

Project Title	Improving outcomes through social support in pregnancy
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Lead discipline (please select one)

X Nursing and Midwifery

Allied Health

Medicine

Pre-clinical

X Health Policy

Health Economics

Biostatistics

Value-based Healthcare

Epidemiology

Other

Outline of the project 250 words max

Social support during pregnancy is thought to contribute to better pregnancy and birth outcomes. However what types of support and which outcomes it impacts upon are not well understood. This project will undertake a systematic scoping review of empirical research on the impact of social support on a range of pregnancy, birth and neonatal outcomes. Specifically, we will assess existing evidence on the different types of social support (informational, instrumental, emotional), provided by whom (peer or professionally led); at what time (eg during pregnancy and/or postpartum) and their impact on which outcomes (eg. preterm birth; labour length; initiation and maintenance of breastfeeding etc). The project aims to develop the evidence base for policy and program development by identifying gaps in knowledge and proposing areas in which program development may be expected to support improved outcomes for women.

The review will be guided by the following research questions are:

- What types of social support interventions for pregnant women have been trialed?
- What aspects of support do they seek to address and what mechanisms for change are employed?
- Which of these have been shown to be effective for which populations, on which outcomes and in which contexts?

Proposed research methods

With the support of the supervisor and an experienced post doctoral researcher, the student will conduct a systematic scoping review. Scoping reviews are a well-regarded method for mapping relevant literature in a field of interest. The scoping review will follow

the methodology outlined by Arksey and O'Malley (2005) which consists of five steps:

1. developing the research questions;
2. identifying relevant studies;
3. selecting studies;
4. charting data;
5. collating, summarizing and reporting results.

Preferred study discipline being undertaken by the student

Public health or Health policy or midwifery

Benefits to the student and to the department

The project will build the student's capacity in evidence review and synthesis which is a key skill increasingly required in health care practice.

The review addresses a gap in knowledge and the results can help inform the design of supports and interventions, particularly for vulnerable populations due to lack of existing social support and the need to know more about the types of social support that are beneficial and under what circumstances.

Alignment with Government Research Priorities 100w max

This research supports a number of ACT Government research priorities, including women and children's health, mental health and the health of vulnerable populations. By improving the evidence base for social support during pregnancy the project aims to underpin better policy and decision-making and by identifying potential areas for program development lead to achievable and effective impacts on health outcomes for pregnant women.

Department within ACT Health Directorate / Canberra Health Services where the student will be based

Academic Unit of General Practice, ACT Health

Please submit form to preclinical.research@act.gov.au