

# media release

Embargoed



## **Medibank and Monash University to support healthier pregnancies**

Medibank and Monash University's leading experts on reproductive women's health, Professor Helena Teede and Dr Cheryce Harrison, have today announced a partnership to support women with a pre-conception to post-partum healthy weight program trial.

Professor Teede and Dr Harrison have recently led and contributed to two ground-breaking studies; one which revealed around 50 per cent of women gain too much weight during pregnancy, while 25 per cent gain too little weight, which can cause adverse outcomes such as premature births; and another which showed that healthy lifestyle interventions can protect against weight-related pregnancy complications.

The studies confirm Medibank's own data from 19,000 births in 2016, which showed an increasing trend of pregnancy-related adverse health outcomes and gestational diabetes in one out of every ten pregnancies.

Monash University's Dr Cheryce Harrison said the studies have paved the way for the first of its kind Australian trial with Medibank.

"We have enough studies that show the effectiveness and importance of leading a healthy lifestyle through pregnancy. It's now vital that we put this knowledge into practice to understand how it can benefit women in the community," she said.

Medibank's Head of Health Outcomes, Dr Catherine Keating, said the focus of the new Medibank Monash University program will be to provide much greater support to women before and during pregnancy to help them achieve a healthy pregnancy and baby.

"As a mother of two young daughters, I remember people offering – sometimes uninvited – advice about my body and how to approach pregnancy. The problem is that some suggestions, such as being encouraged to 'eat for two', may increase the risk of pregnancy complications," she said.

"Weight is a sensitive topic and a source of anxiety for many women. This will be respected in Medibank's and Monash Universities new program, which will be free and range from face to face, online, and phone support tailored to the needs of each voluntary participant.

"The new trial and program will seek input from 1000s of Medibank members to shape how we offer the support. Voluntary participants in the main trial will receive evidence-based dietary advice and support to stay physically active to maintain a healthy weight preconception, during pregnancy and

after birth. Other preconception support will include screening for fertility risks and other pregnancy risks, such as smoking, alcohol and inadequate folate intake.”

“This support is currently not part of standard antenatal care offered,” said Dr Keating.

Professor Helena Teede said she was thrilled to see our research being applied through the program to benefit Australian women.

“It is great to partner with Medibank for this trial, particularly because preconception populations are very difficult to identify and support. This research will allow us to better understand optimal and preferred delivery methods to support healthy lifestyles in a community setting.”

Work on the trial has recently commenced and will run over the next three years.

The trial will be run through the Monash Centre for Health Research and Implementation, which includes world leaders in women's health. The team focus on research and translation of new evidence directly into practice to benefit our community.

### **Media enquiries**

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### **Notes to editors:**

Once pregnant, 50% of women have excessive gestational weight gain (GWG) and 65% retain weight postpartum.

Each excess kilo gained is linked to a 10% increase in adverse maternal and neonatal outcomes.

Expected trial outcomes will include improved preconception health behaviours, adherence to international gestational weight gain recommendations in pregnancy, reduced pregnancy complications (GDM, caesarean rates and neonatal admissions) and fewer women with postpartum weight retention.