MEDIA RELEASE

New national report exposes growing prevalence of perinatal anxiety and depression, now affecting one in four mothers

- **More than one in four pregnant and postpartum birthing mothers report experiencing perinatal anxiety or depression, according to new national report**
- **The need for support doesn't end at six weeks: three in five mothers who gave birth in the past year reported experiencing psychological distress, while one in five felt inadequately supported at their six-week postpartum check-up**
- **Australia needs a more consistent approach to maternal mental health care, with Women's Mental Health Australia and Gidget Foundation Australia calling for screening, referral and follow-up throughout pregnancy and the first year after birth**

EMBARGO: Tuesday 17 November 2026, 5am AEST – A new national report has uncovered the concerning scale of maternal mental health challenges in Australia, with more than one in four pregnant and postpartum birthing mothers (28%) reporting they experienced perinatal anxiety or depression. The findings underscore the urgent need for consistent screening, referral and follow-up throughout pregnancy and the first year after birth.

Released by Women's Mental Health Australia in collaboration with Gidget Foundation Australia, *Perinatal Mental Health in Australia 2026: Understanding Women's Experiences Through Pregnancy, Birth and Early Motherhood* examines women's mental health experiences, help-seeking and access to care. The findings highlight why a consistent approach is needed, with three in five mothers (60%) who gave birth in the past year reporting they had experienced psychological distress.

One in five mothers (20%) felt their mental health was inadequately supported at their routine six-week postpartum check-up. The findings are particularly concerning given the severity and persistence of distress, with more than one in four (27%) birthing mothers continuing to report experiencing severe psychological distress 9 to 12 months after giving birth. These findings reinforce the need to recognise maternal mental health as an ongoing priority throughout the first year after birth.

Katrina Locandro, Chief Operating Officer of Women's Mental Health Australia, says the findings raise important questions about whether the current system adequately supports women throughout the perinatal period.

"What the evidence tells us is clear. Too many women are struggling, and too many are navigating a healthcare system that doesn't adequately recognise or respond to their needs beyond the early weeks of motherhood."

"Women need a nationally consistent approach to perinatal mental health screening, referral and follow-up, including assessments between 6 and 12 months after birth. Support must reflect the reality that mental health needs don't end at the six-week check-up."

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Gidget Foundation Australia CEO, Arabella Gibson, says the research reinforces the importance of making mental health support accessible throughout pregnancy and early parenthood.

“Gidget Foundation Australia has witnessed a year-on-year increase in demand for our services, and this report suggests the prevalence of perinatal depression and anxiety amongst mothers is rising. With more than one in four pregnant and postpartum birthing mothers reporting perinatal anxiety or depression, we need to ensure women can access the right support without having to navigate a fragmented system on their own.

“Perinatal mental health challenges don’t follow a set timeline. Integrating ongoing mental health assessments into existing primary healthcare and child and family health services, including at six and 12 months postpartum, would help identify women who may be struggling and connect them with appropriate care.”

The implications extend beyond individual wellbeing. The Cost of Perinatal Depression and Anxiety in Australia[1] report by Gidget Foundation Australia and PwC estimates that perinatal anxiety and depression is costing Australia $877 million annually, including $643 million in productivity losses associated with workforce exit, absenteeism, presenteeism and caring responsibilities, $227 million in increased health service utilisation and $7 million in wellbeing impacts on children[1].

The findings come amid national scrutiny of women’s healthcare, with the Senate Select Committee on Women’s Health examining postpartum care and maternal health services.

In line with Perinatal Mental Health Week (22 – 28 November), Women’s Mental Health Australia and Gidget Foundation Australia are calling for a nationally consistent perinatal mental health framework that strengthens routine screening, referral pathways and follow-up throughout pregnancy and the first 12 months after birth. Both organisations advocate for assessments to be integrated into existing primary healthcare and child and family health services, including at six and 12 months postpartum, to help ensure women receive appropriate support as their needs change.

Perinatal Mental Health in Australia 2026: Understanding Women’s Experiences Through Pregnancy, Birth and Early Motherhood report will be available from Monday, 23 November - visit: womensmentalhealthaustralia.org.au/perinatal-mental-health-in-australia-2026

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Contact: MediaCast | Alicie Simpson | 0402 361 266

[1] The cost of perinatal depression and anxiety in Australia

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About the report and citations

Perinatal Mental Health in Australia 2026: Understanding Women's Experiences Through Pregnancy, Birth and Early Motherhood was developed by Women's Mental Health Australia in collaboration with Gidget Foundation Australia.

The research explores women's experiences during pregnancy, birth and the first year after birth, including mental health challenges, help-seeking behaviours, barriers to care and opportunities to strengthen support.

This research draws on insights from *Beyond the Surface 2026*, Women's Mental Health Australia's national study of women's mental health experiences which was conducted in April 2026 with a nationally representative sample of 9,000 Australian women. The sample was further defined into a woman's motherhood status or pregnancy history to form the sample of women currently in the perinatal period. This included pregnant women, postpartum birthing mothers, postpartum non-birthing mothers, women who had experienced pregnancy loss, and who had experienced a termination for medical reasons in the previous 12 months. Respondents could fall into more than one group. The perinatal period refers to the time from conception until 12 months after birth.

This research was conducted by Women's Mental Health Australia with approval from the UNSW Human Research Ethics Committee (IRECS10209).

About Women's Mental Health Australia

Women's Mental Health Australia is the nation's leading organisation dedicated to improving mental health outcomes for women across the lifespan. We work to ensure gender is recognised as a critical factor in mental health by advancing research, advocating for evidence-informed policy and reform, delivering education and resources, and investing in innovative community initiatives. By partnering with government, health professionals, researchers, community organisations and people with lived experience, we are driving meaningful change; where every woman, at every stage of life, is seen, heard and supported.

Learn more at womensmentalhealthaustralia.org.au

About Gidget Foundation Australia

2026 marks Gidget Foundation Australia's 25-Year anniversary. Gidget Foundation Australia is a not-for-profit organisation that exists to support the mental health of families, from pre-conception through to early infancy, to ensure they receive accessible, timely and specialised care.

As the leading national provider of perinatal mental health services, Gidget Foundation Australia provides bulk-billed individual and group perinatal mental health psychological services delivered in-person and via telehealth. Gidget Foundation Australia also invests in its 200+ clinicians through innovative training, mentoring and supervision to meet growing service demand.

To access perinatal mental health support – those affected need to speak to a GP about a referral and a Mental Health Treatment Plan or contact Gidget Foundation Australia's Client Experience Team on 1300 GIDGET to discuss support options specific to their needs.

Although there have been incredible advances in perinatal mental health awareness, education and support since 2001, there is still so much more to do. Gidget Foundation Australia's key focus for the next 25 years is to transform perinatal mental health for the next generation.

For further information and helpful resources visit gidget.org.au.

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About Gidget

Gidget was the nickname of a vibrant young mother who tragically died by suicide while experiencing postnatal depression, a diagnosis she kept close to her heart.

Together, her loving family and friends created Gidget Foundation Australia, determined that what happened to Gidget would not happen to others.

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