



women & infants  
research foundation

# Media Release

## **Masquerade at the MCG to benefit mothers and babies at risk of early birth**

**Tuesday, 1 October 2019**

Melbourne's health, sporting, business and philanthropic community is set to usher in autumn in grand style as it unites for a highly anticipated event at the MCG to benefit mothers and babies at risk of preterm birth.

To be held at the MCG on Saturday, 29 February 2020, the Masquerade Ball: 'Unmasking Preterm Birth', promises to be an unforgettable evening of exquisite food, wine and insight. Promotion for the event has just commenced to coincide with Pregnancy and Infant Loss Awareness Month which will run throughout October.

Event organiser and mother of a Little Angel, Veronica Johnston, said the inaugural event would shine a light on the pioneering work of the Women & Infants Research Foundation (WIRF) to prevent early birth and pregnancy loss. Veronica's daughter, Eden Rose, was born sleeping on the 28th February, 2019.

"Discovering I was pregnant is something I will never forget. But losing Eden to premature birth was something nobody could have prepared me for," she said.

"Whilst I've felt more sadness than I knew was humanly possible, I have channelled my grief into this event to ensure that no woman or mother should ever experience the emotional turmoil and heartache of pregnancy loss that I had to endure.

"The Masquerade Ball: 'Unmasking Preterm Birth' will honour my little girl's memory, build awareness of preterm birth, and raise critical funds for research into preventing its causes."

WIRF Ambassador, former Australian Cricketer, and father of two very premature babies, Mike Hussey, said the event would provide an opportunity to share stories of early birth and reflect on WIRF's transformative research.

"Veronica's story is amazingly powerful and her commitment to raising awareness and support for preterm birth should be applauded," he said. "Amy and I know exactly how tough it is for families to go through a preterm birth experience. This event is a critical forum to raise awareness and support the amazing research being done by WIRF which is ultimately saving the lives of Australian women and their babies."

60 Minutes Reporter, Sarah Abo will MC the event which will also feature the world leading authority in the field of preterm birth prevention and the Founder of the Australian Preterm Birth Prevention Alliance, Professor John Newnham AM.

The night will feature well-known Melbourne band Matt Bradshaw & G-Force, as well as a stunning bespoke cocktail menu and beverage selection designed by the MCG's Chef de Cuisine, Renee Guymer.

Event organisers are currently seeking interested event partners, major supporters and prize donors. If you are able to assist in shaping and ensuring the success of this very important event please contact Veronica Johnston on 0418 171 780 or at [veronica@realworldpsychology.com.au](mailto:veronica@realworldpsychology.com.au)

Proceeds from the Masquerade Ball: 'Unmasking Preterm Birth' will go directly towards supporting the critical preterm birth prevention research and programs of the Women & Infants Research Foundation.

For more information about the Ball visit the dedicated event website: <https://wirfmasqueradeball.com.au>

**ENDS**



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**Media contact:** Richie Hodgson, 0408 128 099, [richie@wirf.com.au](mailto:richie@wirf.com.au)

## **Media opportunity:**

WIRF Chief Scientific Director, Professor John Newnham AM, WIRF Ambassador, Mike Hussey, and Event Organiser, Veronica Johnston, are all available for follow media comment.

## **Key dates to note are:**

- October is Pregnancy and Infant Loss Awareness Month
- 17 November 2019 is World Prematurity Day
- The Masquerade Ball: 'Unmasking Preterm Birth' will be held on Saturday, 29 February 2020.

## **About preterm birth**

Worldwide 15 million babies are born preterm each year. For one million of these, the day they are born is the day they die. Preterm birth is the single greatest cause of death and disability in children up to five years of age in the developed world.

Those born at the earliest gestational ages may suffer from severe problems such as cerebral palsy, developmental delay, chronic lung disease, diabetes or blindness. For those born at a later gestation, even approaching full-term, there may be behavioural and learning problems.

## **About the Women & Infants Research Foundation**

The Women & Infants Research Foundation (WIRF) is one of Australia's leading medical research institutes dedicated to improving the health of women, mothers and babies. WIRF's greatest area of impact is undoubtedly is work in the field of preterm birth prevention.

In 2014, it launched a state-wide initiative known as the Whole Nine Months. Results from the first full year of the Initiative revealed an 8% reduction in the rate of preterm birth across the state.

The real face of this is that almost 200 women were prevented from having a preterm birth; safe from the prospect of long-term care and permanent disability for their child as well as the heartache and financial burden associated with it.

## **The Australian Preterm Birth Prevention Alliance**

In a world first, the key practice points and public health campaign developed as part of WIRF's pioneering program have now been used to inform and shape a national approach to preventing preterm birth.

In June 2018, the Australian Preterm Birth Prevention Alliance was established with a singular goal; to safely lower the rate of preterm birth across Australia.

The Alliance will now play a central role in identifying prevention strategies that are effective and feasible for our healthcare system.