



**THE HON NICOLA ROXON MP  
MINISTER FOR HEALTH AND AGEING**

The Hon Julia Irwin MP  
Committee Chair  
Standing Committee on Petitions  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mrs Irwin *Julia*

Thank you for your letter of 22 October 2009 regarding the petition on postnatal depression.

The Australian Government and state and territory governments are working together to implement the National Perinatal Depression Initiative. The initiative, which began in 2008-09, aims to improve prevention and early detection of antenatal and postnatal depression, and to provide better care, support and treatment for expectant and new mothers experiencing depression.

The Australian Government's contribution of \$55 million over five years includes:

- \$30 million to state and territory governments to contribute to the roll out of routine and universal screening, support services, and training and development for health professionals;
- an additional \$20 million to the Access to Allied Psychological Services Initiative to increase the capacity of Divisions of General Practice to better support women with perinatal depression through the provision of focused psychological strategies; and
- \$5 million to *beyondblue* to support implementation, including the development of materials that support professional practice, such as national perinatal depression screening guidelines and training materials, the raising of community awareness and promotion of help-seeking behaviour in relation to perinatal depression.

In addition to the funding being provided to states and territories, it is anticipated that state and territory governments will also contribute approximately \$30 million in funding to supplement the roll out of routine and universal screening, support services, and training for health professionals.

The following key elements are integral to the National Perinatal Depression Initiative:

- routine and universal screening for perinatal depression, offered once antenatally and once postnatally;
- follow up support and care for women assessed as being at-risk of, or experiencing, perinatal depression;
- workforce training and development for health professionals;
- research and data collection;
- national guidelines for screening for perinatal depression; and
- community awareness.

The Petition attached to your letter refers directly to the promotion of postnatal depression among medical practitioners and raising awareness within the community. The National Perinatal Depression Initiative is specifically responding to these needs.

Through the Initiative, training, development and materials to support professional practice will be available to help health professionals in: raising the awareness of perinatal depression; the use of screening tools to identify women at-risk of, or experiencing, perinatal depression, and the appropriate referral mechanisms; and the availability and provision of appropriate treatment and support.

Community awareness activities through the Initiative will include: promoting the importance of routine screening as a way of ensuring early detection and identification of perinatal depression, and therefore early intervention; promoting the benefits of management and treatment of perinatal depression for women, as well as the benefits for families; and providing accessible information to the community about perinatal depression and the available treatment and support.

I hope this information is of assistance to you.

Yours sincerely

**NICOLA ROXON**

25 NOV 2009