

## Facts about preterm birth and The Western Australian Preterm Birth Prevention Initiative

- Worldwide, an estimated 15 million babies are born preterm each year (before 37 completed weeks of gestation). In 2015, preterm birth was responsible for nearly 1 million deaths – World Health Organization.
- Preterm birth is defined as birth before 37 completed weeks of pregnancy (and after 20 weeks)
- In WA alone, nearly 3000 babies are born preterm each year – approximately 1 in 12 pregnancies ends preterm. Rates of preterm birth among Aboriginal Australians and disadvantaged communities are approximately double.
- Preterm birth is the single greatest cause of death and disability in children up to five years of age in the developed world.
- **Immediate care for a single newborn with a birth weight of less than 750 grams typically costs the health system \$216,000 and in the range 1.5kg – 2kg around \$59,000.**
- First launched in November 2014, The Western Australian Preterm Birth Prevention Initiative is a whole-of-population, whole-of-state program which 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 King Edward Memorial Hospital – the State’s sole tertiary level perinatal center.
- **Results from the Initiative published this week in The American Journal of Obstetrics & Gynecology has revealed a 8 per cent reduction (196 fewer cases relative to the preceding year) in the rate of preterm birth across Western Australian in the study’s first year of implementation.**
- **The Initiative has been unique in that it has harnessed both the entire health care workforce and the families of our state. It is 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.**
- Key activities and deliverables contributing to the marked decline of preterm birth include:
  - Promotion and oversight of the measurement of length of the cervix as a routine component of the mid-pregnancy ultrasound scan; a simple but highly predictive diagnostic of events that will follow.
  - Successful completion of a state-wide outreach roadshow to inform all health care practitioners in WA in their own work environments of the new clinical guidelines informed by research and developed as a part of the Initiative.
  - Launch of a Preterm Birth Prevention Clinic at King Edward Memorial Hospital, providing support and management plans for women at highest risk of having a preterm birth.
- We are now seeking support to expand the program even further during the coming year and to build on our success.
- The website for The Western Australian Preterm Birth Prevention is [www.thewholeninemonths.com.au](http://www.thewholeninemonths.com.au)



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