

## CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

# The Perinatal Mental Health and Wellness Project: Improving perinatal mental health outcomes by working together across sectors

1<sup>st</sup> Asia Pacific Conference on Integrated Care, Brisbane, 06-08 Nov 2017

Emily Louise Herde

Queensland Centre for Perinatal and Infant Mental Health, Children's Health Queensland, Australia

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This paper reports on the Perinatal Mental Health and Wellness Project which aimed to develop and evaluate a collaborative model for mental health promotion, illness prevention and early intervention in the perinatal period. The project took on a place-based action research approach, developing and trialling the model with expectant parents (n=537) engaged with Redcliffe Hospital Maternity Services in the Metro North Hospital and Health Service in Queensland, Australia, from 2015 – 2017.

In Australia, at least 16% of expecting and new mothers and 10% of expecting and new fathers experience depression and/or anxiety to a clinically significant degree<sup>1</sup>. Supporting and protecting the mental health and emotional wellbeing of expectant and new parents not only benefits the parents but has lifelong benefits for the infant, reducing demand for social and health services across the lifespan.

Based on this evidence and the identified need for more effective models of promotion, prevention and early intervention in perinatal mental health, a collaborative project was developed. The project was jointly funded by the Queensland Mental Health Commission and the Statewide Maternity and Neonatal Clinical Network, Clinical Excellence Division, with in-kind support from participating organisations including Children's Health Queensland Hospital and Health Service, Metro North Hospital and Health Service, Hope's Room Incorporated, and Women's Health Queensland Wide.

A key component of the model included closer collaboration among public health services, non-government services and peer-led services, to provide information and resources to support the emotional health and wellbeing of expectant and new parents and their infants and families. This was achieved by the establishment of new relationships between project partner organisations and the First 5 Forever Program, Moreton Bay Regional Council, Playgroup Queensland and Brisbane North Primary Health Network, which resulted in their collaborative contribution to the model of service.

Project findings support the premise that partnerships and collaborations have the benefit of bringing together varied skills and resources for more successful outcomes. Collaborative partnerships require a clear purpose, add value to the work of partners and have a bigger

impact than if partners were working alone. Our project was mindful of these factors in creating a successful collaboration<sup>3</sup>.

Feedback received from members of the collaboration indicates that the establishment and strengthening of relationships has resulted in increased connectedness of the community sector with the health sector, co-production and co-branding of resources, review and improvement to referral processes and increased opportunities to engage with fathers which otherwise would have been limited.

Cross-sectoral collaboration, especially the initial building of relationships, requires considerable time and effort. While such an innovative project presented challenges at many levels, evaluation has been overwhelmingly positive and the model is seen as holding considerable promise for implementation in other areas.

#### References:

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**Keywords:** collaboration; perinatal mental health; integrated care

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