



Gidget Foundation Australia launches free national telehealth program, *Start Talking*, for families experiencing perinatal depression and anxiety

Wednesday 18 April 2018: Gidget Foundation Australia launches its national *'Start Talking'* telehealth program providing free specialist perinatal psychologist support for families experiencing emotional distress during pregnancy and early parenthood this April. The new program, available via video call, substantially improves equity of access to perinatal mental health treatment services for people in regional, rural and remote locations across Australia.

The initiative is primarily targeted at families who may otherwise struggle to receive timely, appropriate and supportive care for perinatal depression and anxiety. With a GP-referred Mental Health Plan, expectant and new mums and dads can now receive up to seven free video-call counselling sessions with a specially-trained perinatal psychologist that can be accessed from anywhere in the country with internet.

Across Australia, 1 in 5 new mums and 1 in 10 new dads suffer from perinatal depression and anxiety (PNDA). That's almost 100,000 expecting and new parents each year.

"We have launched our Start Talking Telehealth service to enhance ease of access to, and increase choice in, perinatal mental health services across Australia," explained Arabella Gibson, CEO of Gidget Foundation Australia. *"People living in regional, rural and remote Australia will no longer experience the inconvenience, time and expense of having to travel significant distances simply to access these services. For some patients, just leaving their home to seek treatment is not possible."*

The Gidget Foundation has recruited a number of psychologists to facilitate this initiative who are supervised by perinatal psychiatrist, Professor Bryanne Barnett AM. The dedicated team of psychologists operate remotely using tablets or computers to conduct the one-hour video call sessions. The national *Start Talking* telehealth program offers seven free counselling sessions over the period of 12 months.

"Tech has become such a big part of our lives. We've found that when people use the video call option, it has a disinhibiting effect, meaning that they find it easier to 'open up'. Recent evidence also shows that when in expert hands, video counselling is just as effective as being face-to-face," explained Chris Barnes, Clinical Psychologist at Gidget Foundation Australia.

Federal Minister for Health, Greg Hunt, put his support behind the program. *"The moment of having a new baby, the path of pregnancy and the months afterwards can be one of the great joys, perhaps the greatest of all joys in life. For so many parents, it can be a time of surprising anxiety and depression, something which many do not expect and about which some feel guilt, and there's no reason to feel that guilt. But, this is something that's real and it's vital that we acknowledge it. I want to commend the Gidget Foundation. You are honouring her life, taking the worst of circumstances and making something profound and beautiful from it. So, to all of you involved, I thank you and I'm delighted to officially launch the Gidget Foundation Start Talking telehealth initiative."*

In addition, Deputy Premier and Minister for Regional NSW, John Barilaro, and Minister for Mental Health NSW Tanya Davies today announced \$270,000 in funding for the program.

"The Start Talking program is so important because we know families in remote areas don't always have the same access to psychological counselling as those in the cities," explained John Barilaro, NSW Deputy Premier.



“Many parents are unaware of the risk of developing perinatal depression and anxiety, so it is reassuring there are psychological counselling services available, if required, no matter where you live.”

NSW Minister for Mental Health, Tanya Davies added: *“This program will give parents across the state access to psychological support when they need it most and could prevent more serious mental health issues requiring specialist perinatal and infant mental health services. Across Australia up to one in five new mums and one in 10 new dads may experience symptoms of PNDA – which is almost 100,000 expectant and new parents each year.”*

Dr Vijay Roach, Chairman of Gidget Foundation Australia said: *“The care of pregnant women and their families goes beyond blood pressure, birth and breastfeeding. We must recognise the inherent value of emotional wellbeing and make mental health care for pregnant women and all parents accessible, affordable and universal. There is no health without mental health. By supporting the emotional health of pregnant women and their partners we are helping to grow resilient parents, happier children and stronger communities. Gidget Foundation Australia supports the provision of accessible, affordable and universal mental health care for all pregnant Australian women and their families.”*

‘Gidget’ was the nickname of a vibrant young mother who took her own life while suffering from unrecognised postnatal depression. She hid her suffering from even her loving family and friends. Gidget’s devastating loss inspired her sisters and friends to establish a foundation in her name and, crucially devote their lives to helping families in need of emotional support. Today, the Gidget Foundation assists thousands of expectant parents and their families each year.

The program is accompanied by television advertisements on all free-to-air networks, FOXTEL and cinemas nationally. Educational advertisements will also air on GP patient waiting room screens across the country.

The TVC, stills and vision from the official media launch are available from 1pm, Wednesday 18 April [here](#).

Gidget Foundation Australia

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About Gidget Foundation Australia

Gidget Foundation Australia is a national not for profit organisation. It exists to promote emotional wellbeing and to raise awareness of perinatal depression and anxiety amongst expectant and new parents, their families, their health providers and the wider community to ensure that those in need receive timely, appropriate and supportive care. Gidget Foundation Australia’s programs include:

- Gidget Emotional Wellbeing Program, early intervention screening at hospitals
- Gidget House model of care, providing 10 free face to face psychological support sessions for families experiencing emotional distress during pregnancy and early parenthood
- Gidget Start Talking Telehealth Program, providing 7 free video call psychological counselling sessions for families experiencing emotional distress during pregnancy and early parenthood



- Education and awareness programs for health professionals and the community
- Advocacy and active memberships of professional networks
- Research and contribution to mainstream and professional publications
- Development and distribution of resources