

The Australian Perinatal Depression Initiative (NPDI): a policy evaluation

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Symposium Abstract

Background: The morbidity and cost associated with maternal mental illness in the perinatal period (pregnancy - 1st postnatal year) is substantial for mother, infant, and family and may impact on the health of the next generation. The Australian National Perinatal Depression Initiative (NPDI) endorsing routine depression screening and psychosocial assessment and improving access to mental health services for perinatal women was implemented 2008-2014.

Methods: a retrospective evaluation of the NPDI's impact on 1) service uptake and 2) cost in terms of psychiatric hospitalisation (data linkage for NSW & WA) and Medicare MH item (aggregate data national and Jurisdictional), was undertaken as was 3) Policy analysis of the NPDI pre/post its introduction. Finally, due to the absence of standardised reporting on the implementation of the NPDI we undertook 4) data development with a view to inclusion of one or more perinatal mental health item(s) in the Perinatal National Minimum Dataset – eventually allowing for prospective evaluation of the NPDI.

Results: are reported for each of the objectives with a focus on process required for national policy development and evaluation; the strengths, limitations and challenges of these “big data” methods.

Conclusions: It is recommended that new mental health policy initiatives incorporate a planned strategic approach to evaluation, which includes sufficient follow up to assess the impact of public health strategies.

Keywords: Policy, evaluation, psychiatric admissions, postnatal

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