

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

*Wednesday, 15 December 2021*

### **THREE NEW APPROACHES FUNDED TO PREVENT STILLBIRTH AND HELP FAMILIES**

Three ground-breaking stillbirth research projects will support research into stillbirth prevention and provide better support for parents who have already endured one.

Leading stillbirth advocacy group, Stillbirth Foundation Australia (the Foundation), together with the Stillbirth Centre of Research Excellence, proudly announced the major funding today.

“Six babies per day die due to stillbirth, and these grants – largely funded by people trying to stop the same thing that happened to them, happening to others – will support research to help,” Foundation CEO, Leigh Brezler said. The grants will:

- **Support a novel ultrasound perfusion tool to monitor placental blood flow to predict fetal compromise and babies at risk of stillbirth.**
- **Create a resource to improve the capacity of researchers and bereaved parents to co-design and translate research together.**
- **Understand the range of services available across Australia to parents who become pregnant after a stillbirth.**

“Each of these projects support the Foundation’s mission to reduce the incidence and impact of stillbirth,” Ms Brezler said.

#### **The Foundation has awarded \$42,500 to Professor Alec Welsh and his research team at the UNSW Sydney and the Royal Hospital for Women, Sydney.**

This study uses non-invasive ultrasound to monitor placental blood flow, and will test its reliability in evaluating fetal wellbeing, which may help identify babies under stress and at risk of stillbirth.

“The placenta is an extremely important organ in fetal development and there is so much more we can learn about it,” Ms Brezler said.

“Professor Welsh and his team have developed a tool to unlock some of that mystery with a common ultrasound machine.”

#### **Professor Welsh is a senior clinician dealing with the devastating consequences of stillbirth**

“As a researcher with a specific interest in imaging of the fetus and placenta, I am delighted to receive this funding to help us understand the underlying causes of stillbirth,” Professor Welsh said.

“Although we have long known that blood flow changes are present in these pregnancies, we haven’t until now had a tool to measure blood flow within the fetus and placenta.

“Our validated blood flow tool will be applied to evaluation of late pregnancy for the first time.

“By identifying those pregnancies at risk, we hope that we will eventually be able to have a dramatic impact upon the incidence of stillbirth.”

**\$19,700 has been awarded to Dr Christine Andrews to help researchers and bereaved parents to co-design and translate research together by creating a research guide for bereaved parents.**

“Engaging bereaved parents in stillbirth research in a meaningful way is essential to drive improvements in care and outcomes,” Dr Andrews said.

“Bereaved parents offer unique and valuable insights as research is prioritised, conducted, and translated, helping to ensure research quality and relevance.

“To engage more effectively with bereaved parents in stillbirth research activities, providing appropriate support to enable their contribution is critically important.”

**A third grant of \$47,800 has been awarded to Dr Siobhan Loughnan for her project on caring for parents in a subsequent pregnancy after stillbirth, which will include a survey of the availability of care after loss services across Australia and a social return on investment analysis.**

“Pregnancy following stillbirth or neonatal death is a daunting prospect for many parents who have previously experienced the death of their baby, with standard antenatal care unlikely to meet the emotional and medical needs of parents.” Dr Loughnan said.

“With this study we will gain a better understanding of the maternity care services available in Australia to parents during a subsequent pregnancy and listen to parents about what aspects of care are most important to them. We are grateful to the Foundation for this opportunity.”

**Ms Brezler acknowledged the efforts of the Foundation’s donors in making these grants possible and thanks them for their continued support.**

“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](http://www.stillbirthfoundation.org.au)

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