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## **Virtual visits pay health dividends**

A digital connection between specialist nurses and mums and dads and their babies is bringing big benefits to families worried about their own health and the health of their children.

The program is the first of its kind in Australia and is aimed at giving parents the support they need in the early days and months after their child is born.

A nurse sitting in an office in southwestern Sydney establishes a video link to virtually visit the family home, including a tour of the nursery via video link technology.

Health Minister Brad Hazzard visited Karitane's digital health service in Carramar to see first-hand how its innovative approach supports parents grappling with issues such as sleep and settling, feeding, establishing routines, toddler behaviour and perinatal depression and anxiety.

"We all know that there's no manual when you become a parent. The little challenges like establishing good sleep patterns for your baby can seem like mountains to climb," Mr Hazzard said.

"That's why getting advice from the experts is a really practical thing to do and I am delighted that going digital can sometimes mean a parent gets help in days rather than perhaps waiting weeks or months to get support in person."

Karitane's CEO, Grainne O'Loughlin, said, in just a few short months, the introduction of TeleHealth has made a huge difference for many parents.

"We have seen the service reduce waiting times for support and more than 50 per cent of families who get a virtual visit then no longer require additional assistance through Karitane's residential services," Ms O'Loughlin said.

In its first six weeks of operation more than 60 virtual home visits, lasting approximately 90 minutes each, were carried out.

A little more than a third of those "visits" were provided to families from rural and regional areas where access to services was previously limited.

One new mum who participated in the "virtual visit" said she has finally been able to get some sleep.

"It has been a long eight months with not much sleep at all. The amazing Karitane staff were very supportive, caring and flexible to different parenting styles," she said.

While another parent said being referred to Karitane had been "life changing".

“After 16 months my son is finally sleeping through the night and I am back in my own bed,” the parent said.

Karitane’s digital health service centre in Carramar is staffed with two experienced child and family health nurses who deliver the virtual home visits.

The program is funded by the NSW Government for four years and costs \$300,000 per year to run.

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