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Improvement in Low Birthweights Welcome News

Assistant Minister for Health Fiona Nash welcomed an Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report released today that shows improvement in a key indicator for Indigenous health.

The *Birthweight of Babies Born to Indigenous Mothers* report finds a nine per cent fall in the rate of low birthweight babies born to Indigenous mothers between 2000 and 2011.

“Healthy birthweight is an important indicator of infant health more broadly, so to see a significant fall in the rate of low birthweight for Indigenous babies is very welcome,” Minister Nash said.

“The report also found a seven per cent decline in pre-term births and a fall in the number of mothers smoking during pregnancy, which are also positive signs,” she said.

However, Minister Nash said there was still a long way to go to close the gap in Indigenous health.

“The report shows newborns of Indigenous mothers are still twice as likely to have a low birthweight compared with babies of non-Indigenous mothers. And while smoking rates are declining (6 per cent fall between 2005 and 2011), half of the 11,729 Indigenous mothers who gave birth in 2011 reported smoking during pregnancy,” she said.

“The Government is committed to working collaboratively to continue to close the gap in Indigenous health outcomes. This will focus on child and maternal health to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children get the best possible start in life.”

Minister Nash said the Government’s $94 million *Better Start To Life* programme will improve early childhood outcomes. Funding announced in the 2014-15 Budget includes:

- $54 million to increase the number of *New Directions: Mothers and Babies* services from 85 to 136 sites (to ensure more Indigenous children can access effective child and maternal health programmes); and
a $40 million expansion, from 2015-16, of the evidence-based *Australian Nurse Family Partnership Programme* from 3 to 13 sites (to provide targeted support to high needs Indigenous families).

“A further $36.2 million was also committed in the Budget to expand the *Healthy for Life* programme to a further 32 Aboriginal community controlled health organisations throughout Australia,” Minister Nash said.

*Healthy for Life* focuses on improving the availability and quality of child and maternal health care, the prevention, early detection and management of chronic disease, as well as men’s health and long-term health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

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