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## South Western Sydney awarded for Healthy Beginnings

A project pioneered by South Western Sydney Local Health District aimed at preventing obesity in children has taken out the 2014 NSW Health award for Preventative Health.

The Healthy Beginnings program involved nurses visiting 667 first-time mothers living in South Western Sydney in the first two years of their children's lives, to help tackle childhood obesity.

Mandy Williams, Director of Health Promotion for South Western Sydney Local Health District said staff were proud to be recognised for the world-first randomised controlled trial.

"Australia's obesity epidemic continues to be one of the major health burdens in society, which has had a direct flow-on effect to our younger generation, with approximately one in five children aged 2-3 years now overweight or obese," she said.

The early intervention program consisted of eight home visits from specially trained community nurses delivering a staged home-based intervention: one in the antenatal period, and seven at one, three, five, nine, 12, 18 and 24 months after birth.

"Timing of the visits was designed to coincide with early childhood developmental milestones," Ms Williams said.

"We developed the staged intervention to improve infant feeding practices, eating habits and active play, and reduce TV viewing time, as well as improve family behavioural risk factors for childhood obesity.

"The Healthy Beginnings Trial was undertaken in some of the most socially and economically disadvantaged areas of Sydney where there is a great need for social support."

The results of the Trial found that the mean body mass index for children in the intervention was significantly lower and that 11.2 per cent of the group were overweight or obese, compared with 14.1 per cent of the control group.

Children in the intervention group were also significantly more likely to eat one or more servings of vegetables a day (89 per cent compared with 83 per cent), and were less likely to be given food as a reward (62 per cent compared with 72 per cent). The percentage of children eating in front of the television was also significantly lower in the intervention group (56 per cent compared with 68 per cent).

Mothers in the intervention group were also significantly more likely to eat more than two servings of vegetables per day (52 per cent compared with 36 per cent) and spend 150 minutes or more exercising per week (48 per cent compared with 38 per cent).

Ms Williams said the trial's successful resources have been adapted globally.

“Organisations in the US, UK and China have adapted our health promotion resources as a model for conducting early childhood obesity research, which is great testament to the importance of the Trial developed here in South Western Sydney,” she said.

The annual NSW Health Awards were the 16th in the state’s history and continue the focus on delivering innovation right across the health system.

Amanda Larkin, South Western Sydney Local Health District’s Chief Executive, said she was proud of the team for receiving the award.

“The NSW Health Awards celebrate the excellence of our nurses, clinicians, population health and allied health professionals, support staff and researchers - but they also shine a light on innovation,” Ms Larkin said.

“These wonderful ideas harness new approaches to ensure high quality, world class health care and enable us to deliver the right care at the right time in the right place.”