

MEDIA RELEASE

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RESEARCH GRANTS AWARDED TO TWO STUDIES INVESTIGATING EARLY STILLBIRTH

Leading stillbirth parent advocacy group, Stillbirth Foundation Australia (the Foundation), today announced major funding for two ground-breaking stillbirth research projects.

The first grant will support a world-first study into the endometrial environment in women who experience a preterm birth or preterm stillbirth.

The second grant will support a population study of more than 1.5 million Australian women, examining and identifying pregnancies that have a higher risk of ending in an early stillbirth.

Both projects will support the development of practical prevention measures aimed at ending preventable stillbirths.

The Foundation's CEO, Leigh Brezler, said this year's grants support research into early stillbirth (20-28 weeks), which accounts for the highest proportion of stillbirths and infant deaths in Australia each year.

"68% of all stillbirths and 64% of all neonatal deaths occur before 28 weeks. While we have seen the rate of stillbirth after 28 weeks decline from 3.5 per 1000 to 2.2 per 1000 since 1999, the rate of early stillbirth and neonatal death has remained stubbornly high," Ms Brezler said.

"The focus of these grants will be to gain a deeper understanding into the contributing factors and risk profiles of pregnancies that end in early stillbirth - both at population and cellular levels."

The Foundation has awarded \$84,000 to Dr Miranda Davies-Tuck and her multi-disciplinary team from the Ritchie Centre at the Hudson Institute of Medical Research.

This first of its kind study on the endometrial environment in women who experience a preterm birth or preterm stillbirth will use a novel, minimally invasive sampling of menstrual fluid to shine a light on this previously hidden process.

"Preventing stillbirths in the preterm period, when the majority of stillbirths occur, is a challenge," Dr Miranda Davies-Tuck said.

"Most research to date focusses on the placenta and ignores the critical steps that occur prior to the placenta forming, those that occur at the time of conception."

This work will uncover novel early drivers of stillbirth and possible early targets for therapies to optimise the implantation microenvironment or support fetal development.

This study will also reveal the foundation of placental issues, potentially opening the door to completely new directions in stillbirth research and prevention.

\$105,000 has been awarded to Dr Ibinabo Ibiebele of the Kolling Institute of Medical Research at the University of Sydney for a study into the causes, risk factors and subsequent pregnancy outcomes of early stillbirth in New South Wales.

This study will produce valuable baseline information about trends in early stillbirth and infant death to help monitor progress with prevention measures.

The information will help to target interventions to higher stillbirth risk communities and help doctors caring for pregnant women to identify those at increased risk.

“Our study will pinpoint risk factors to identify pregnancies that have a higher risk of ending in an early stillbirth and determine whether women who have a previous early stillbirth are at risk of further complications in her next pregnancy,” Dr Ibiebele said.

Ms Brezler acknowledged the efforts of the Foundation’s supporters in making these grants possible, especially during these uncertain times.

“This research is only possible because of the extraordinary efforts of the Foundation’s supporters, who give up their time to raise funds to invest into research priorities, especially during this difficult and uncertain year for so many,” she said.

“We are incredibly grateful to our supporters, from bereaved parents to their wider circles of friends, family and colleagues, who devote their time, effort and money to stop stillbirth from happening to others.

“We also acknowledge and appreciate all of the researchers who share our vision of ending preventable stillbirths and supporting bereaved families who are impacted by this tragedy.”

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

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