

SA Mental Health Commission Media Release



Government of South Australia
SA Mental Health Commission

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SMS pilot project supporting 246 South Aussie new dads

246 South Australian 'dads-to-be' have joined SMS4dadsSA, a free 'dad-friendly' information service by text message, run for the first time in South Australia as a pilot research project by the SA Mental Health Commission.

During the development of the South Australian Mental Health Strategic Plan 2017-2022, the SA Mental Health Commission heard that parenthood means a great deal to South Australian men, they are excited to be fathers and they are keen to do a good job. We also heard that there is less information about being a father than there is for a mother, and that men communicate differently to women.

"We know that approximately one in 20 men experience anxiety and depression during their partner's pregnancy, and approximately one in 10 men following the birth of their baby," said SA Mental Health Commissioner Chris Burns.

Commissioner Burns said that reports from dads who are completing the program show the tips are hitting the mark and offering valuable support as they transition to parenthood, because the messages are timed to manage developmental milestones, including sleeping, playtimes, feeding - and even baby poo!*

The SMS4dadsSA project, run in partnership with the University of Newcastle, helps dads learn about their baby, support their partner and look after their own mental and physical health. The SMS messages begin from 20 weeks' gestation to when the baby is six months' old at the rate of three texts a week.

As well as links to online resources, dads receive a mood checker every three weeks to see how they are travelling. If they are feeling overwhelmed, telephone support is available or, if they are in severe stress, they can be referred to acute services.

"The value of the project is evident from the insightful feedback from new dads and the retention rate in the SMS4dadsSA project, which is higher than similar projects interstate," said Commissioner Burns.

"And thankfully the project has benefitted six dads with additional advice and assistance from PANDA (Perinatal Anxiety & Depression Australia) because they were finding the transition to parenthood difficult and challenging."

At a Glance - SMS4dadsSA

- The average age of dads is 33;
- 81 per cent of the 246 participants were expecting their first child;
- Over 200 babies have been born so far
- To date, six dads have benefitted from additional advice and assistance from PANDA (Perinatal Anxiety & Depression Australia) as a result of the difficult and challenging transition to parenthood.
- Nine in ten dads stayed in the program, a rate higher than similar projects interstate. For those dads who checked out earlier, the average length of involvement is 10.5 weeks.

As part of the research component of the pilot project, dads were asked for their feedback on the messages, to fine-tune and improve the messages for the next generation of fathers.

Some of the feedback:

- *"The texts come along at the right time and say the right thing...7 out of 10 times, the text is spot on with what's happening with our baby and with me."*
- *"It's like a mate checking in, putting a hand on my shoulder and asking if I'm OK. I don't feel so alone."*
- *"The crying is really causing stress at home. This message has reassured me we are not alone."*
- *"The dad texts seem to arrive at my lowest point. I appreciate the constant reminder that I am just human and need to take a deep breathe every now and then. The current growth leap is killing me. I fell asleep at work today and my eyes constantly burn."*
- *"I think she's (my partner) impressed or she's really happy that I jumped into it and that I'm actually interested in the messages... Yeah. Because I guess it shows like, you know, I care about the baby and I care about what's happening."*

The research component of the pilot project continues to run until 30 June 2019. The evaluation of the pilot project and research findings will be shared widely by the SA Mental Health Commission in the second half of 2019, so that we can continue to best support men as they make this transition to fatherhood.

***Curious about that baby poo link – have a look if you dare: <https://www.babycenter.com/baby-poop-photos>**