

## Look out for Dad this International Fathers' Mental Health Day

- **One in ten fathers experience perinatal depression and anxiety, yet half of new fathers do not seek support**
- **Almost half of first-time dads believe postnatal depression and anxiety is a sign of weakness**
- **This International Fathers' Mental Health Day (21 June), Gidget Foundation Australia is launching a new video to support dads experiencing PNDA across the country**
- **The first screening will be officiated by the Honourable John Barilaro MP, NSW Deputy Premier, Minister for Regional NSW, Industry & Trade and the Honourable Bronnie Taylor MLC, NSW Minister for Mental Health, Regional Youth and Women**

**EMBARGO - 21 June:** This International Fathers' Mental Health Day (21 June), it's time to focus our attention to all the dads experiencing perinatal depression and anxiety (PNDA). Becoming a dad is a unique and special time but is also a time of great change. The stigma surrounding men's mental health can prevent dads from seeking help, with almost half (43%) of first-time dads believing postnatal depression and anxiety is a sign of weakness<sup>1</sup>.

All expectant and new parents have their good days and bad days, but when bad days start to out-number the good, there may be more to it. Around 10% of fathers experience mental health problems in the first year, following the birth of their child and 57% of first-time dads admit to experiencing significantly increased stress levels<sup>1</sup>.

Although suicide is the biggest killer of men under 45<sup>2</sup>, over half (56%) of new fathers do not seek support during stressful times. Since men are three times more likely to take their own lives<sup>3</sup>, Gidget Foundation Australia is urging dads who are feeling overwhelmed, anxious or depressed to reach out for help.

Perinatal depression and anxiety are medical conditions diagnosed when a parent experiences strong negative emotions and physical issues for two weeks or more, that hinder their ability to function in their usual way.

This International Fathers' Mental Health Day, Gidget Foundation Australia is hosting a screening of a new awareness video to support dads experiencing PNDA across the country.

NSW Deputy Premier, Minister for Regional NSW, Industry & Trade, The Honourable John Barilaro MP is an advocate of Gidget Foundation Australia and champion for being open about his personal experiences with PNDA. "There's no rule book to being a parent, each person's journey is personal and unique. When my wife and I experienced two miscarriages we avoided talking about it for a long time.

"As a husband, you struggle but you don't want to show weakness in front of your family or in front of your peers, so you sort of pretend and move on. This is the opposite of what you should be doing. It's so important to reach out to somebody and breakdown those barriers and obstacles that prevent us from speaking openly about how we feel," Mr Barilaro says.

International Fathers' Mental Health Day (IFMHD) is an annual global event first launched in 2016, which gives voice to issues unique to men and non-birthing partners as they transition to parenthood.

The Honourable Bronnie Taylor MLC, NSW Minister for Mental Health, Regional Youth and Women says "Perinatal depression and anxiety can creep up on new dads and very quickly become overwhelming.

"We know blokes can often find it hard to put their hand up when they are struggling, but the truth is there is nothing braver than asking for help.

“We want them to know that its ok to not be ok and that there is help at hand specifically for men, because being a dad is one of the toughest jobs going, she says.”

General Practitioner Dr David Moore explains what this can mean for dads. “For men, symptoms of perinatal depression and anxiety can present differently than in women, although there are some similarities. They include the inability to enjoy activities like they used to, being less able to concentrate, make decisions or get things done.”

PNDA can affect fathers from all socioeconomic backgrounds and cultures, as they adjust to changes in their lives and the additional pressures. For some fathers, the expectation to provide financial stability for their family can seem overwhelming. The symptoms of depression or anxiety can lead to a sense of disappointment - like they've let themselves or others down.

Arabella Gibson, CEO of Gidget Foundation Australia says, “A range of factors can contribute to fathers developing PNDA. For some, it may appear to be biological, for others it's a personal or family history of anxiety and depression or even social circumstances can trigger these feelings.

“At Gidget Foundation Australia we're here to support both dads and mums throughout their parenting journey and know how important it is to ensure that people have a community they can rely on and reach out to when they need to,” Ms Gibson says.

According to Dr David Moore, the good news is that fathers do benefit from receiving professional help and they can recover. “It's important to seek guidance as soon as possible. Fathers who are experiencing parenthood adjustment issues can benefit from the support from a professional who listens and understands.”

This International Father's Mental Health, Gidget Foundation Australia is encouraging dads to reach out for emotional support to understand what is happening to them, to feel well again and in turn be able to enjoy time with their children and partner. Dads are encouraged to watch their new video '**Understanding Perinatal Depression and Anxiety for Dads**' via the Gidget Foundation Australia website and contact their GP to start a mental health plan if they need some extra support.

### **About Gidget House**

Gidget House at Westmead Private Hospital joins other NSW Gidget House services in Randwick at Karitane, Merrylands at Stockland, North Sydney, Manly at Royal Far West, North Sydney at the Mater Hospital, St Leonards at North Shore Private Hospital and Shellharbour at Stockland Shellharbour, as well as at Tresillian family care centres in Coffs Harbour, Dubbo, Queanbeyan, Taree and Wagga Wagga. Interstate, Gidget Foundation Australia have opened Gidget House's in Toowoomba at St Vincent's Hospital (QLD) and Victoria's first Gidget House in Clayton at Jean Hailes (VIC).

### **About Gidget Foundation Australia**

Previously known as postnatal depression, perinatal anxiety and depression during pregnancy and early parenthood (the perinatal period) affects almost 100,000 Australians each year, equating to 1 in 5 new mums and 1 in 10 new dads. Gidget is the nickname of a vibrant young mother from Sydney who took her own life while suffering from unrecognised postnatal depression. She hid her suffering even from her loving family and friends. They created the Gidget Foundation, determined that what happened to Gidget would not happen to others.

Today, Gidget Foundation Australia assists thousands of expectant parents and their families each year and provides psychological services to [parents in need](#) through its [Gidget House](#) face-to-face services (at an expanding number of locations), its [Start Talking](#) telehealth program and Emotional Wellbeing antenatal screening programs conducted through participating hospitals.

Gidget Foundation Australia is a not-for-profit organisation, supported by the community, the corporate sector, the medical profession, the NSW and Commonwealth Governments, and the media.

**About the citations**

- 1) <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/docs/default-source/research-project-files/bw0313-beyondblue-healthy-dads-full-report.pdf>
- 2) <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/life-expectancy-death/deaths-in-australia/contents/leading-causes-of-death>
- 3) Patton GC, Coffey C, Posterino M, Carlin JB, Bowes G: Life events and early onset depression: cause or consequence? *Psychological Medicine* 2003, 33(7):1203-1210

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