

The Western Australian Preterm Birth Prevention Initiative

Research overview

The Western Australian Preterm Birth Prevention Initiative was launched on 17 November 2014. This is a state-wide program aiming to safely lower the rate of preterm birth in our state and builds on many years of research conducted by WIRF and other organisations.

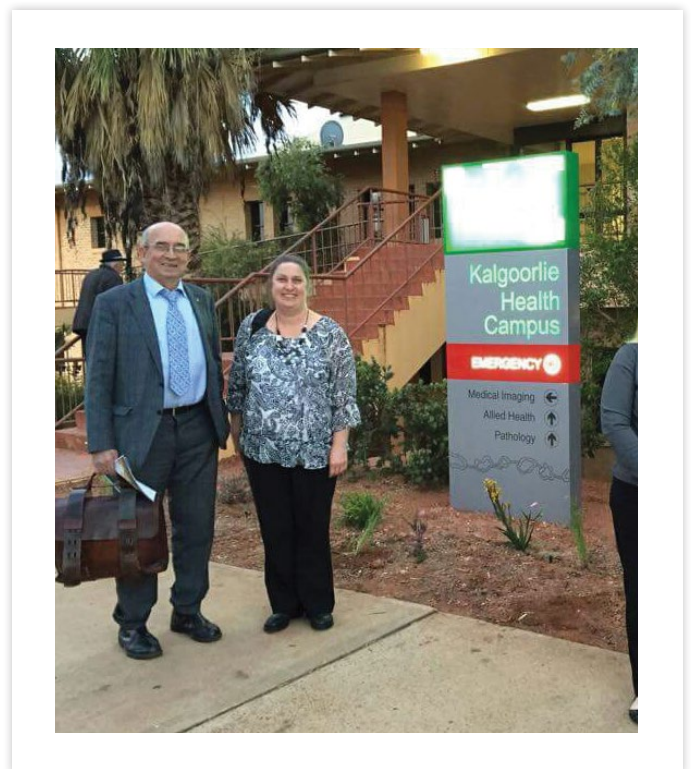
The Initiative is based on six clinical strategies that have been developed into clinical guidelines. These guidelines include: how vaginal progesterone and suturing the cervix may be used to prevent early birth, how ultrasound measurement of the length of the cervix in mid-pregnancy is used to identify women at risk of early birth and who will benefit from these treatments, how all pregnancies should be left undelivered until at least 38+ weeks gestation unless there are strong medical reasons for earlier intervention, ways to reduce smoking in pregnancy, appropriate use of fertility treatments and a new dedicated preterm birth prevention clinic at KEMH.

The Initiative has three core components. First, is a state-wide outreach program aiming to inform all health care practitioners in Western Australia of the new clinical guidelines. Second, is a public health campaign for the women and families of our state. Third, is a new preterm birth prevention clinic at KEMH. The first two components are funded by philanthropy through WIRF and the new clinic is funded by the Western Australia Department of Health.

Research highlights

WIRF is managing the public health campaign which is badged as 'the whole nine months'. Our aim is to create awareness of the initiative through social media and other digital media channels and extend our reach to as many women and families as possible. - Tiny Sparks WA led by Bronwyn Rose are keen supporters of our campaign and continue to help share our key messages through their online audiences.

The outreach program is being led by Prof John Newnham and includes Dr Suzanne Meharry, Michelle Pedretti (chief sonographer at KEMH) and one of our two preterm birth prevention midwives Cate Belcher or Susie Allen. Workshops are being held throughout metropolitan Perth and rural and remote Western Australia. These two hour evening workshops are attended by local obstetricians, general practitioners, radiologists, midwives and sonographers. The outreach program is proving to be highly successful and provides an invaluable interchange between health care practitioners resulting in improved clinical care.



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A new research arm of the Initiative is the establishment of a biobank under the leadership of Prof Jeffrey Keelan and Prof Craig Pennell. This bio-bank of specimens will provide an invaluable collection for research enabling discoveries that will assist us in tackling some of the causes of preterm birth for which we do not currently have effective clinical strategies.

Western Australia is the ideal location for this world-leading Initiative. Our state is effectively a medical island served by a single tertiary level centre and with effective computerisation of outcomes enabling thorough monitoring and evaluation of the Initiative. Biostatistical evaluation of the outcomes of the Initiative will be headed by Prof Dorota Doherty and will provide information on effectiveness and ways by which the clinical guidelines can be further improved.



THE TEAM

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Dr Suzanne Meharry FRANZCOG
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Prof Jeffrey Keelan PhD

Prof (Adj) Dorota Doherty PhD
Michelle Pedretti DMU
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