

First Steps Pregnancy Support - Budget Proposal - January 2022

First Steps Pregnancy Support is a new initiative that will act as an initial point of contact for vulnerable women during pregnancy, beginning in the **Queanbeyan region**, and then being replicated across other locations over the next 5 years. It will utilise an extensive local network of established supports to develop individualised pathways of care within welcoming and safe communities of women.

Current model of antenatal care

In Eden-Monaro, Queanbeyan has the highest birth rate of all the districts and consequently the greatest number of women accessing its antenatal care services. More than 10% of women who birth at Queanbeyan Hospital are identified as having complex care needs that require additional support¹. QDH is highly regarded as having an effective and coordinated approach to pregnancy care between the local hospital midwives and GP Obstetricians, which goes some way in starting to address the needs of our most vulnerable women.

Despite this effective model of care, there is still a distinct gap in coordinated supports and services for vulnerable women. General Practice is underfunded for the services that are provided, with Medicare rebates for antenatal visits being fixed rather than time based (currently \$41.70). This means there is no incentive for doctors, other than their own good will, to explore the more complex needs of their pregnant patients beyond the basic requirements of antenatal care.

Women who find themselves in crisis often lack the motivation, skills or resources needed to access support. Poor self-worth, substance use, minimal internet/phone access and transport limitations are just some of the barriers that can prevent a woman from seeking care. A relational, multidisciplinary approach is needed where a small team can provide wraparound care and coordinated supports, according to the woman's identified needs.

Nationally, there is a growing awareness that additional pregnancy support services are required. There is however no pregnancy support service in the Eden Monaro Region, and as a result vulnerable pregnant women are falling through the gap and missing essential community supports and interventions.

First Steps Pregnancy Support

First Steps Pregnancy Support (FSPS) offers an innovative approach to perinatal care. Women who are experiencing disadvantage or who have more complex care requirements are provided an individualised relational pathway that meets medical, physical, and emotional needs. All services are offered free of charge and will be available to women in any stage of pregnancy, continuing into early parenting. FSPS is run by women for women and is well networked with the existing support services in the ACT and Queanbeyan region. It will **run a community facility** which is safe, and open throughout the week for informal drop-in periods as well as scheduled individual appointments with a range of health professionals. Group workshops will cover fields such as birth skills, breastfeeding, parenting, budgeting, training opportunities and employment. There will also be telephone, online engagement and home visiting options available so that barriers to accessing comprehensive antenatal care will be minimised.

Multi-disciplinary Staffing team

The FSPS facility will be overseen and supported by an all-female multi-disciplinary team of relevant professionals. The centre manager will be a social worker with extensive experience within organisations that offer support to women and their children in the Canberra/Queanbeyan region. Other health professionals will visit and regularly contribute and will include a **midwife, GP Obstetrician, physiotherapist, lactation consultant** as well as **community volunteers**. While there will be some remunerated roles within the organisation, it will operate as a charity, with many of those involved providing their services on a voluntary basis. Women who benefit from the support received at FSPS will also be encouraged to remain involved as peer support mentors and volunteers.

¹ Local maternity unit data, unpublished.



Resource directory and facilitation

FSPS has developed a Resource Directory (due for distribution July 2022) which to date has over 50 organisations listed within it that offer a variety of support options for pregnant women in the ACT/Queanbeyan region. FSPS will have a strong focus on networking and working closely with other organisations to facilitate engagement between the woman and the relevant service, and to ensure the necessary support is being received. Local organisations can make referrals, but women can also access the service directly.

Key personnel

- Dr Sarah Jensen** - GP Obstetrician - Queanbeyan District Hospital (2018- current)
- BMSc; MBBS (2009); DRANZCOG Adv (2020), RACGP (2018); Diploma Child Health (2013)
- Secretary QDH Medical Staff Council Secretary (current)
- Laura Lamerton** - Social Work (BSW ACU/BA ANU 2011); Master of Child & Adolescent Welfare (CSU, 2016)
- Student & Family Counsellor at Catholic Care (current); Community Child Protection Officer (WCS/CYPS - 2017-2020); Case Worker at Marymead Foster Care (2012-2016)
- Dr Ingrid Kensey** - General Practitioner (RACGP 2021), Palliative Care Registrar, Clare Holland House (current)
- BA (Hons, USyd), MChD (ANU, 2014), DCH (U.Syd 2021)

Key community endorsement

- Mr Kenrick Winchester** - QPRC Mayor
- Hon Kristy McBain MP** - Federal Labor member for Eden-Monaro (Labor)
- Senator Perin Davey** - Federal Government Senator for NSW (National)
- The Hon Wendy Tuckerman** - NSW Minister for Local Government (Liberal)

Timeline

- February 2022** - Research phase – community consultation; exploration of funding/location options
- June 2022** - Fundraising launch
- July 2022** - Online platform launched, Resource directory published and distributed,
- Social worker employed (0.5FTE)
- September 2022** - Location determined, Renovations/building commenced, Program design
- January 2023** - Opening of community facility, Increased staffing hours
- January 2024** - Satellite clinics launched in ACT and regional NSW (e.g. ACT, Cooma, Goulburn)
- January 2026** - Residential facility opening

Funding and costs

The Government start-up contribution would be approximately \$815,000 over three years. Additional income will arise chiefly from Medicare rebates for eligible services (e.g. appointments with medical, midwifery and allied health practitioners). Local grants, community fundraising, and private donors would also be pursued.

| FSPS | 22-23 | 23-24 | 24-25 | Notes |
|-------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|---|
| Staffing | \$140,000 | \$220,000 | \$220,000 | Social worker, Administrator, Development Director, Community Midwife |
| Programs | \$20,000 | \$15,000 | \$15,000 | Personalised care pathway, Community partnerships, Parental planning |
| Amenities | \$5,000 | \$10,000 | \$10,000 | |
| Education and Training | \$15,000 | \$20,000 | \$25,000 | Factors include inclusion of playground or more significant renovations |
| Administrative | \$30,000 | \$30,000 | \$30,000 | Dependent on location |
| Government contribution | \$220,000 | \$295,000 | \$300,000 | \$815,000 (lease/rent removed) |
| Rent | \$40,000 | \$48,000 | \$48,000 | Community Hub and Medical clinic |
| Renovations | \$25,000 | \$10,000 | \$10,000 | |
| Overall | \$285,000 | \$353,000 | \$358,000 | TOTAL - \$996,000 |

Contact – Dr Sarah Jensen – sarah.jensen@health.nsw.gov.au – 0409 065 158

