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## GPs helping pregnant women get healthier

Today's launch of the *Pregnancy Lifescripts* resource kit by the Minister for Ageing, Christopher Pyne has been welcomed by the Australian General Practice Network (AGPN).

The resource kit developed by an AGPN led consortium, is another tool general practice can use to support women who are considering pregnancy, currently pregnant or those breastfeeding in making healthy lifestyle choices.

AGPN Chair Dr Tony Hobbs said the kit covers the important areas of smoking, alcohol and nutrition. "Left unchecked smoking, drinking alcohol and poor nutrition in mothers or mothers to-be can have serious consequences for the mother and unborn or newborn babies.

"**Alcohol consumption** during pregnancy can result in Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, an umbrella term for a range of complications in newborns.

"**Nutrition** is equally important and poor nutrition can have serious consequences for babies. For example folate supplements before conception and in the early stages of pregnancy can significantly reduce the chances of babies having neural tube defects such as Spina bifida.

"Knowing how to avoid food borne infections that come from eating contaminated foods can reduce the risk of mental retardation, still birth and nervous system damage. It is also necessary mothers are aware of other supplements such as iron and iodine are taken to enhance their babies development.

"Unfortunately figures from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare that indicate 17% of pregnant women **smoke**. Babies of mothers who smoke are at risk of a number of conditions such as being born underweight. Underweight babies are more vulnerable to infections and more likely to have breathing difficulties.

"Not only does supporting women to make healthy lifestyle choices lead to improved health outcomes for babies, mother's health can also significantly improve," Dr Hobbs said.

*Pregnancy Lifescripts* will be delivered in a clinical setting such as a general practice and allows a GP or practice nurse to:

- discuss the implications of smoking, alcohol consumption and nutrition with parents
- provide written non medicinal lifestyle prescriptions that support women to set goals and activities to improve lifestyle choices
- organise ongoing review
- refer patients to other services that provide additional support such as dieticians

"A healthy pregnancy and breastfeeding period can set the platform for a healthy life. Mums need to know it's never too late to make lifestyle changes for the better," Dr Hobbs said.

Development of the kit has been funded by the Australian Government's Department of Health and Ageing.

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