



AUSTRALIAN
Preterm Birth
Prevention
ALLIANCE

Statement by The Australian Preterm Birth Prevention Alliance

22nd January 2019

The Australian Preterm Birth Prevention Alliance wishes to draw attention to recent research indicating that birth before 39 weeks of pregnancy may have important consequences in later life, including behavioural and learning problems in school aged children. In recent years there has been a progressive increase in elective early birth across Australia and all women and their health care providers need to understand the critical issues when making such a decision.

There are many potential medical and pregnancy complications where an early birth by induction of labour or Caesarean section is necessary and may save lives.

However, in the absence of a medical justification for early birth, all pregnancies should be allowed to continue until about 39 weeks' gestation to enable the unborn baby to fully develop its brain and other organs. Birth before this time may have serious consequences for the child and cannot be justified for social reasons alone. Most children born before full term will go on to lead a normal and productive life, but for many others there may be significant problems. The health concerns can include medical complications for the newborn and learning and behavioural problems at school age.

In each case, the decision-making process regarding time of birth needs to be done as a partnership between the health care provider and the pregnant woman. The process needs to be based on a thorough understanding of the relative benefits of early birth in possibly minimising the risk of stillbirth as balanced against the risks of harm in childhood.

END

Approved by the Executive and Steering Committees, 22nd January 2019



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