

Media Release



Reaching out around Western Australia to prevent preterm birth

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Executive Director of the Women and Infants Research Foundation (WIRF) and University of Western Australia's (UWA) Professor John Newnham has been touring Western Australia, informing medical professionals of new evidence-based clinical guidelines from the *WA Preterm Birth Prevention Initiative - The Whole Nine Months*.

Endorsed by the Australian Medical Association, the *Initiative* is a joint collaboration between WIRF, UWA, the Women and Newborn Health Service (WNHS), and the Department of Health Western Australia (DOH), and aims to reduce the rate of premature births in the State by 15 percent over the next two years.

The 'Outreach' campaign to educate State-wide medical professionals on the new guidelines, is the second phase of the *Initiative* which follows on from the opening of a specialist trial Preterm Birth Prevention Clinic based at King Edward Memorial Hospital (KEMH) in November last year.

The campaign will ensure that medical professionals across the State are equipped to safely guide their patients on the below recommended interventions to reduce the rate of preterm birth in WA, which currently stands at 8 – 9 percent;

- o Prescription of natural vaginal progesterone in certain women with a past history of preterm birth;
- o Routine measurement of the length of the cervix at the standard mid-pregnancy ultrasound examination and prescription of natural progesterone if the cervix is shortened;
- o Not delivering babies until 38 weeks gestation or later unless there are medical or obstetric reasons necessitating an early birth;
- o Cessation of smoking or exposure to cigarette smoke for pregnant women;
- o Use of fertility treatments with appropriate caution;
- o Pre-conception care and planning a pregnancy, and;
- o Other health optimising strategies will also be encouraged.

Professor John Newnham said "There are significant costs in managing premature births. Debilitating effects on the health of the premature children themselves, as well as the stress placed on families and health systems are just some of the impacts. As the largest cause of death and disability in children under five in developed countries – it is imperative that we take action to reduce this rate."

Professor Newnham and his team have recently visited health professionals in the North-West of Western Australia and across Perth, soon to be followed by sites in the Mid and South West. Professor Newnham said the *Initiative* had so far been well received by health professionals around Western Australia.



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"Our guidelines are also gaining international recognition from obstetric leaders and we hope that with proven statistics following the campaign, our *Initiative* will become a blue print for other organisations around the world to be a part of the preterm birth solution", said Professor Newnham. Leading obstetric professional Roberto Romero from Detroit has applauded WA Preterm Birth Initiative and is using the model to design a similar campaign for promotion in the United States.

A health promotion campaign aimed at raising awareness amongst the general public in WA and those most at risk of having a preterm birth will also be launched in the coming year as a part of the *Initiative*.

Further information about the Initiative is available on Twitter @WIRFWA or by searching the hashtag #thewholeninemonths, or on the below website:

THEWHOLENINEMONTHS.com.au

Preterm birth is defined as birth before 37, and after 20, completed weeks of pregnancy. In Western Australia, the rate of preterm birth is 8-9 percent, and is almost double in Aboriginal Australians. While many children born preterm can expect to live a normal and productive life, very early preterm birth is associated with death, physical disability, respiratory disease, cerebral hemorrhage, bowel necrosis and prolonged stay in intensive care. In childhood, risks include chronic lung disease, deafness, blindness, learning difficulties and behavioral problems. In adulthood, there may be additional risks of metabolic syndrome, diabetes and heart disease.

Media contact: Sarah Cooper, sarah@wif.com.au 0416 228 722
