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Media Release

WA program sets bar for national alliance to prevent preterm birth

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A Western Australian-based research program which has significantly reduced the rate of preterm birth across the state is set to be rolled out nationally potentially benefitting hundreds of thousands of pregnant women each year after its key practice points and outcomes were used to develop a national preterm birth prevention alliance.

The Australian Preterm Birth Prevention Alliance will bring together a national partnership of clinical leaders, researchers, health departments, and communities working together to lower the rate of preterm birth in Australia.

Worldwide, an estimated 15 million babies are born preterm each year. Preterm birth is the leading cause of death in children up to five years of age.

Chair and Founder of the Australian Preterm Birth Prevention Alliance, Chief Scientific Director of the Women and Infants Research Foundation, and Head of Division of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, University of Western Australia, Professor John Newnham said a decision had been made to take the program to all states and territories.

A parallel program is set to be developed in New Zealand and will share many aspects of the Australian program. Australia is now the first country to have developed a national preterm birth prevention program.

“The success in WA has been the result of researchers, doctors, health professionals, families and government working collaboratively to develop solutions to a critical area of human health,” he said.

“The challenge was always to work out how to expand the effect and translate the program into other health care environments.”

Prof Newnham said The Alliance will have the singular aim to safely lower the rate of preterm birth in Australia.

“This will be done by bringing together clinical leaders, Health Departments, and communities, to adapt and modify and tailor the existing WA specific Initiative for introduction and implementation in each state and territory, joined together in a single Alliance,” Prof Newnham said.

“We now have the vehicle for the learnings from WA and the new knowledge generated by our key partners to be captured, expanded on, and translated into state-based implementation programs supported by policies and best practice guidelines specific for that environment.”

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Media opportunity: Chair and Founder of the Australian Preterm Birth Prevention Alliance, Professor John Newnham is available for interview and follow-up media comment.

Media contact: Richie Hodgson, 0408 128 099, richie@wirf.com.au

Background:

The Australian Preterm Birth Prevention Alliance

The Australian Preterm Birth Prevention Alliance is a national partnership of clinical leaders, researchers, health departments, and communities working together to lower the rate of preterm birth in Australia.

The Alliance, a sub-committee of the Perinatal Society of Australia and New Zealand (PSANZ), has the singular aim of safely lowering the rate of preterm birth on a national level.

For more information visit: <https://wirf.com.au/APBP-Alliance>

The Western Australian Preterm Birth Prevention Initiative

The Western Australian Preterm Birth Prevention Initiative, through the Women and Infants Research Foundation, was launched in November 2014 with the goal of safely and effectively lowering the rate of preterm birth, saving lives, and preventing life-long disability. It is the world's first such program to be applied across an entire population.

Outcomes after the first full year of implementation are now available and have been published in the American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology (AJOG); the leading scientific journal in this field.

During 2015, the rate of preterm birth in single pregnancies in WA fell by 7.6 per cent. About 45 of these babies would have been born in the very early age groups.

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 preterm birth prevention clinic.

The findings have also been recognised as an AJOG 'Report of Major Impact'. The designation recognises the Program's potential for important changes to clinical practice and immediate impact for the clinical and scientific community.