



# Maternity care in Australia during COVID-19: Challenges, silver linings and the way forward

Dr Zoe Bradfield  
Midwifery Research Fellow

# A pregnant WA woman denied full induction due to deepening hospital crisis, as lockdown ramps up others' fears

NEWS CORONAVIRUS HEALTH & SCIENCE

## Pregnant women not more susceptible to COVID-19, current data suggests

*"We do not have evidence that pregnant women are more likely to get COVID-19."*

By **Dr. Ayodola Adigun**  
18 June 2020, 17:14 • 7 min read

[f](#) [t](#) [e](#)

## WA Covid-19 pregnancy rules 'make no sense'


By **PAUL GARVEY**  
SENIOR REPORTER  
Follow @PDGarvey

8:21PM MAY 5, 2021  
7 COMMENTS



MARCH 29 2020 - 4:30AM

## Student nurses and retired health workers to join the ranks in the battle against coronavirus in Canberra

 Kimberley Le Lievre

Coronavirus

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**Blood, sweat and tears**  
Midwifery

### 'There are more births in the car park': a midwife's experience of the Covid-19 crisis

These are strange times we are working in, but I haven't felt frightened, and neither should the women I'm helping

# Study Overview

Overall Aim: to explore experiences of receiving and providing maternity care during COVID-19 in Australia

Participants (5 cohorts): women, women's partners/other support persons, midwives, medical practitioners, and midwifery students.

Method and Recruitment: Two-phased cross-sectional study advertised via social media. Recruitment for interviews from survey completion.

Data sources:

online survey (13/5/2020 – 24/6/2020) >4500 responses and n = 78 semi-structured interviews

Analysis: descriptive statistics and thematic analysis for qualitative data



## RECEIVED OR PROVIDED MATERNITY CARE DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC?

PLEASE SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCES WITH US



**Women**

Pregnant or given birth since March 2020



**Partners**

Supporting a woman who is pregnant or has given birth since March 2020



**Midwives**

Who have provided midwifery care during the COVID-19 Pandemic



**Doctors**

Who have provided maternity care during the COVID-19 Pandemic



**Midwifery Students**

Who have provided maternity care during the COVID-19 Pandemic

To participate in this study please click this [link](#) or scan the QR code  
For more information about this study visit this [webpage](#)

 Curtin University





**Women**



**Partners**



**Midwives**



**Doctors**



**Midwifery  
Students**

Survey

3364

Interviews

27

Survey

44

Interviews

15

Survey

602

Interviews

16

Survey

86

Interviews

8

Survey

147

Interviews

12





*“Having been told there is an issue with our baby it was extremely scary to be at the ultrasound at 20 weeks on my own. It was a terrifying experience”*







Received: 9 March 2021 | Revised: 4 June 2021 | Accepted: 16 June 2021

DOI: 10.1111/birt.12569

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

BIRTH ISSUES IN PERINATAL CARE WILEY

## Australian women's experiences of receiving maternity care during the COVID-19 pandemic: A cross-sectional national survey

Alyce N. Wilson MD, MPH<sup>1,2</sup>  | Linda Sweet RM, PhD<sup>3,4</sup>  | Vidanka Vasilevski PhD<sup>3,4</sup>  |  
Yvonne Hauck RM, PhD<sup>5</sup>  | Karen Wynter PhD<sup>3,4</sup>  | Lesley Kuliukas RM, PhD<sup>5</sup>  |  
Rebecca A. Szabo MBBS, MClEd<sup>2,6</sup>  | Caroline S. E. Homer RM, PhD<sup>1</sup>  |  
Zoe Bradfield RM, PhD<sup>5,7</sup> 

Midwifery 98 (2021) 102996



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Midwifery

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/midw](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/midw)



Becoming a mother in the ‘new’ social world in Australia during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic



Linda Sweet<sup>a,b,\*</sup>, Zoe Bradfield<sup>c,d</sup>, Vidanka Vasilevski<sup>a,b</sup>, Karen Wynter<sup>a,b</sup>, Yvonne Hauck<sup>c,d</sup>, Lesley Kuliukas<sup>c</sup>, Caroline S.E. Homer<sup>e</sup>, Rebecca A. Szabo<sup>f,g</sup>, Alyce N. Wilson<sup>e</sup>



*“Being separated immediately from my wife and child after the birth was traumatizing and I believe an unnecessary event. It was detrimental to both my and my wife’s mental health and impacted my ability to bond with my child.”*



Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](#)

Women and Birth

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/wombi](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/wombi)



Receiving maternity care during the COVID-19 pandemic:  
Experiences of women’s partners and support persons

Vidanka Vasilevski<sup>a,b,\*</sup>, Linda Sweet<sup>a,b</sup>, Zoe Bradfield<sup>c,d</sup>, Alyce N. Wilson<sup>e</sup>,  
Yvonne Hauck<sup>c,d</sup>, Lesley Kuliukas<sup>c</sup>, Caroline S.E. Homer<sup>e</sup>, Rebecca A. Szabo<sup>f,g</sup>,  
Karen Wynter<sup>a,b</sup>



*“...The pandemic has added a great deal of stress and uncertainty for pregnant women, they had more questions and a decline in mental health, requiring longer appointments and added resources at a time when we’ve had less”*

*“...you’re rostered to the woman, you go wherever she is, continuity models have provided women with what they’ve needed, we didn’t have to change our model that much, it’s certainly pandemic adaptable”*









Women and Birth

Available online 15 March 2021

In Press, Corrected Proof 



## Midwives’ experiences of providing maternity care during the COVID-19 pandemic in Australia

Zoe Bradfield <sup>a, b</sup>   , Yvonne Hauck <sup>a, b</sup> , Caroline S.E. Homer <sup>c</sup> , Linda Sweet <sup>d, e</sup> , Alyce N. Wilson <sup>c</sup> ,  
Rebecca A. Szabo <sup>f</sup> , Karen Wynter <sup>e</sup> , Vidanka Vasilevski <sup>d, e</sup> , Lesley Kuliukas <sup>a</sup> 



*“It was much more spaced, so although we had fewer doctors in the clinic, the women were more spaced, so we were seeing them within 10–15 min of them arriving. They were having longer appointments, all of the issues that they had were being addressed because they were truly the women who needed medical care, not this whole volume of people who came in with a question that was really easy to answer.”*










Aust N Z J Obstet Gynaecol 2021; 1–8

ANZJOG 

DOI: 10.1111/ajo.13307

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

## Covid-19 changes to maternity care: Experiences of Australian doctors

Rebecca A. Szabo<sup>1,2</sup> , Alyce N. Wilson<sup>3</sup> , Caroline Homer<sup>3</sup> ,  
Vidanka Vasilevski<sup>4,5</sup> , Linda Sweet<sup>4,5</sup> , Karen Wynter<sup>4,5</sup> ,  
Yvonne Hauck<sup>6,7</sup> , Lesley Kuliukas<sup>6</sup>  and Zoe Bradfield<sup>6,7</sup> 





*“They had some specific training for the midwifery staff, we were not included in any of that...there was a lack of PPE, the midwife and the two doctors that were in the room had goggles, but there wasn’t enough goggles for me and I was the primary accoucher!”*

➤ [Nurse Educ Pract. 2021 Feb;51:102988. doi: 10.1016/j.nepr.2021.102988. Epub 2021 Feb 9.](#)

## **A cross sectional study of midwifery students' experiences of COVID-19: Uncertainty and expendability**

Lesley Kuliukas <sup>1</sup>, Yvonne Hauck <sup>2</sup>, Linda Sweet <sup>3</sup>, Vidanka Vasilevski <sup>4</sup>, Caroline Homer <sup>5</sup>, Karen Wynter <sup>6</sup>, Alyce Wilson <sup>7</sup>, Rebecca Szabo <sup>8</sup>, Zoe Bradfield <sup>9</sup>

Affiliations + expand

PMID: 33601117 PMID: PMC7870440 DOI: 10.1016/j.nepr.2021.102988



RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Experiences of receiving and providing maternity care during the COVID-19 pandemic in Australia: A five-cohort cross-sectional comparison

Zoe Bradfield<sup>1,2☯\*</sup>, Karen Wynter<sup>3,4☯</sup>, Yvonne Hauck<sup>1,2☯</sup>, Vidanka Vasilevski<sup>3,4☯</sup>, Lesley Kuliukas<sup>1‡</sup>, Alyce N. Wilson<sup>5‡</sup>, Rebecca A. Szabo<sup>6‡</sup>, Caroline S. E. Homer<sup>5‡</sup>, Linda Sweet<sup>3,4‡</sup>

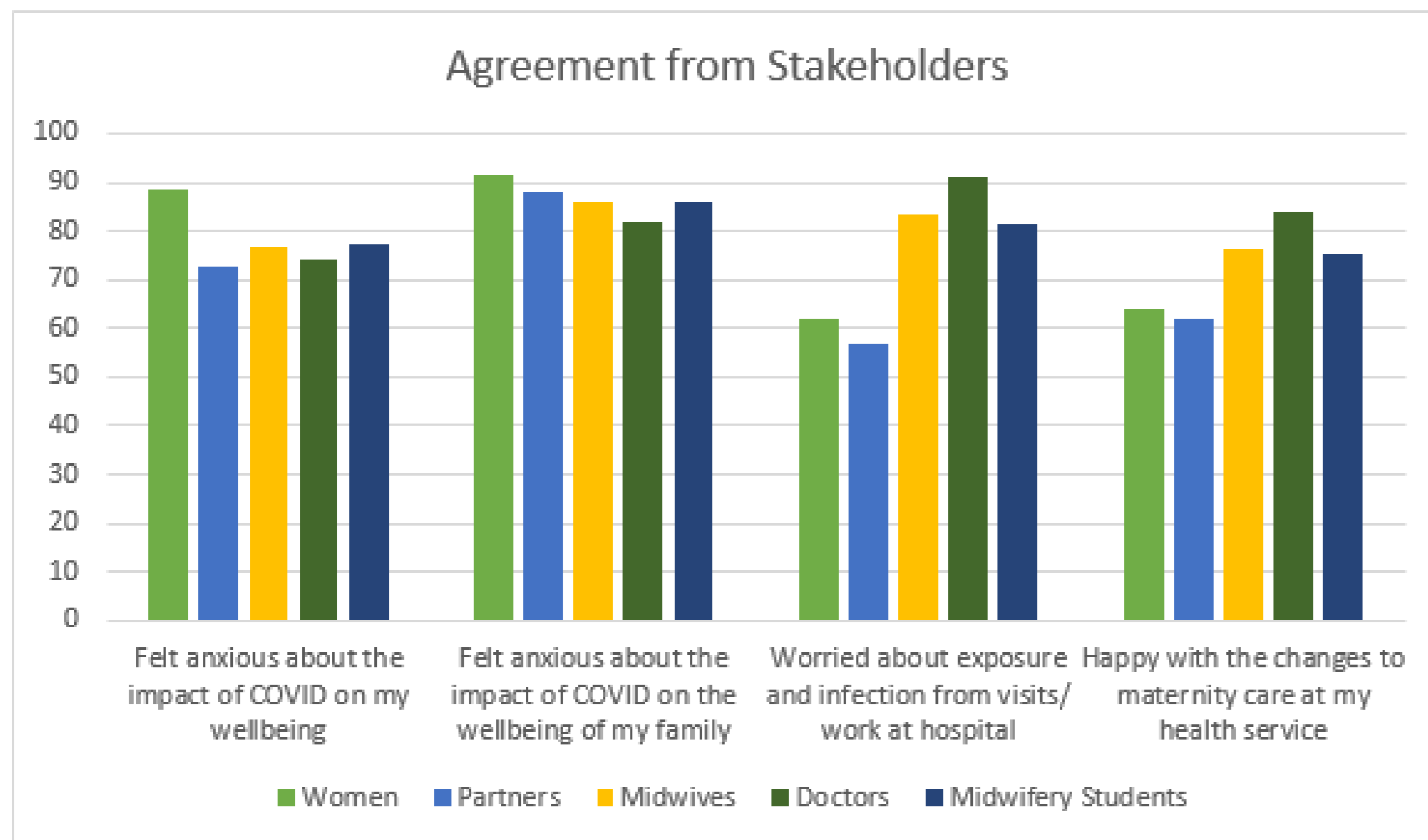


Figure 1. Agreement from five key stakeholder cohorts<sup>1</sup>

# Policy Brief

- Partners support in labour
- Visitation
- Protection of student clinical placement – future workforce



**Improving provision and experiences of maternity care during the COVID-19 pandemic – lessons from the COVMAT study**

**Policy Brief 1**

**I'm too scared to leave home because I'm pregnant and can't get vaccinated**

A pregnant Sydney mum won't leave her home until she can get the COVID vaccine.

Cindy Lever | August 02, 2021

[f](#) [t](#) [✉](#)

**BREAKING NEWS** Missing toddler Anthony "AJ" Elfalak has been found, three days after he disappeared from his family's rural property in the Hunter region

**Majority of Australians have concerns about vaccine rollout, new study says**

AM / By Alexia Attwood  
Posted Wed 5 May 2021 at 6:02am



**COVID BLOG** Follow our live coverage for the latest news on the coronavirus pandemic

**Rumours of infertility caused by COVID-19 vaccination hold women back**

By Amy Greenbank and Michael Workman  
Posted Sun 15 Aug 2021 at 4:07am, updated Sun 15 Aug 2021 at 6:06am

**COVID BLOG** Follow our live coverage for the latest news on the coronavirus pandemic

**Pregnant woman fights for life in ICU amid calls for urgent access to Pfizer**

ABC Newcastle / By Bindi Bryce and Ben Millington  
Posted Tue 31 Aug 2021 at 12:35pm, updated Tue 31 Aug 2021 at 2:13pm

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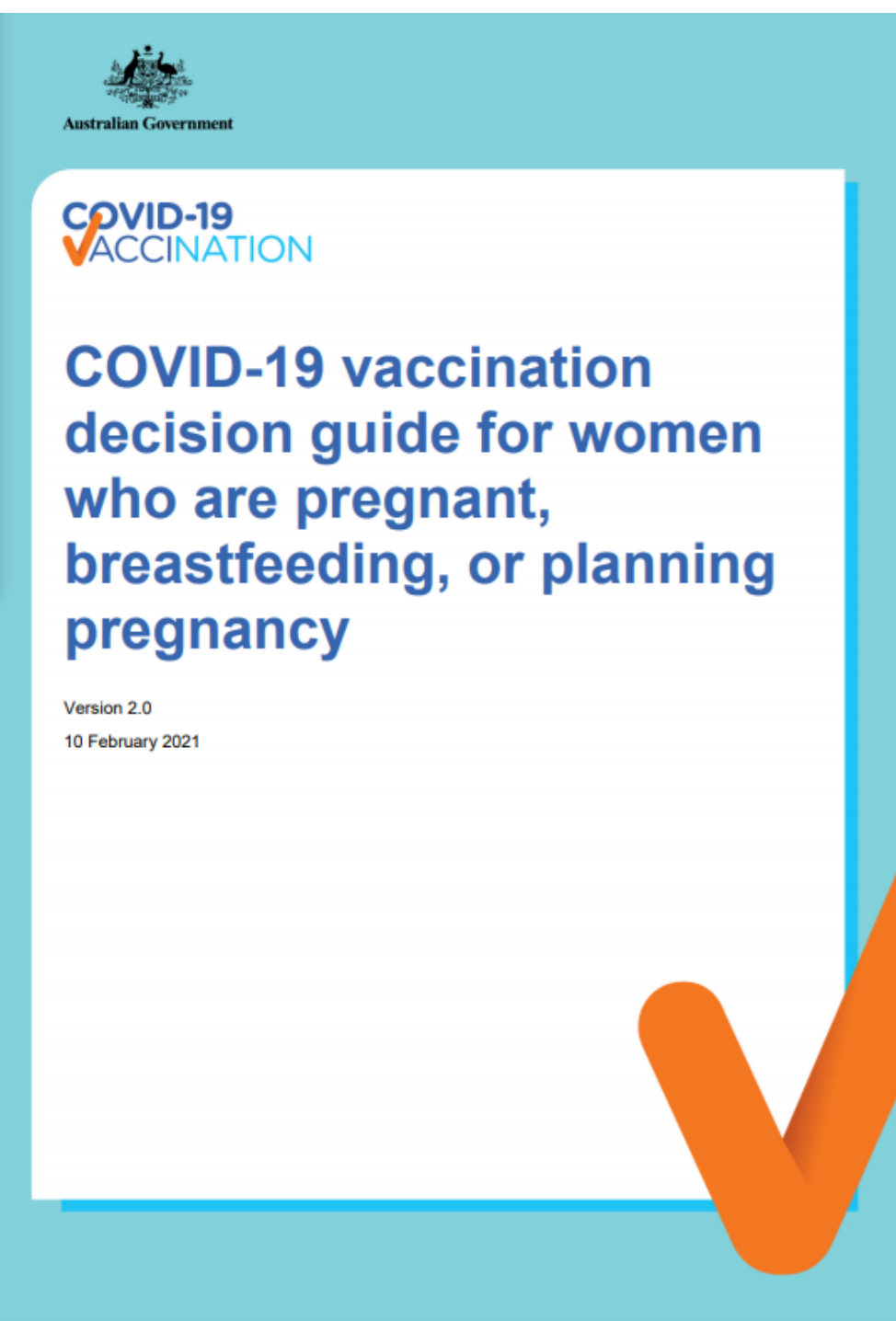
**Queensland police and West Australian health workers ordered to get vaccinated**

# COVID-19 Vaccination



“COVID-19 Vaccination perceptions and intentions of maternity care consumers and providers in Australia.”

- Survey, online March – May 2021 N=853
- Conflicting and unclear messaging
- Hesitancy in all groups
- Willingness to advise against recommendations
- Lack of resources to support education



# TALKING COVID-19 VACCINES INFORMATION FOR MIDWIVES



**Talking to women about COVID-19 vaccination**  
We know that starting a conversation with a pregnant woman can be difficult, but as a midwife WE are the best placed professionals. Here are some talking points to get started.

**How to start the conversation**  
Where are you up to with the decision about COVID-19 vaccination to help you decide? How can I help as your midwife? I have read all the guidance, recommendations and advice and can discuss these with you today.

**Outline the current recommendations**  
Pregnant women are a priority group and are eligible to access the recommended COVID-19 vaccine.

Originally, we were not able to get good information about the safety and effectiveness of the vaccine, but a lot of information from countries with a higher risk of severe illness has shown that the vaccine is safe and effective. Vaccination is proving to be the best way to protect pregnant women. In Australia, the vaccine is available in pregnancy from the USA and the UK.

Government of Western Australia  
Department of Health

**COVID-19 VACCINATION**

## Information on the COVID-19 vaccine and pregnancy

**Planning**

**Does the vaccine stop me having a baby?**  
No.  
The vaccine won't stop you from getting pregnant.

**When should I get the vaccine?**  
Get it now.  
You can get it before you're pregnant, or if you are already pregnant or if you are breastfeeding. The sooner the better for you and baby.

**Pregnancy**

**Why should I get the vaccine?**  
Pregnant women who get COVID-19 can get very sick. The vaccine protects you from getting very sick from COVID-19. This is very important in the last three months, so get vaccinated early. Pregnant women with COVID-19 can have a still birth, or the baby might come too early, so get vaccinated now.

**Which vaccine will I get?**  
You will get the Pfizer or the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine, which are both safe.

# THE 5 As COVID-19 VACCINATION INFORMATION FOR MIDWIVES

## ASK

• Where is she up to in her pregnancy?

## ASSIST

• Where to get good information – ACM, RANZCOG, ATAGI

## ADVISE

• Address concerns  
• Be clear and confident  
• Share facts on COVID-19  
• Remember the vaccine is safe, effective and will protect women from getting sick  
• Be clear that it is recommended

# TALKING COVID-19 VACCINES INFORMATION FOR WOMEN



Choosing to be vaccinated is absolutely YOUR decision. This trusted document from the Australian College of Midwives with information from the Australian Department of Health can help you make your decision.

## Why should I get the vaccine?

The virus is spreading uncontained and widely in our communities. Pregnant women are a vulnerable population and numbers of pregnant women being admitted to hospital with severe COVID-19 symptoms are increasing. The vaccine is known to be the best way to reduce the risk of you getting COVID-19 and becoming seriously unwell. Becoming unwell with COVID in your 3rd trimester doubles your chance of stillbirth and triples your chance of having your baby born prematurely. It also increases the chance of you needing an emergency caesarean.

## Why have vaccine recommendations changed?

Women weren't originally included in the first clinical trials for COVID-19 vaccines, so there wasn't a large amount of information to confirm the safety of the vaccine during pregnancy. Since then, evidence from overseas now shows that COVID-19 vaccines, like Pfizer (Comirnaty), are safe for pregnant women.

**rollupforwa.com.au**

**Roll up for WA**  
COVID-19 Vaccination

*In collaboration with the Maternal & Child Health team/Darbari Yerrigan Health Service*

**“I got vaccinated while I was pregnant to protect me and my baby.”**  
Hannah | Noongar woman  
Aboriginal health practitioner

# What have we learned so far?

- Rapid and radical changes to maternity service provision – some positives
- Limitations of the physical environment / resources designed in Industrial era
- Communication and consultation is key
- We (system) and we (people) are able to be agile and respond
- Collaboration is key, rewarding, sustaining, resilience-building

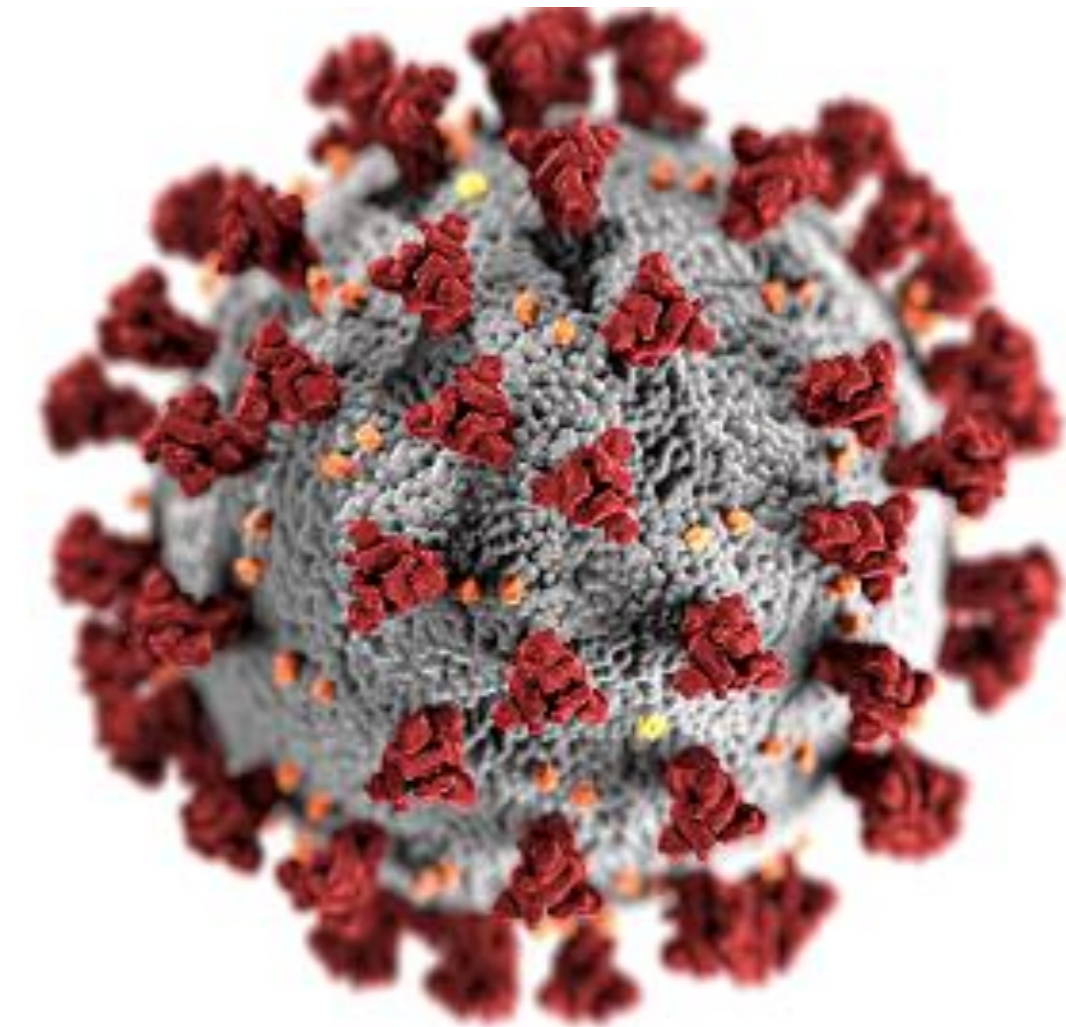
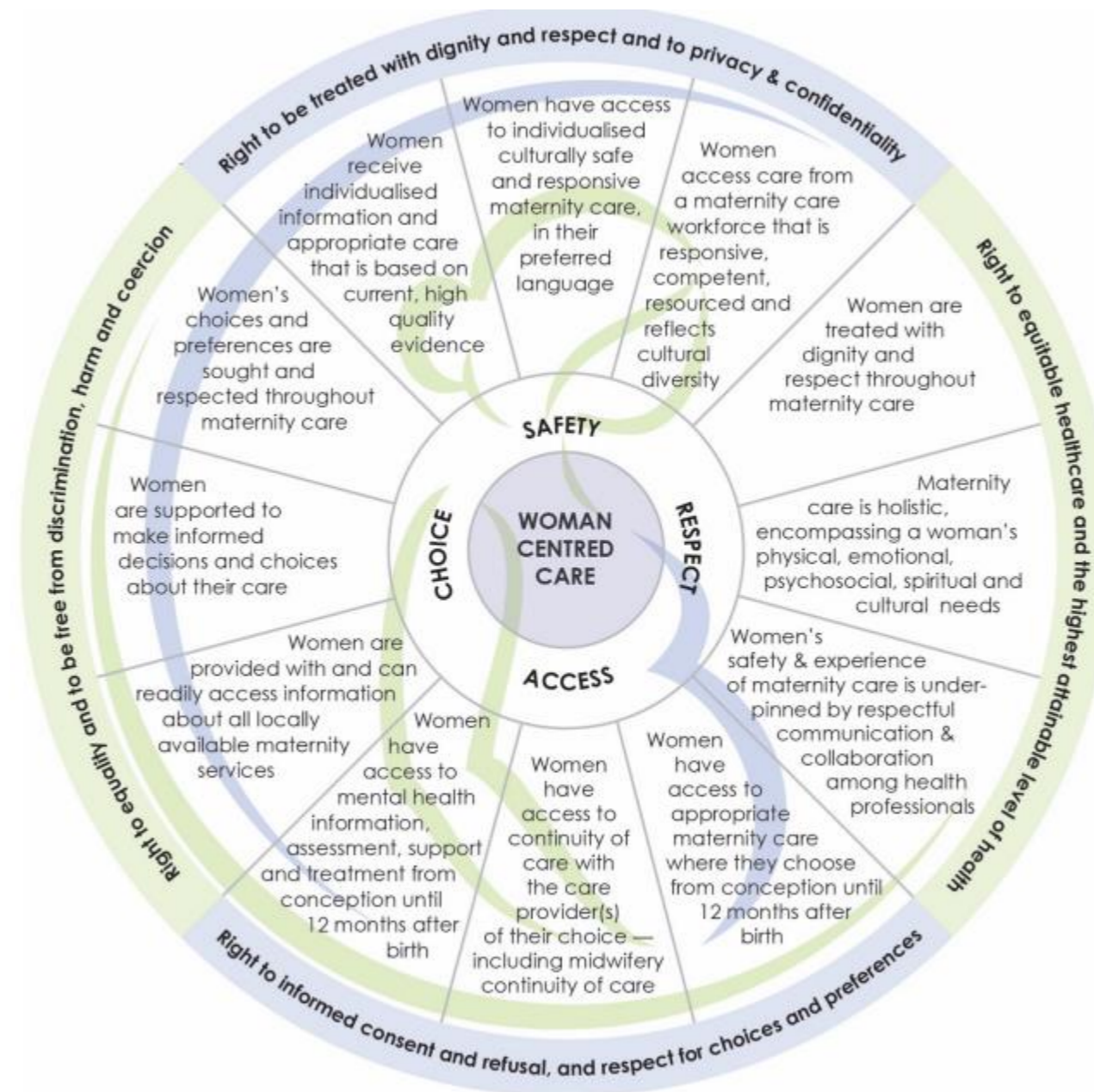


# WNHS Relocation Project



## Woman-centred care

Strategic directions for Australian maternity services  
August 2019



NATIONAL  
COVID-19  
CLINICAL  
EVIDENCE  
TASKFORCE

## Best evidence supporting best care

As clinicians work to provide the best possible care for Australians during the COVID-19 pandemic, we're working to keep them up-to-date with the latest evidence

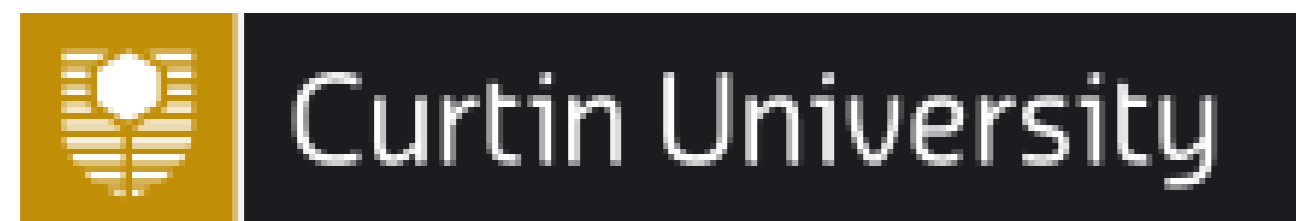
- LIVING GUIDELINES
- CLINICAL FLOWCHARTS
- EVIDENCE UNDER REVIEW



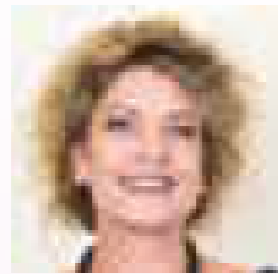
# Acknowledgements

Participants who took time in the middle of a global pandemic to complete our survey and participate in interviews

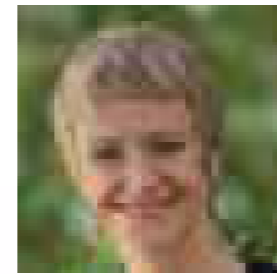
Institutions for support with funding for analysis and publication



# Research Team



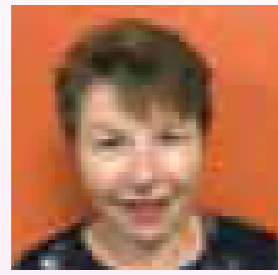
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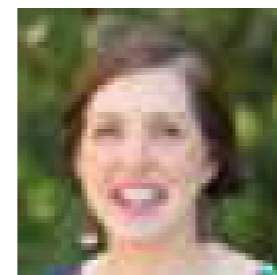
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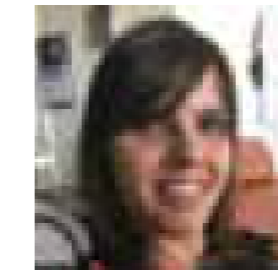
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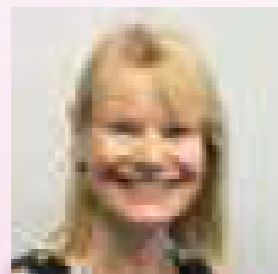
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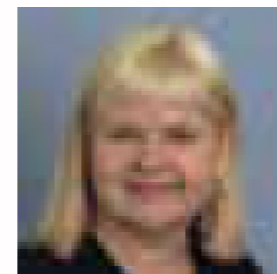
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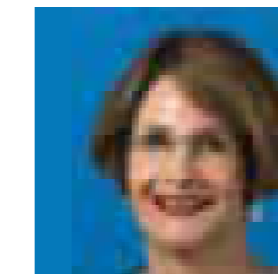
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Thank you

Make tomorrow better.