

Stable housing in infancy nets lifelong benefits

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Housing stability in the first thousand days of a child's development has a potential economic benefit of \$3 billion annually, new research from PwC and the Strong Foundations collaboration has found.

Living in a stable housing situation in the first thousand days of a child's development, from conception to age two, leads to societal benefits of approximately \$36,000 over a child's lifetime, with 94 percent of the [benefit](#) due to increased earnings as an adult.

The [economic analysis](#) by PwC Australia was developed in collaboration with experts from the Murdoch Children's Research Institute (MCRI), the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) and the Bupa Health Foundation, who collectively make up the Strong Foundations collaboration.

"Our research shows that supporting housing stability for expectant parents and families with young children brings a number of benefits, including alleviating parental stress, helping to build a stronger sense of community and belonging, and supporting a more connected experience of antenatal care and the development of stronger relationships with care providers," said MCRI's Dr. Tim Moore.

"We used home ownership as a proxy to estimate the potential economic benefits of housing stability for children within their first thousand days because there wasn't enough data on other examples of housing stability in our market, such as long-term leasing. Australia's rental system is actually one of the worst in the world in terms of providing long term stability, so it needs to remain an important area of focus for [policy makers](#) to ensure housing stability is improved for all Australians," said Zac Hatzantonis of PwC.

The report also focuses on antenatal care, outlining the potential economic benefits of reducing the prevalence of smoking amongst [pregnant women](#), in addition to the healthy development of children.

For each woman who stops smoking during pregnancy, there is an estimated saving of \$29,000 over her child's lifetime. A reduction in

obesity costs makes up half of this saving, along with 35 percent as a result of increased earnings and 15 percent for a reduced likelihood of smoking as an adult. The annual potential benefit of all pregnant mothers ceasing smoking is close to \$1 billion.

"With clear evidence about the importance of the first thousand days already produced by the Strong Foundations Collaboration, the question now is how to turn this knowledge into practical outcomes for kids," said Penny Dakin, CEO of ARACY.

"There is much that can be done to curb smoking in pregnancy. Education campaigns, price signals and working with mums through programs such as the sustained nurse home visiting program right@home."

"Antenatal smoking is one of the few preventable factors associated with low birthweight and other adverse pregnancy outcomes.

"Quitting before conception or in the first trimester results in similar rates of adverse pregnancy outcomes, compared with non-smokers, and quitting at any time during pregnancy produces health benefits and as our research shows, this translates into economic benefits for the child and for our society more broadly."

The report acknowledges the work government is currently doing to improve early childhood outcomes and presents four immediate steps to improve policies, programs and initiatives targeted at the first thousand days:

- Raising awareness of the impact the first thousand days on lifelong health, wellbeing, learning and development outcomes;
- Investing in environmental determinants of health and disease, to avoid the need for later expenditures addressing inequalities;

- Improving and targeting services to the earliest stages of childhood and conception, and on programs that target the most impactful interventions; and
- Undertaking further research to map current investments and gauge their success, and whether innovative ideas could work in future.

"There are a number of steps we can take to improve outcomes by targeting the first thousand days. In terms of policies, programs and initiatives, we can focus on improving information and education, we can improve services and supports provided to families during this period, and we can improve the environment families and children live in," said Annette Schmeide, Bupa Health Foundation Executive Leader.

"The purpose of this report is not to advocate for a specific area for intervention, which is why our economic modelling does not consider the costs of interventions as part of a cost benefit analysis. The results of the economic analysis are important to guide potential funding for these programs, whatever they may be."

The report is the second in a series examining the first thousand days. The first, released in September last year, outlined the nature and significance of development during pregnancy and infancy, the ways in which experiences during the first thousand days shape development, and the long-term consequences of these experiences for health, wellbeing, learning and development throughout the child's life.

Provided by Murdoch Children's Research Institute

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