

For Immediate release: 7am Wednesday 15 October 2008

ATTENTION: C.O.S and HEALTH EDITORS

NEW RESEARCH FINDS ONE THIRD OF STILLBIRTHS ARE PREVENTABLE

New research from the Australian and New Zealand Stillbirth Alliance (ANZSA) indicates that at least one third of all stillbirths are primarily due to factors which are potentially avoidable.

The three most important avoidable factors that were identified by the research team include mothers carrying excessive weight, those who are over 35 years of age and those who smoke during the pregnancy.

The research, co-funded by the Stillbirth Foundation* and the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing, is the most comprehensive of its kind ever undertaken in Australia and coincides with ***International Baby Loss Day on Wednesday 15 October***.

Professor David Ellwood, of ANZSA, said in Australia 2000 pregnancies (of at least 20 weeks gestation) end in a stillbirth each year. This equates to one stillborn baby for every 140 births - a rate that has not decreased in almost 20 years. Unexplained stillbirth occurs over 10 times more frequently than infant deaths from SIDS.

Professor Ellwood said: "With up to 30% of stillbirths remaining unexplained, it is important to consider modifiable risk factors in order to reduce the numbers of these deaths.

"While there are obviously still many unexplained stillbirths this research is particularly heartening because it gives a clear indication of things women can do to reduce the risk. It is vital that women receive information and support prior to pregnancy to assist in choices for planning a family. They need to reach an optimal weight before conceiving and smokers need encouragement and support in order to stop smoking."

Professor Ellwood said other potentially modifiable factors which appear to increase a woman's risk of stillbirth were identified but require further research. These include advanced paternal age, maternal stress, inadequate antenatal care, previous caesarean section, excess caffeine intake, alcohol and substance use.

As well as announcing the research during this International Pregnancy & Infant Loss (IPIL) month ANZSA, have teamed with the International Stillbirth Alliance (ISA) to launch the **World Circle of Loved and Remembered Babies**.

The World Circle of Loved and Remembered Babies is an online memorial that allows families and friends to publicly acknowledge, remember and honour babies and infants who have died during pregnancy and in infancy.

Stillbirth Foundation founder, Emma Kirkwood, said "It is timely that an opportunity exists for us to put our grief to good use. We can remember our lost babies and, in doing so, raise awareness and funds to help ensure the incidence of these tragedies is minimised."

Stillbirth Facts

In Australia one in every 140 babies born are stillborn. A high proportion of these, about 300 every year, are born at term with no known cause for their death. It is surprising that, in an age of enormous technical and medical advances, the death rate of these babies is not declining.

-ends-

For further information:

Australian and New Zealand Stillbirth Alliance (ANZSA)

Vicki Flenady, Mater Health Services Brisbane, email vicki.flenady@mater.org.au or 0419 664 956

Stillbirth Foundation

Emma Kirkwood, emma@stillbirthfoundation.org.au or 0419 995 464

ANZSA was established through seed funding from the Department of Health and Ageing to address the problem of stillbirth in Australia through conducting high quality research and improving clinical care and raising awareness. www.stillbirthalliance.org/anz

**The Stillbirth Foundation is a voluntary fundraising organisation that was established in 2005 to reduce the incidence of stillbirth, by raising awareness and funds for research. It has helped raise over \$500,000 since its inception and greatly advanced the cause. www.stillbirthfoundation.org.au*