

Event to canvass a way forward to reduce South Australia's preterm birth rates

Tuesday, 18 February 2020

An event to address South Australia's alarming rates of preterm birth is set to benefit thousands of women, families and infants across the state.

Some 20,000 babies are born in South Australia every year, and approximately 2000 of these babies are born preterm.

Preterm birth is the leading cause of death and disability in children up to five years of age in the developed world including Australia. Every year more than 26,000 Australian babies are born too soon; tragically for some the day they're born is the day they die.

Obstetrician, Gynaecologist and Research Fellow, and Co-Lead of the South Australian chapter of the Australian Preterm Birth Prevention Alliance, Dr Monika Skubisz, said the SA initiative was already in the process of developing key strategies to try and reduce the number of families affected by preterm birth across the state.

"We are updating the South Australian Perinatal Practice Guidelines regarding Preterm Labour and Birth as well as Induction of Labour," Dr Skubisz said.

"These will help to ensure our Obstetricians, GP Obstetricians and midwives are thinking about how each pregnant woman may be at risk of preterm birth and how they can use the most up-to-date evidence to help minimise that risk, safely.

"Smoking remains an important risk factor for preterm birth and we are clearly not doing enough to help mums to cease smoking, both for their health and that of their babies – particularly our Aboriginal mothers. We are looking at ways of increasing support to mums early in their pregnancies to help them cut down or quit smoking to reduce their risk of having a 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 has adopted the key practice points and public health campaign developed by the Women & Infants Research Foundation's WA Preterm Birth Prevention Initiative.

Chair of the Australian Preterm Birth Prevention Alliance and the 2020 Senior Australian of the Year, Professor John Newnham AM, said that until recently it was thought that preterm birth could not be prevented.

"There is no roadmap to follow, but we have shown that the rate of early birth can be safely reduced, improving the lives of many people. We should all be very proud of the fact that Australia is now the first country to have such a national program," Professor Newnham said.

"The structure of the program has been built, the lead persons in each state and territory are in place, what we need to do now is to provide the support needed for national success and that includes financial support. It is now time for prevention of pre-term birth to become a national priority for Australia."

This event will address and inform on the scope of the preterm birth problem in South Australia and will endeavour to recruit key stakeholders to assist in the implementation of the state-based Initiative.

The Australian Preterm Birth Prevention Alliance is proudly supported by the Women & Infants Research Foundation.

Media Opportunity: 2020 Senior Australian of the Year and Alliance Chair, Professor John Newnham AM, and Dr Monika Skubisz, are available for comment. **Media contact:** Richie Hodgson: 0408 128 099, richie@wirf.com.au