

Focus on New Fathers program

What is the Focus on New Fathers program?

Healthy child development starts early and dads have an important part to play.

NSW Health is piloting the Focus on New Fathers program (FoNF) to offer support to new dads and dads-to-be in four local health districts (LHDs) – Northern NSW, Murrumbidgee, Northern Sydney and Western Sydney.

Focus on New Fathers (FoNF) provides a free text message-based service called SMS4dads.

Once registered, new dads and dads-to-be will receive text messages from SMS4dads with practical tips, tools and links to help them connect with their baby and partner.

NSW Health and SMS4dads at the University of Newcastle have partnered to launch the pilot program. It is funded by the Commonwealth Government under the Health Innovation Fund.

Is the Focus on New Fathers program being evaluated?

Yes. NSW Health has engaged the Parenting Research Centre to evaluate the program to find out how well the pilot has worked. New dads and dads-to-be who register for the program will be asked if they would like to participate in the evaluation. This could be by survey, interview or as part of a focus group.

New dads and dads-to-be who agree to participate in the evaluation will be asked about their experience of receiving the messages and being referred to other services, if this occurred.

Is the service free? Are there any hidden costs?

No, this is a free text message-based service being delivered by NSW Health in partnership with the University of Newcastle (who manage SMS4dads).

Note: Dads are responsible for paying their mobile phone bills.

Who will benefit from registering?

Being a dad is rewarding, but at times challenging and stressful.

The Focus on New Fathers program aims to help new dads and dads-to-be feel confident and supported in their role as a parent.

The text messages are designed to help fathers understand and connect with their baby, support their partner, and monitor their own wellbeing.

How do the text messages help?

The messages:

- are timed to be appropriate to the developmental stage of the baby
- help dad understand how their baby is developing
- provide practical tools, tips and links to reliable, credible online health information and services
- share tips about how their baby is developing, how to get along with their partner and stay healthy
- regularly check in with dads about how they are feeling
- trigger a referral to support services for dads who may find the challenges of becoming a dad overwhelming.

Who is eligible for Focus on New Fathers?

To be eligible for the Focus on New Fathers program, dads need to:

- be 18 years old or older
- have a partner who is at least 12 weeks pregnant or a baby who is up to 6 months old
- live in either Northern NSW, Northern Sydney, Western Sydney or Murrumbidgee local health district and have a NSW postcode

The service is available to all co-parents, regardless of gender.

Is this service only for first time dads?

No. Dads who already have children are encouraged to register because although they've had prior experience, every child and every birth is different.

Can LGBTIQ+ parents register for this service?

Yes - any non-birthing parent who meets the eligibility criteria is encouraged to register.

What if a dad lives outside of the pilot LHDs? Will they still be able to access the service?

Yes. New dads and dads-to-be who live outside the four pilot locations can access the SMS4dads service via the [Tresillian website](#).

How do you register?

- New dads and dads-to-be are encouraged to register at www.nsw.health.gov.au/focus-on-new-fathers
- To explain the service to clients, Health practitioners / professionals are encouraged to register for a 3 week trial ('professional taster') via <https://www.sms4dads.com/pt/land.aspx>

Can someone register, on behalf of dad?

No because we ask dads to complete a questionnaire and fill out the consent form, as part of the registration process.

What does the consent form cover?

The consent form explains that individuals:

- can withdraw at any stage
- agree to receiving texts up to three times a week
- will be asked to participate in online health quizzes when they register, during and at the end of the program
- will be offered an opportunity to participate in the evaluation of the pilot program
- personal information will remain confidential to the program team and will not be identifiable in any reports or publications.

How soon can a dad register?

A dad can register once their partner is at least 12 weeks (or three months) pregnant.

When do the messages start?

Once a dad has completed the SMS4dads registration, they will receive a welcome message straight away, followed by three messages a week.

Can the texts be cancelled at any time?

Yes. A dad can, for any reason, choose to cancel the service (SMS4dads) for free at any stage.

How many texts should a dad expect to receive?

Once registered, a dad will receive text messages from SMS4dads up to three times a week, to their nominated mobile phone.

Does a dad's data get shared? If so, with whom?

No, a dad's information remains confidential. It is used solely by the program team for delivering the program.

If a dad indicates in a survey that they are experiencing high levels of stress or distress, their contact information is sent to PANDA (Perinatal Anxiety & Depression Australia) who provide a follow up to check if they would like some help. PANDA are part of the program team.

I know that healthcare workers and people who aren't dads can register for a trial period (known as the Professional taster). Can I do a second 'taster' after the initial three-week period?

No, only one professional taster can be undertaken.

Will the program and text messages be presented in languages other than English?

No, at this stage Focus on New Fathers is a pilot program.

How were the four pilot areas chosen?

NSW Health asked for expressions of interest to participate in the program from all local health districts. Applications were assessed against a number of criteria by a selection panel. These included a demonstrated partnership with their local Primary Health Network.

The four successful LHDs are Murrumbidgee, Northern Sydney, Western Sydney and Northern NSW. Together they have a significant annual birth rate and a diverse mix of dads.

What happens after the pilot is finished?

NSW Health is undertaking an independent evaluation of the Focus on New Fathers program. This will include a process and outcomes evaluation and economic analysis of the program. The evaluation will provide information on the effectiveness and sustainability of the FoNF Pilot which will be used to inform future plans.