

Media Release - 22 May 2019

**Appointment of Mr Allan Sparkes CV,OAM, VA, FRSN
and Dr Kathryn Austin B.Pharm B.Med FRANZCOG CMFM GAICD
to the Board of Gidget Foundation Australia**

Gidget Foundation Australia has today announced the appointment of two new Directors, Allan Sparkes and Kathryn Austin, to the Board, effective immediately. Mr Sparkes and Dr Austin join recently appointed Chairperson, Kara Nicholls, as independent Non-executive Directors advocating for perinatal mental health awareness, support and services.

Mr Sparkes is a Deputy Commissioner of the Mental Health Commission of NSW and one of Australia's most highly decorated citizens. As the only Australian to be awarded the Cross of Valour and the Commendation for Brave Conduct, Mr Sparkes also holds the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) for service to Mental Health Organisations and the Community and the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal. Having a lived experience of trauma related mental illnesses and recovery, Mr Sparkes is a passionate advocate for proactive approaches and greater education relating to the physiological risks being faced by people of all ages in today's society. Mr Sparkes is also a Fellow of the Royal Society of NSW, the Chairman of the National Police Bravery Awards Committee, a member of the NSW Police Mental Health Intervention Team, Patron of the Thomas Kelly Youth Foundation, Vice Patron of the Australian Bravery Association and an Ambassador for Australia Day, beyondblue, and Kookaburra Kids.

Of his appointment to the Board, Mr Sparkes said, "I am both deeply honoured and proud to join the Gidget Foundation. It is one of those great Foundations who have their sleeves rolled up, boots on the ground and sweat dripping from their brow to provide awareness, education and support to those who need it.

"The beauty of the Gidget Foundation is that together we can empower new parents and provide education about the potential risks to their mental health, how to overcome or manage those risks and then support new parents to rebuild their emotional wellbeing - not only for their futures but also for the future of their children."

Dr. Kathryn Austin is an Obstetrician Gynaecologist who is a Maternal Fetal Medicine Sub-Specialist. Prior to embarking upon a career in medicine she worked as a pharmacist in regional hospital and community pharmacy and as a counsellor with the medication's in pregnancy information service 'Mothersafe'. Kathryn has been a director of the Board for the state and federal Australian Medical Association (AMA). She is currently on the AMA NSW Council and the AMA NSW Charitable Foundation Advisory Board. Kathryn has been involved with various government and professional body committees that oversee quality healthcare, medical leadership and women's health.

Dr Kathryn Austin said of joining the Gidget Foundation, "I am delighted to become a part of such an inspiring and talented Board and organisational team that works tirelessly to develop and expand awareness and provision perinatal mental health services for all in need. I forward with great anticipation to the journey that awaits me. I am honoured to become a part of this tremendous organisation."

Chairperson of Gidget Foundation Australia, Kara Nicholls, who is also Group Company Secretary at CBA, said of the new appointments, "We are delighted to have Kathryn and Allan join the Board. At the Gidget Foundation, our mission is to promote the importance of emotional wellbeing amongst expectant and new parents, their healthcare providers and the community to ensure that those in need receive timely, appropriate and supportive care.

"For both Kathryn and Allan, their incredible breadth of skills and understanding of humanity is key. Kathryn's clinical experience in complex maternal medicine will further complement the Board's clinical capabilities. Allan's first hand



lived experience and great passion for both sound and resilient mental health is paramount. I speak on behalf of all Directors when I say that we are genuinely honoured to be in their company.”

-ENDS-

About Gidget Foundation Australia

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

The organisation leverages its impact and strengthens its outcomes by working collaboratively with many professionals who support vulnerable parents. All funds raised are directed to its programs, which include:

- Gidget Emotional Wellbeing Screening Program at hospitals
- Gidget House, providing 10 free face to face psychological support sessions for families experiencing emotional distress during pregnancy and early parenthood
- Start Talking, providing 10 free video call psychological support sessions nationally 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

About Perinatal Depression and Anxiety (PNDA)

Perinatal depression and anxiety and the difficulties of early parenting affects 20% or 1 in 5 new mothers and 10% or 1 in 10 new fathers who will experience some degree of clinically diagnosable mental health illness in association with pregnancy or early parenthood. This equates to over 100,000 new parents every year. Over 50% of new parents will experience adjustment disorders. The cost to the workplace, the family and the community is significant and poorly recognised. Suicide remains the leading cause of maternal death.

Gidget Foundation Australia

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