

## MEDIA RELEASE

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### **Mornington Peninsula new mums receive world-first online mental health check to detect perinatal depression and anxiety**

Frankston Hospital on the Mornington Peninsula is among the first in Australia to be using a world-first online screening program to detect perinatal depression and anxiety, thanks to a new partnership between Peninsula Health and the Centre of Perinatal Excellence (COPE), Australia's peak body for reducing the impacts of perinatal anxiety and depression.

COPE is leading the free delivery of the iCOPE screening program to all public hospitals and maternal and child health clinics across the country as part of the [Commonwealth Government-funded National Perinatal Mental Health Check initiative](#).

COPE has developed the iCOPE digital screening platform to identify mums at risk and facilitate faster and more effective mental health screening in the perinatal period (pregnancy and year following birth). The app enables mental health screening to be undertaken across all clinical settings, from in-person to remote screening via an SMS link sent to the patient's mobile phone.

Minister for Health and Aged Care, The Hon. Greg Hunt MP said: "I'm delighted that the Frankston Hospital will be able to offer this as an essential part of their maternal healthcare services, providing vital mental health support for local new and expectant mums."

Founder and Executive Director of COPE and perinatal mental health specialist Dr Nicole Highet said: "The COVID-19 pandemic has further increased the incidence and severity of perinatal depression and anxiety, with a huge increase in calls to helplines and support services. At the same time, many people have become more reluctant to attend medical appointments in person due to COVID concerns. Now, more than ever, our health services need to be using this world-leading technology to implement regular, faster and more efficient perinatal mental health screening to identify women who are at risk or are experiencing symptoms. The sooner symptoms are detected, the faster treatment can begin, which is why it's so important to spot the signs early.

"iCOPE will change the way perinatal mental health screening is conducted across the country and ensure all new mums and mums-to-be have the opportunity to undertake regular mental health checks, in line with the National Perinatal Mental Health Guidelines. The ability to complete the survey at home via the patient's mobile phone means iCOPE provides a COVID-proof solution to the screening process, while ensuring mental health can still be assessed and monitored at a time when mental distress has increased," Dr Highet said.

Peninsula Health perinatal mental health psychiatrist Dr Lucinda Smith said perinatal anxiety and depression were serious health issues for many new mums and mums-to-be in Frankston and on the Mornington Peninsula.

"This improved screening tool allows us to provide improved mental health support to more new mums and mums-to-be than ever before," she said.

More than 100,000 Australian parents are impacted by perinatal (pre and post-natal) anxiety and depression each year, and nearly three quarters (74 per cent) of women with perinatal anxiety and/or depression don't seek help until they reach crisis point.

“With suicide being one of the leading causes of maternal death in Australia, and rates of perinatal anxiety and depression rising further during the COVID-19 pandemic, screening during pregnancy and in the first year after birth is more critical than ever,” Dr Highet said. “The iCOPE digital health check speeds up and facilitates this process.”

iCOPE is available in 12 languages – English, Arabic, Cantonese, Chin Hakka, Dari, Dinka, Mandarin, Persian/Farsi, Punjabi, Tamil, Turkish and Vietnamese, with another 20 languages in development. This allows patients from culturally diverse backgrounds to undertake the screen and receive their own personal report in their preferred language, which is vital for the 1 in 4 Australians who speak a language other than English at home.

iCOPE patients also receive access to the [e-COPE Directory](#) of local specialist perinatal mental health support services, ensuring that parents who are doing it tough can get the professional support they need, where and when they need it.

COPE is leading the free delivery of the iCOPE screening program to all public hospitals and maternal and child health clinics across the country as part of the Commonwealth Government-funded National Perinatal Mental Health Check initiative. Visit [www.icope.org.au](http://www.icope.org.au) for more information.

iCOPE is also available for purchase to private medical practitioners in all states and territories delivering perinatal care, including GPs, obstetricians and private maternity hospitals. Visit [www.diginostic.com.au/icope](http://www.diginostic.com.au/icope) for more information.

Parents and health professionals seeking information about emotional wellbeing during pregnancy and after birth can visit [www.cope.org.au](http://www.cope.org.au). Parents needing counselling support should call the free PANDA National Perinatal Mental Health Helpline on 1300 726 306 (Monday to Friday 9am to 7.30pm AEST / AEDT).

#### **Media interviews:**

**Dr Nicole Highet COPE – call John Fulcher on 0412 978 263 / [john.fulcher@diginostic.com.au](mailto:john.fulcher@diginostic.com.au)**

**Peninsula Health (including a local mum who has completed the iCOPE screening and is happy to talk to media) – media contact Samantha Robin / Steve Pearce 0429 327 664**