

Media Release

Gidget Foundation Australia urges parents to *Start Talking* this PNDA Awareness Week, 11 - 17 November 2018

Gidget Foundation Australia urges all Australians, especially new and expectant parents, to '*Start Talking*' this November in an effort to break down the stigma surrounding perinatal depression and anxiety (PNDA). This call to action coincides with Perinatal Depression and Anxiety Awareness Week (PNDA Awareness Week), 11-17 November, which aims to drive awareness of an illness that affects around 100,000 Australians every year.

The Gidget Foundation is a national not-for-profit organisation offering free support services to families suffering emotional distress throughout pregnancy and the early stages of parenting. The Foundation's mission is to raise awareness and knowledge of the importance of emotional wellbeing as well as providing treatment services.

The Foundation's latest service, the national '*Start Talking*' telehealth program which launched in April this year, provides 10 free specialist perinatal psychology sessions for families experiencing PNDA. The new program, available via video call, substantially improves equity of access to perinatal mental health treatment services for people in regional, rural and remote locations across Australia.

Father of five, Obstetrician, and Chairman of Gidget Foundation Australia, Dr Vijay Roach, firmly believes a major step in breaking the stigma surrounding PNDA is to begin a conversation and *Start Talking*.

"Pregnancy and the first year of parenthood (the perinatal period) can be a uniquely special time. It is also a time of great adjustment and the impact is often underestimated in our society. Our community needs to understand these challenges and support pregnant women and new parents in the acknowledgement of their emotional health, encouraging them to seek help when they are feeling anxious or down," Dr Roach said.

The Gidget Foundation has recruited psychologists to further facilitate this initiative who are supervised by perinatal psychiatrist, Professor Bryanne Barnett AM. The dedicated team of psychologists operate remotely using tablets or computers to conduct the one-hour video call sessions. The national *Start Talking* telehealth program offers 10 free counselling sessions over the period of 12 months.

"Tech has become such a big part of our lives. We've found that when people use the video call option, it has a disinhibiting effect, meaning that they find it easier to 'open up'. Recent evidence also shows that when in expert hands, video counselling is just as effective as being face-to-face," explained Chris Barnes, Clinical Psychologist at Gidget Foundation Australia.

While much of the focus is often placed on the health of the child during pregnancy, and after birth, it is equally important that, as a community, we address the emotional wellbeing of the parents as well. During PNDA Awareness Week, the Gidget Foundation strongly encourages the community to reach out to loved ones and ask a simple question.

Chloe Shorten reflected on the Foundation's message and said: *"Too many people still don't ask for help. Too many people still suffer in silence. For all we've done, for how far we've come, there is still a lingering stigma. And that's why it's so important that we keep talking.*

"The more people know about the importance of emotional wellbeing for expecting and new mothers – the better. The more people know about the support that's available – the better. And the more people know they aren't alone – the better. The conversations we are having this week are part of that."

'Gidget' was the nickname of a vibrant young mother who took her own life while suffering postnatal depression. She hid her suffering from even her loving family and friends. They established the Gidget Foundation in her memory, determined that what happened to Gidget would not happen to others.

Today, the Gidget Foundation assists thousands of expectant parents and their families each year.

CEO of Gidget Foundation Australia, Arabella Gibson, said: *"The foundation provides free psychological counselling services face to face at Gidget House and seven free video calls via the start talking program, as well as the Gidget Emotional Wellbeing Screening Program for pregnant women in hospitals. The Foundation also trains health professionals, supports research, develops resources and has established workplace awareness programs."*

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For further information, images, or an interview please contact Tonic PR:

Trudy Dear I trudy@tonicpr.com.au I 0449 513 557

Belinda Sieben I belinda@tonicpr.com.au I 04 432 474 558

About Gidget Foundation Australia

Gidget Foundation Australia is a national not for profit organisation. It exists to promote emotional wellbeing and to raise awareness of perinatal depression and anxiety amongst expectant and new parents, their families, their health providers and the wider community to ensure that those in need receive timely, appropriate and supportive care. Gidget Foundation Australia's programs include:

- Gidget Emotional Wellbeing Program, early intervention screening at hospitals
- Gidget House model of care, providing 10 free face to face psychological support sessions for families experiencing emotional distress during pregnancy and early parenthood
- Gidget Start Talking Telehealth Program, providing 10 free video call psychological counselling sessions for families experiencing emotional distress during pregnancy and early parenthood
- Education and awareness programs for health professionals and the community
- Advocacy and active memberships of professional networks
- Research and contribution to mainstream and professional publications
- Development and distribution of resources

Gidget Foundation Australia

gidgetfoundation.org.au I 1300 851 758 I contact@gidgetfoundation.org.au

Instagram [@gidgetfoundation](https://www.instagram.com/gidgetfoundation) I facebook.com/GidgetFoundation I twitter.com/GidgetFoundation