

Media Release

WA research recognised as a report of global health importance

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A paper from a Western Australian research program which has revealed a significant decline in the rate across the state has been recognised as a 'Report of Major Impact' by The American Journal of Obstetrics & Gynecology (AJOG).

The paper, published in the May 2017 edition of AJOG, reported the results of the first full year of The Western Australian Preterm Birth Prevention Initiative. The findings revealed an 8 per cent decline in the rate of preterm birth across WA (196 fewer cases relative to the preceding year).

The AJOG 'Report of Major Impact' classification was introduced to recognise studies with the potential for important changes to clinical practice and immediate impact for the clinical and scientific community. Worldwide, an estimated 15 million babies are born preterm each year. In 2015, preterm birth was responsible for nearly 1 million deaths.

Chair and Founder of the Initiative and Chief Scientific Director of the Women and Infants Research Foundation (WIRF), Professor John Newnham said the findings has the potential to benefit the millions of infants and families worldwide who will potentially suffer from this complication of pregnancy.

"Until recently, preventing preterm birth was an idea limited to the world of research. But the discovery and translation of effective new strategies, coupled with a multi-faceted commitment to educating health care professionals and families, has enabled change on such a scale," Prof Newnham said.

"These results have global implications for safely and effectively lowering the rate of preterm birth, saving countless lives and preventing lifelong disability."

First launched in late 2014, the Initiative encompasses new clinical guidelines, an outreach program for health care practitioners, a public health program for women and their families, and a new clinic at the State's sole tertiary level perinatal centre.

Professor Newnham said the Initiative was the first program in the world to have safely lowered the rate of preterm birth across the gestational age spectrum, including births as early as the 28-31 week category.

"These results have global implications for safely and effectively lowering the rate of preterm birth, saving countless lives and preventing lifelong disability," Prof Newnham said.

"Our challenge now is to expand the effect and translate to the program into other health care environments."

'Reducing preterm birth by a state-wide multifaceted program – an implementation study', can be viewed online at The American Journal of Obstetrics & Gynecology here:

[http://www.ajog.org/article/S0002-9378\(16\)32063-4/fulltext](http://www.ajog.org/article/S0002-9378(16)32063-4/fulltext)

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Background: The Women and Infants Research Foundation is one of Australia's leading independent research institution dedicated to improving the health of women, infants and reproductive health. We have a proud 40-year history of scientific discovery and public health achievement centred on the eradication of disease and the reduction of illness in women of all ages and babies.