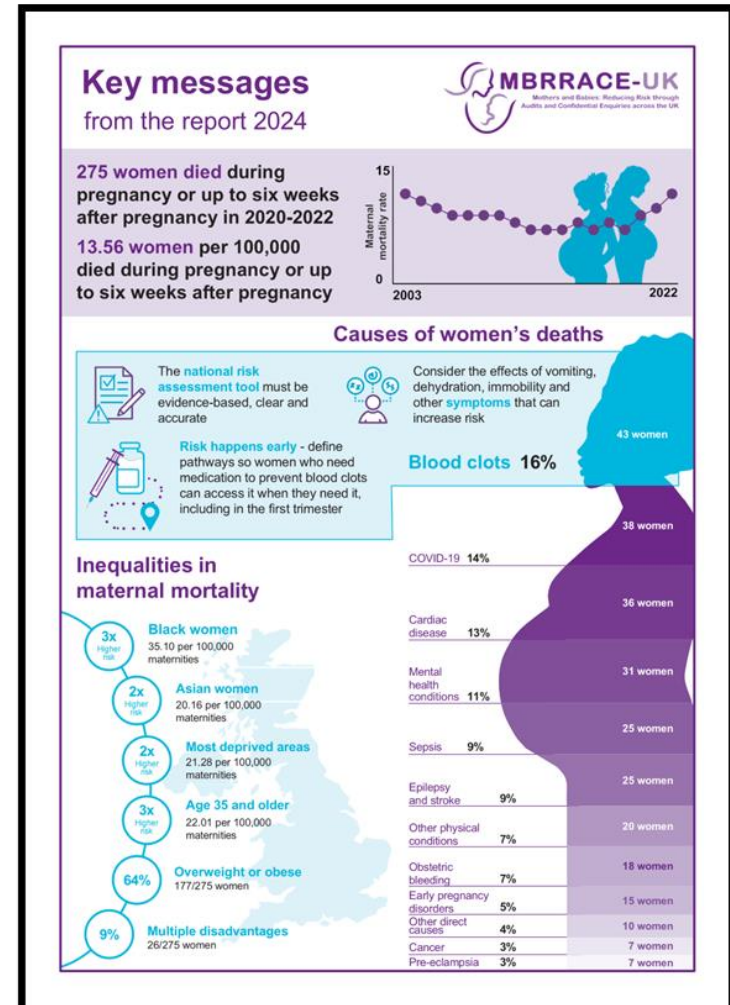
Risk factors

Include: smoking, alcohol, substance misuse, obesity, long-term physical and mental health conditions, previous pregnancy complications, genetic risks, maternal age, adverse childhood experiences, domestic abuse, migrant health factors



Wider determinants

Include: relationships and support, education, housing, employment, financial stability, environment, community safety and cohesiveness



Project development

Priorities	Why?
Understand the needs of the local population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Map and streamline resources • Define current offerings and identify gaps. Ensure engagement with the right stakeholders for targeted impact • Integrate with wider public health initiatives, particularly the women's health strategy (Department of Health and Social Care, 2022)
Engagement and co-design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct focus groups and surveys with people of reproductive age to inform planning. • Engage staff to ensure alignment and gather insights. • Prioritise groups at risk of health inequalities, particularly migrant women, who national data shows have the poorest preconception health outcomes.
Public Campaign	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build on existing national initiatives and proven approaches. • Position the preconception campaign as a key component of the broader women's health strategy.

**Southeast London
Pre-conception
Workshop**

Pre-conception health is achieving optimal health before pregnancy. Choices made before conceiving can significantly impact your birth experience and the long-term health of your children



Attention all future parents! Get ready for an opportunity to embark on a journey towards designing the future of pre-conception care across Southeast London.

**12th or 13th
July**
9:15 am to 1:15

As a token of our gratitude, we are thrilled to offer an exclusive £20 Love to Shop voucher to all service-users attending the workshop. This small reward will be sent to you after you've participated in one of the workshops

Please email
Tanya.Campbell-Rochester@lewisham.gov.uk
to reserve your place.
We have limited vouchers and this will be allocated on a first-come, first-serve basis.



The needs of our local population

- Around 75% of women in Lewisham had at least one pre-conception risk factor; multiple risk factors were more common in the most deprived areas (CORE20).
- Most common risks factors inc. low folic acid use, obesity, and smoking
- There is a strong case for universal education and targeted outreach, particularly in boroughs like Southwark and Lambeth, where folic acid uptake is lowest .

23.1 Risk factor analysis for low birth weight, based on available data¹

PRECONCEPTION RISK FACTORS*

OUTCOME

	Folic acid supplements before pregnancy (%), 2018/19 ²	Obesity in early pregnancy (%), 2018/19	Smoking in early pregnancy (%), 2018/19	Low birth weight (<2500g) of term babies (%), 2021
Bexley	28.5	22.5	9	3.4
Bromley	20.7	16.4	6	2.5
Greenwich	29.6	19.8	8.9	3.8
Lambeth	17.5	17.6	4.7	3.4
Lewisham	25.5	17.9	-	2.8
Southwark	14.7	16.6	4.9	3
London	28.5	17.8	6.0	3.3
England	27.3	22.1	12.8	2.8

Data are benchmarked against the London average



Engagement with families and young people

Scope of the Project

1. **Purpose:** To understand and improve preconception health needs through targeted community engagement across Southeast London
2. **Target Group:** Women and men aged 15–45 with focus on underrepresented communities
3. **Our Approach:** Open Dialogue Workshops with community members and professionals, co-designed with LMNS and MNVPs
4. **What We Are Exploring:**
 - Awareness and understanding of pre-conception health
 - Barriers to accessing care
 - Cultural expectations and family planning
 - Preferences for support and service design
5. **Why It Matters:**
 - Builds trust and reduces stigma
 - Supports co-production of services
 - Helps shape inclusive, evidence-based interventions



Organisation and Delivery

1. Survey Development

- Designed a Preconception Survey using insights from previous LMNS resources
- Created separate versions for birthing people and partners
- Language refined after initial engagement to improve clarity and cultural sensitivity

2. Engagement Approach

- Combined structured survey data with informal, unscripted conversations
- Captured rich, personal insights into lived experiences and service needs

3. Community Collaboration

- Partnered with children's centres, family hubs, and community groups across Southeast London
- Shared surveys in advance via QR codes and printed copies
- Staff and partners advised on suitable groups to engage

4. Delivery Format

- Sessions held in informal, accessible settings (e.g. sitting on the floor during baby groups)
- Discussions ranged from brief chats to in-depth, emotional reflections
- Support offered to all participants who shared personal stories

5. Venue Coverage

- Engaged with service users across 11 venues between Sept 2024 – June 2025.
- Included groups such as **Babies and Us**, **Explorers Baby Group**, **Young Mums Club**, **Mummas Together** and **Future Dads**.

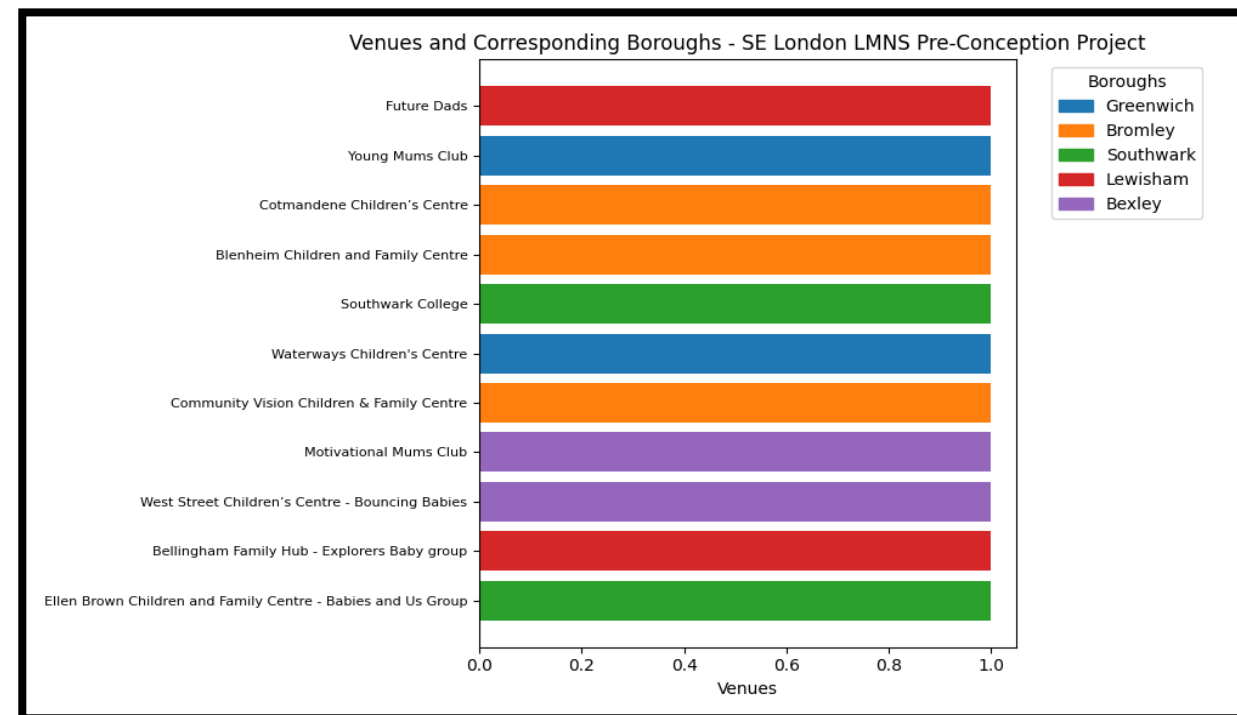
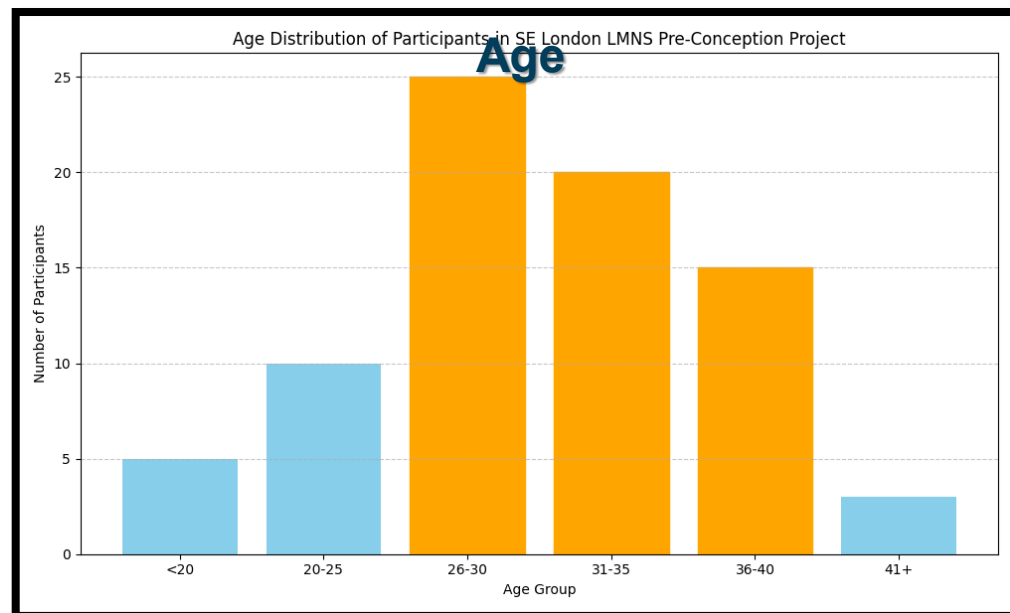


Participants and Locations

Ethnicity



Location



Findings of Engagement

What is preconception care?

“I used Netmums for information. It was helpful to hear someone else's experiences”

“I had really good preconception advice through my IVF journey”



“I didn't know that I had to take anything before getting pregnant”

“Information needs to be easy to find – TikTok's and Instagram are great for sharing information I get lost using the NHS”

Information gaps and preferences

Information gaps

Many participants were **unaware of what preconception care involves**, often confusing it with contraception. Most people did not make changes until after becoming pregnant, due to lack of awareness .

Specific gaps included:

- When and how much **folic acid** to take
- Which **vitamins** are important
- What **lifestyle changes** are recommended before pregnancy

Participants reported difficulty accessing clear, concise health information, especially around maternity entitlements and financial planning

Preferences:

- **Face-to-face conversations** were preferred by many, especially for emotional support and clarity
- Others favored **digital formats** like apps and social media for convenience and privacy
- People whose **first language is not English** relied more on **printed materials** and in-person support
- There was a strong call for **inclusive, culturally sensitive language**, with suggestions to replace “preconception” with “fertility” to improve understanding

Access to preconception care

- Preconception care was not seen as a medical need by many, and therefore not something they would seek professional advice for
- Most participants did not engage with healthcare professionals before becoming pregnant unless they were undergoing fertility treatment or had suffered a miscarriage
- Many individuals reported receiving health advice only at their 12-week antenatal appointment or later
- Additionally, participants frequently mentioned difficulties in securing GPs
- Some even travelled abroad to access quicker or more familiar healthcare support.
- Many relied on informal sources like family, friends, or online platforms instead of professional guidance.



Cultural and Traditional Influences



Cultural Beliefs and Pregnancy

Cultural beliefs and traditions play a vital role in shaping attitudes toward pregnancy and preconception planning.

Family Expectations

Family expectations can create pressure on individuals as they navigate their journey toward pregnancy and parenthood.

Emotional Complexity

The preconception period can evoke past trauma, including infertility and baby loss, complicating the emotional landscape.

You drink okra water to help you conceive

No one in my country plans-they just stop contraception and try

My daughter went to the GP because she lost a baby

Specific considerations - men



Low awareness: Most dads were unaware that preconception advice was available or relevant before trying for a baby

Terminology barrier: The term “preconception” was unfamiliar; participants suggested using “fertility” instead, which they felt would resonate more

Strong desire for information: 86% said they would have benefited from a dedicated pre-pregnancy planning session

Topics of interest:

- Vitamins (e.g. folic acid)
- Healthy lifestyle changes
- Mental health and emotional preparation
- Sperm quality and fertility
- Financial planning and parental rights

Preferred formats: Online resources were popular, but dads also wanted visibility in community spaces like gyms, public transport, and workplaces



Very low awareness: 71% had never heard of preconception care

Terminology confusion: Some students confused preconception care with contraception

High interest: 85% wanted to have children in the future, and 65% hoped to start a family between ages 21–30

Curiosity and questions:

What vitamins to take?

Are there exercises to prepare for birth?

Preferred channels:

College-based education

Social media (e.g., TikTok, Instagram)

Sexual health clinics

Opportunity for early intervention: Students expressed a strong desire to learn more, suggesting that colleges are ideal settings for early education

Recommendations from the report



Awareness

- Increase visibility of preconception information in public spaces
- Use everyday settings like transport, gyms, supermarkets
- Embed messages in HR policies and community campaigns



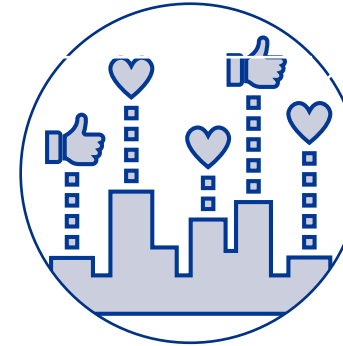
Communication

- Use inclusive, culturally sensitive language
- Avoid confusing terms like 'preconception'; consider 'fertility'
- Provide materials in multiple formats and languages



Inclusion

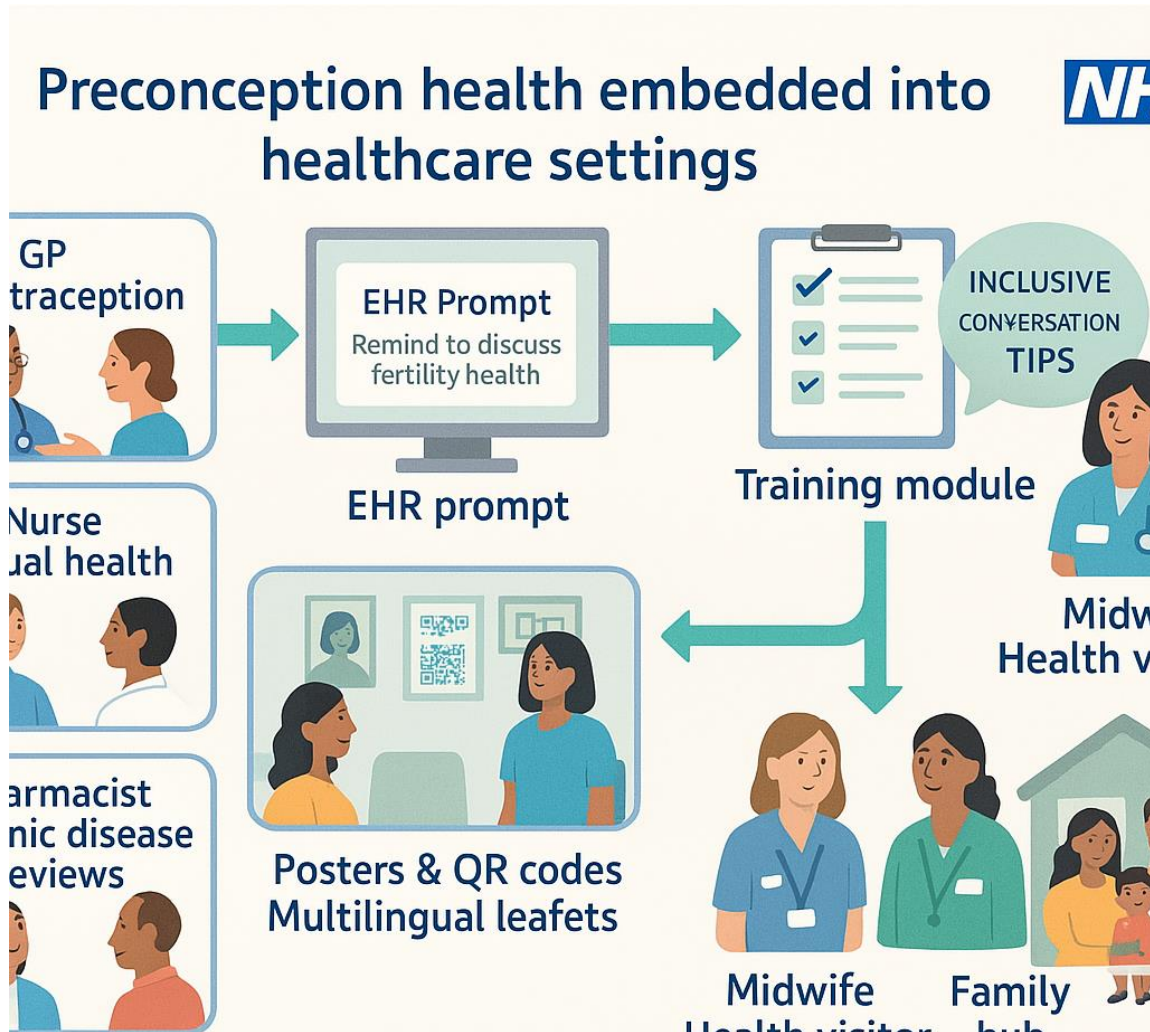
- Actively involve partners and fathers
- Address men's mental health and role in preconception
- Create dedicated resources and support networks



Co-design

- Co-create resources with communities and service users
- Use focus groups to ensure relevance and inclusivity
- Adapt materials based on lived experiences and feedback

Access to Pre-conception health



- Embed preconception health discussions into contraception, sexual health, and chronic disease management appointments
- Use electronic health record prompts to remind clinicians to raise the topic with patients of reproductive age
- Replace or supplement the term “preconception” with “fertility health” or “planning for pregnancy” to improve understanding and engagement, especially among younger patients and men
- Provide brief training modules for GPs, nurses, and pharmacists on how to initiate non-judgmental, inclusive conversations about preconception health
- Develop scripts or conversation guides to support consistent messaging
- Display leaflets, posters, and QR codes in waiting rooms, consultation rooms, and pharmacy counters
- Ensure materials are culturally sensitive, available in multiple languages, and tailored to different literacy levels
- Encourage staff to raise preconception health during smear tests, contraception reviews, and travel vaccinations, where appropriate
- Partner with health visitors, midwives, and family hubs to reinforce messages and refer individuals to local support

Public Health Campaign



¿Planea tener hijos?

¿Está lista?

Hay ciertas cosas que puede hacer antes del embarazo que marcarán una diferencia en la futura salud de su hijo.

¡Haga el test ahora!

Escanee este código QR con la cámara de su teléfono para una asesoría personalizada.

¿No tiene tiempo para el test?

Si por lo menos hace una cosa, empiece el día tomando una pastilla de ácido fólico hoy. Para alcanzar el nivel más alto de protección contra los defectos de nacimiento como espina bífida, se recomienda tomar ácido fólico de 2 a 3 meses antes de interrumpir la anticoncepción.

tommys.org/planningforpregnancy

Tommy's
The pregnancy and baby charity

South East London
Local Maternity and Neonatal System

NHS
South East London

Campaign Overview

The Preconception Campaign aims to provide essential advice across six boroughs, enhancing preconception education.

Physical and Digital Materials

The campaign utilises physical materials like posters and flyers alongside a strong digital presence for outreach and engagement. Translated into 10 languages

Targeted Outreach

Materials are distributed to children's centers, family hubs, and men's groups to enhance access to education.

Inclusive Education

Including fathers and partners in preconception and perinatal education promotes more supportive care.



Performance from the Campaign (July 2025)

- Our pre-conception campaign, delivered in partnership with Tommy's, has reached over 871,000 people across Southeast London through social media
- We are targeting postcodes of greater deprivation and women from black African and black Caribbean heritage
- Mamadinya a midwife and influencer has led a video on social media promoting the use of Vitamin D and Folic acid
- Nearly 2,000 people have completed the tommy's pre-conception tool which provides personalised key messages to help planning for the next pregnancy.
- SEL webinars for health care community ambassadors have been delivered by SEL LMNS and Tommy's charity.
- The next phase of the campaign will involve targeted advertisement based on the recommendation of this report and the data from people completing the tool in SEL

Conclusion

➤ **Community Insights**

The Preconception Engagement Project has highlighted crucial insights regarding community needs and awareness about health. This include a widespread lack of awareness of preconception health. This engagement has also highlighted the limitation of engagement with health care professionals and suggest that improvements are required.

➤ **Recommendations Implementation**

Implementing the outlined recommendations can significantly improve preconception health education for prospective parents. Our SEL LMNS are working closely with Women's and Girl's hub to ensure that learnings from this project are included in the development and outreach activities of the hub.

➤ **Cultural and Emotional Complexity**

We need to continue with community organisations and health partners to ensure that pre-conception is included in everyday encounters both in the community and health consultations

SEL LMNS has an opportunity to support healthier family outcomes by sharing the learning of these projects and enhancing support for prospective parents is essential for achieving healthier outcomes for families in the community. We are planning to disseminate the findings from this report and continue influencing policy at local and national level to ensure preconception is part of the preventative health approach in the future.