

MEDIA RELEASE

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NEW NATIONAL STILLBIRTH PLAN WILL SAVE BABIES' LIVES

The Australian Government has today launched a National Stillbirth Action and Implementation Plan, which aims to reduce stillbirth by 20 per cent in five years.

Stillbirth Foundation Australia today described the plan as pivotal and holistic, with achievable targets, tangible and actionable steps, and accountability to deliver.

“A plan like this will save babies’ lives and reduce the tragic impact on families, which is what we have been campaigning for so hard, for so long,” Stillbirth Foundation Australia CEO, Leigh Brezler said.

In the Foundation’s submission to the Senate Select Committee on Stillbirth Research and Education in June 2018, it stated:

“A strategic and well-considered stillbirth policy response from the Federal Government, in the form of a National Action Plan for Stillbirth, is the Foundation’s principal recommendation.”

“Today the Australian Government and Parliament have delivered on that recommendation,” the Foundation’s CEO said.

“Today is the day that Australia has said enough is enough and decided to work together to drive down the rate of stillbirth, which has been stubbornly and tragically static at six babies per day, for 20 years.

“Stillbirth is the biggest cause of perinatal mortality in Australia. Nearly 2,200 babies are stillborn each year, which is almost twice the national road toll.

“When it comes to stillbirth, we know there are things that can reduce the risk, and these should be acted upon. The rest should be researched. This plan provides a roadmap to do both.”

Already it is estimated that some 20-30 per cent of stillbirths are preventable, if pregnant women are provided with high-quality evidence-based care, and know about actions they can take such as:

- sleeping on their side from 28 weeks
- avoiding alcohol, smoking and second-hand smoke
- seeking immediate medical attention if they notice a change in their baby’s movements.

However, the practices and messages are not getting through to everyone equally, in particular those who are most vulnerable. As the new plan points out today, stillbirth touches the lives of many families, but some groups are more impacted.

In Australia on average, there are 6.8 stillbirths for every 1000 babies born. The figures; however, trend upwards in specific cultural, socio-economic and age groups:

- **Women in very remote areas:** (13.6 per 1,000 births)
- **Women aged under 20:** (13.6 per 1,000 births)
- **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women:** (9.4 stillbirths per 1,000 births)
- **Women in the most socially disadvantaged areas:** (7.6 per 1,000 births)
- **Women in outer regional areas:** (7.5 per 1,000 births)
- **Women from some migrant and refugee groups:** For example, women born in Melanesia, Polynesia, north, central and west Africa and central Asia (≥ 10 per 1,000 births).

“This plan has specific, targeted and coordinated strategies to understand and reduce stillbirth rates among target groups, and that’s the reason we know it will work,” Ms Brezler said.

“We saw this type of effort work with SIDS from about 1986, when governments and the charity sector worked together to reduce the rate by 86 per cent through education programs and research.

“We are also seeing it work in the UK, which has set out to dramatically reduce stillbirth, neonatal and maternal deaths under the banner of *Improving the safety of maternity care in the NHS*.

“It will work here too.”

The Centre of Research Excellence in Stillbirth (Stillbirth CRE) leads a cohesive national program of research and implementation.

Director of the Stillbirth Centre of Research Excellence, Professor Vicki Flenady, welcomed the National Stillbirth Action and Implementation Plan as a monumental step forward in the fight to end preventable stillbirth in Australia.

“The National Stillbirth Action and Implementation Plan highlights a clear shift from silence to action in Australia by delivering a roadmap to reduce stillbirth rates across the country, and particularly among communities most at risk of experiencing a stillbirth.”

“This plan is the culmination of years of work by researchers, advocates and parents committed to stillbirth prevention. We thank the Australian Government and the Parliament for their commitment to this important, life-saving work,” Professor Flenady said.

To find out more about Stillbirth Foundation Australia visit: www.stillbirthfoundation.org.au

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