

INFANT

– A research impact case study

Supporting families from the start of life

The first 1000 days – the period between conception and a child's second birthday – are critical for establishing lifestyle behaviours that will determine a person's health across their lives. This includes their risk of becoming overweight or obese.



One in five Australian children are overweight or obese by age two. This has lifelong health and economic consequences for children and adults. The main influencers of children's health behaviours in their first year of life are the family, home environment, and health services.

INFANT - supporting healthy eating and active play from the start of life.

INFANT is based on scientific evidence and is designed to help parents give their babies the best possible start to life, through promoting healthy eating and physical activity behaviours for themselves and their children.

INFANT consists of four face-to-face group sessions and a comprehensive mobile phone app. Sessions are delivered by trained facilitators including Maternal and Child Health Nurses, Dietitians, and Health Promotion Officers. Parents participating in **INFANT** support each other through shared experiences, tips and strategies.

Offering **INFANT** as routine practice within local health services is low cost and maximises the opportunity to support families at this critical time of their infant's life.

The research findings - it works.

A randomised controlled trial showed that **INFANT** had positive effects on a range of parents' and children's health behaviours with sustained benefits at 5 years of age:

- **at 18 months** – Children watched less television, consumed fewer sweet snacks and had improved dietary quality. Children of younger/less educated mothers drank more water and ate more vegetables.
- **at 3.5 and 5 years** – Children consumed more fruit and vegetables and more water at 3.5 years of age and less sugar-sweetened beverages at 5 years. At both ages children consumed less sweet snacks and viewed less TV (approaching significance).

“You’re learning so much as a new mum, something is different each week. I love having sessions like this, any chance to learn because there is so much conflicting information out there.”

- *INFANT* Parent



INFANT was also shown to improve mothers’ knowledge and confidence in feeding their children as well as their own diet, with high levels of engagement with the program (68% attended most sessions).

Early, small-scale translation of the program provided proof of concept of the feasibility of implementing the program in routine practice, and insights for future community translation.

What impact has INFANT had?

As a result of the successful trial and proof of concept of small scale translation, **INFANT** has been recommended in key state and national health policies including:

- The Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan (2019-2023)
- The 2019 consensus statement for obesity prevention, *A Healthier Start for Victorians*, released by VicHealth’s Healthy Eating and Active Living (HEAL) roundtable.
- The Australian Institute of Family Studies guidebook on evidence based programs.

From 2020, **INFANT** is available to all Victorian local governments. Participating organisations have access to online facilitator training, a virtual community of practice and all **INFANT** resources. Offering **INFANT** as routine practice within local health services maximises the opportunity to support families at this critical time of their infant’s life.

****INFANT** is delivered in partnership with VicHealth, Victorian Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV), Victorian Aboriginal Controlled Community Health Organisation (VACCHO), Raising Children’s Network (RCN), Western Alliance, City of Whittlesea, Sunraysia Community Health Service, The University of Sydney, La Trobe University.*

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