

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 affected by overweight or obesity 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 fewer 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 proved the feasibility for implementation of the program in routine practice, and provided 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:

- *Healthy Kids, healthy futures*, five-year action plan
- *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** has been 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.

Number of health professionals trained in INFANT – as at Sept 2022, 533 participants from 69 LGAs have completed the training.

Number of LGAs implementing INFANT – as at Sept 2022, 30 of the 79 LGAs in Victoria are implementing INFANT.

**INFANT is delivered in partnership with VicHealth, Victorian Department of Health, 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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Information current at Sept 2022



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