

A healthy beginning to prevent **childhood overweight and obesity**

in South West Sydney

Introduction

Australia's obesity epidemic continues to be one of the major health burdens in society, which has had a direct flow-on effect to our younger generation. Approximately one in five children aged 2-3 years are now overweight or obese, highlighting the need for further exploration of effective preventive strategies.

Obesity in young children has a high risk of progressing to obesity in later childhood and potentially into adulthood. Early intervention is vital and prevention can result in substantial social and health gains for society and individuals, with an expected return of 6-10 per cent from investing in interventions early in life.

Key activities

The Healthy Beginnings Trial (HBT) developed by Doctor Li Ming Wen, Professors Baur and Rissel and the Healthy Beginnings team, is the world-first randomised controlled trial evaluating the effectiveness of an early obesity prevention intervention. The HBT identified there was no systemic model of home visiting published that included preventing early onset of childhood overweight and obesity as an obligatory part of its content.

HBT developed an early home-based intervention using staged home visits from trained community nurses at early childhood developmental milestones.



The HBT was implemented in some of the most socially and economically disadvantaged areas of Sydney where there is a great need for social support.

Key achievements

The five year trial funded by the National Institute for Health Research Collaborative Research Grants (ID number: 393112 and 1003780) and conducted in South West Sydney, used a unique Healthy Beginnings Program delivered by nurses to 667 first time mothers at their home in the first two years of their child's life to help tackle childhood obesity with significantly positive outcomes.

The study concluded that early, regular home visits to first time mothers that encourage breastfeeding, healthy infant feeding practice and 'tummy time' improved the likelihood of their children growing up to be a healthy weight.

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