



Embedding Deakin's INFANT program in Wodonga.

A case study from Gateway Health's Health Promotion Team

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| Aim | To embed the Deakin University INFANT program in Wodonga. |
| Rationale | <p>A community workshop was facilitated in 2019 to jointly unpack the factors contributing to childhood health and wellbeing in Wodonga.</p> <p>The INFANT program was proposed as one of many possible solutions for improving the health and wellbeing of children in Wodonga.</p> <p>The INFANT program was trialled as a pilot.</p> |
| Partnerships | <p>Maternal & Child Health team – City of Wodonga Gateway Health Private allied health practitioners Deakin University</p> |
| Links to state policy/initiatives | <p><u>First 1000 days</u> of life are key to lifelong health and wellbeing.</p> <p><u>Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures</u> is the Victorian Government's five-year action plan to support children and young people to be healthy, active and well.</p> <p>RESPOND Wodonga Action Plan.</p> |
| Resources | <p>INFANT website: https://www.infantprogram.org (facilitation training modules, session outlines and videos)</p> <p>Department of Health website: https://www.health.vic.gov.au/primary-and-community-health/maternal-and-child-health-service</p> |
| Outcomes | <p>"Promoting healthy lifestyle habits early in life is important for optimal growth and development as well as the prevention of chronic diseases later in life" INFANT Program, Deakin University.</p> |

Objectives

- Provide first time parents and caregivers with information and support, to encourage healthy eating, active play and reduced screen time for their babies from birth until two years of age.
- Offer INFANT as routine practice within local services which maximises the opportunity to support families at this critical time of their infant's life.
- Activate referral pathways and support promotion, awareness and implementation of the evidence-based lifestyle modification program INFANT.

Overview of INFANT

Developed by Deakin University INFANT (INfant Feeding, Active play and NuTrition) has been designed to help parents and families with healthy eating and active play from the start of their baby's life.

INFANT consists of four group sessions for first time parents/caregivers with content reinforced via a mobile app called My Baby Now. INFANT promotes healthy eating, increased active play and reduced screen time for babies from birth until two years of age.

The four group sessions run for around 90 minutes and are delivered when infants are 3, 6, 9 and 12 months. INFANT sessions are delivered by maternal and child health nurses or other healthcare professionals who have received INFANT facilitator training.

INFANT facilitators provide contemporary, evidence-informed information that is tailored to the parents and families who attend their groups, while also promoting group dynamics and sharing of ideas.

INFANT in Wodonga

2021:

Wodonga INFANT commenced with a joint facilitation model comprising of a parent educator and a maternal and child health nurse.

While the City of Wodonga, Maternal and Child Health team were committed to running INFANT, it quickly became apparent that program resourcing was a barrier to sustainability. No additional staffing is attached to the INFANT program, which required existing maternal and child health nurses to staff the program without any reduction in their existing caseload.

Working in partnership with Gateway Health, several solutions were identified. In other local government areas, the maternal and child health provider had been successfully able to leverage additional staffing from the local hospital's outpatient community services. Our local hospital was approached but due to covid pressures and funding restraints, were unable to support the program.

INFANT in Wodonga

2021:

The Health Promotion team at Gateway Health proposed use a private / public staffing model for INFANT.

During 2021 the Gateway Health, Health Promotion team contacted private allied health providers who worked with parents and young children to identify their interest in undertaking training and providing INFANT sessions as co-facilitators free of cost.

Key messaging to practitioners included how the program could compliment their existing work; how they could partner with others in a community initiative; and an opportunity to build awareness of their work within the broader community.

From this engagement, five practitioners indicating their interest, completed the online INFANT training course (approx. 3 hours) and were connected with Wodonga Maternal and Child Health.

2022:

Throughout 2022, private allied health practitioners co-facilitated the INFANT program alongside Maternal and Child Health. Feedback from the Maternal and Child Health team leader indicated that the more experienced the private practitioner was, the more confident they were in responding to parents and caregivers' questions and concerns, as compared to the less experienced practitioners.

2023:

Due to staff turnover, and ongoing post covid resourcing issues, private practitioners have been unable to continue working on INFANT in 2023.

Early in 2023 the Gateway Health, Health Promotion team investigated the opportunity for Gateway Health Child and Parenting programs to offer co-facilitation of INFANT, where the private allied health practitioners were unable. Deakin University were open to sharing their training and resources, and an additional three Gateway Health Parenting Support staff undertook the training. However, it is outside of the scope of their roles to co-facilitate the INFANT program.

Currently these trained staff are using key messages from INFANT within their Gateway Health Parenting Program roles.

In addition, the Maternal and Child Health team report that parent group numbers reduce exponentially as infants get older, and as parents return to work or study, meaning the 9th and 12th month INFANT sessions were becoming too small to operate effectively.

However, the information and resource packages developed by INFANT are still being utilised in day to day maternal and child health service delivery, particularly the Sleep and Settling information embedded within first-time parent groups.

What did we achieve?

20

First time parent groups (consisting of up to 10 parent / caregivers per group) have participated in at least one INFANT session since 2021.

12

Local health professionals have been trained as INFANT facilitators in Wodonga.

What difference did we make in the community?

- Deakin's INFANT program knowledge materials, modules, and resources have influenced Maternal and Child Health services, private practice and community health child and parenting services ensuring evidence-based information is shared to parents across Wodonga, contributing to improvements in health literacy.
- Linking with other parts of the health service system public and private, to support a publicly funded program, remains an innovative strategy. Our capacity to utilise existing networks and people has been effective for linking private businesses into community child health and wellbeing initiatives such as INFANT.
- Maternal and Child Health in Wodonga have embedded the information and resources of the INFANT program into the existing structure and day to day routine of maternal and child health services.
- Our relationship with Maternal and Child Health in Wodonga has strengthened through this process, and the Gateway Health, Health Promotion team have since worked together promoting and co-hosting sleep health seminars for parents of young children, and promoting access and use of Albury Wodonga Pregnancy Journey Map.
- Feedback to Deakin University has led to improvements in INFANT facilitator training and INFANT session content and videos.

Lessons Learnt

A willingness to 'fail' when trying something new is empowering. Even if the use of private allied health providers as co-facilitators didn't end up being effective for INFANT sustainability, we can build on the links with these private sector practitioners and maternal and child health nurses for future community health & wellbeing initiatives.

Recommendations and next steps

- INFANT is no longer a requirement in the Victorian, Community Health - Health Promotion funding guidelines.
- Gateway Health's next steps are to build on these new networks and working relationships, and continuing to engage our new partners in relevant RESPOND child and family health activities and programs.

Get in Touch!

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