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Media Release

New Federal funding to boost nationwide efforts into preterm birth prevention

Monday, 10 May 2021

The Women & Infants Research Foundation (WIRF) has welcomed the announcement of \$13.7 million in Federal Government funding to bolster its ongoing efforts to lower the rate of preterm birth across Australia.

In making the announcement, Minister for Health and Aged Care, the Hon Greg Hunt, said the Government was committed to improving health services around Australia for all women and girls, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

“As part of today’s significant investment, \$13.7 million will help to reduce the rate of preterm births in Australia, which affect 8% of births in Australia and up to 16% among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women,” Minister Hunt said.

The funding will support a national education and outreach program to safely lower rates of preterm birth through the Australian Preterm Birth Prevention Alliance which is managed by WIRF.

Chair of the Australian Preterm Birth Prevention Alliance, Professor John Newnham AM, said discovering how to lower the rate of early birth needs to be one of our highest priorities in contemporary healthcare.

“Being born too early is the single greatest cause of death in young children in Australia and all similar societies,” Prof Newnham said.

“It remains one of the major causes of disability, both in childhood and adulthood. These disabilities include cerebral palsy, deafness, blindness and learning and behavioural problems.”

In June 2018, the Australian Preterm Birth Prevention Alliance was established. The framework, the key practice points, and public health campaign now used with great effect by the Alliance, was first developed in Western Australia as part of WIRF’s WA Preterm Birth Prevention Initiative.

Results from the first year of this program revealed a reduction in the rate of preterm birth across WA by 8% and by 20 per cent in the major tertiary level centre.

WIRF Chief Executive, Deb Portuges, said today’s funding announcement highlighted the Australian Government’s commitment to preventing preterm birth.

“This is a vital sign of support for research and education to improve the developmental outcomes and safety outcomes for the most vulnerable Australians,” she said.

“The incredible work of Professor John Newnham, and the other clinical leaders and researchers involved with the Alliance, is poised to transform practice and save untold heartache for Australian families.

“To see a WA program now inform the national approach to preterm birth prevention is a source of great pride to everyone at WIRF, our supporters, and all Western Australians.”



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Today's funding announcement is part of a broader investment by the Federal Government of \$354 million over the next four years to support women's health, including funding for cervical and breast cancer, endometriosis and reproductive health.

ENDS

Media opportunity:

[Professor John Newnham AM](#) is available for interview and follow-up media comment.

Media contact:

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Background:

The Women and Infants Research Foundation

The Women & Infants Research Foundation is one of Australia's leading medical research institutes dedicated to improving the health of women and infants.

We focus our research and programs across four principal areas: the prevention of preterm birth, gynaecological cancers, women's mental health, and the development of an Artificial Womb. Our research and programs have directly contributed to a number of improved clinical practices and health outcomes.

The Australian Preterm Birth Prevention Alliance is proudly supported by WIRF.