

\$6.8 million boost to expand Australia's world-first Preterm Birth Prevention Program

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The Australian Preterm Birth Prevention Alliance and its partner organisation Women's Healthcare Australasia have welcomed a \$6.8 million Federal Government investment to expand Australia's world-first national program aimed at safely reducing rates of preterm and early term birth.

Announced today by Assistant Minister for Health, The Hon Rebecca White MP, the funding extension through to June 2028 reinforces the Commonwealth's long-standing commitment to improving health outcomes for Australian women, mothers and babies.

Preterm birth remains the leading cause of death and disability in children under five worldwide and may be associated with serious lifelong health and developmental complications, including cerebral palsy, deafness, blindness, and learning and behavioural challenges.

Professor of Obstetrics at The University of Western Australia, and Chair and Founder of the Australian Preterm Birth Prevention Alliance, Professor John Newnham, said the continued investment would enable the *Every Week Counts* program to continue to improve pregnancy outcomes for more women and babies across Australia.

Since the commencement of the National Preterm Birth Prevention Program in 2018, rates of harmful early birth have fallen by 7–10 per cent, equating to approximately 4,000 early births prevented each year. More than 50 hospitals caring collectively for more than half of all annual births, have been participating in the Program, although the education program extends across the entire population.

"Safely reducing early births is about giving babies the safest possible start to life and helping families avoid the trauma and stress that can come with preterm birth," Prof Newnham said.

"This program has shown that supporting maternity services to reliably deliver evidence-based improvements in maternity care can make a profound difference.

"The success of this national program reflects the dedication of thousands of maternity care professionals across Australia, together with strong support from governments, Aboriginal perinatal leaders, consumers and pregnant women and their families," he said.

"This work would not be possible without the support of the federal government and our state and territory partners" he said. "We are excited to be able to continue working with our partners to improve outcomes for Australian families for the next 2 years."

Professor Newnham said the new funding will support the expansion of early pregnancy screening to identify women at risk of preterm preeclampsia across metropolitan, regional and remote maternity services. Preeclampsia accounts for 1 in 7 preterm births and a new screening and treatment regimen has been found to be highly protective, potentially preventing up to 90% of early preterm births associated with preeclampsia.

"Our screening program is designed to identify women at high-risk early in pregnancy and provide timely preventative treatment that can significantly reduce preventable preterm birth, improve outcomes for mothers and babies, and reduce long-term healthcare costs," he said.

“Our goal is to ensure all pregnant women in Australia can access preterm preeclampsia screening before 14 weeks of pregnancy, regardless of where they live.”

CEO of Women’s Healthcare Australasia and Program Co-Chair, Dr Barb Vernon, said strengthening partnerships with First Nations healthcare workers and organisations will remain a key priority of the Program over the next 2 years.

“Strong evidence shows rates of preterm birth among First Nations women can be substantially reduced when Aboriginal women receive culturally safe continuity of care from Aboriginal health professionals working within maternity teams,” she said.

“Supporting public maternity services to deliver culturally safe and trauma-informed care has never been more important. Building trusted relationships with local Aboriginal health organisations and communities will help provide the wraparound support that improves outcomes for mothers, babies and families. We are fortunate to have passionate Aboriginal perinatal clinicians and researchers leading this improvement work at all levels of the Program.”

Professor Newnham said sustaining existing reductions in preterm and early term birth rates would continue to be a major focus of the program as well as seeking to further reduce rates.

“We will continue supporting more women to give birth at the optimal time for their baby, ideally at or after 39 completed weeks of pregnancy, when both mother and baby are healthy and well,” he said.

“We are also supporting participating hospitals to partner with women who have common complexities of pregnancy, such as gestational diabetes, to continue their pregnancy where it is safe to do so.”

A 2025 study published in *The Lancet Obstetrics, Gynaecology & Women’s Health* found Australia has become the first nation in the world to strategically reduce rates of harmful early birth.

Professor Newnham said the program is helping more babies receive a healthier start to life while sparing thousands of families the heartbreak of having a sick or preterm baby in intensive care or special care nursery units.

“For many years Australia has been one of the safest places in the world to have a baby. This program is making it even safer.”

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Media opportunity: Professor John Newnham AM and Dr Barb Vernon are available for follow up media comment.