



The economic case for obesity prevention in the early years: Scaling up the evidenced-based INFANT program

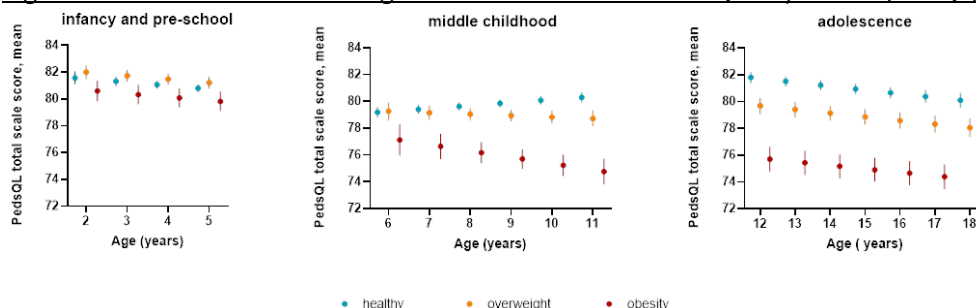
Early years obesity prevention:

- First 2,000 Days are a critical time for establishing healthy eating and physical activity behaviours that can have lifelong health, economic and social benefits.
- Reduces short and long-term health care costs, including hospitalisations
- Improves health and wellbeing outcomes of children and youth, reducing the health gap

Health and economic costs of early childhood obesity

1. Investing in early years obesity prevention can result in significant short and long-term cost savings related to health, education and productivity outcomes.
 - The direct healthcare costs of young children with obesity (aged 2 – 4 years) are more than 60% higher than children with a healthy weight. This includes costs associated with hospital, non-hospital (e.g. GP visits), emergency care and medicinesⁱ.
 - Based on these findings and obesity prevalence, the estimated annual direct costs to the Australian healthcare system of obesity in Victorian children aged 2-4 years is high at \$9.7M (AUD2020).
 - The annual excess cost per child with obesity compared to healthy weight is \$426 (95% CI \$62-\$1,235, AUD2020)¹. Based on these findings, reducing the prevalence of obesity among 2-4 year olds in Victoria by 5% would save \$5.3M in annual direct healthcare costs.
2. Children and adolescents with overweight or obesity have lower quality of life (measured using PedsQL), compared to children with a healthy weight.
 - Infancy and childhood are critical, formative years of growth and development that influence health and mental wellbeing.
 - Preventing early childhood obesity can allay the decline in Quality of Life (QoL)² in later childhood. As children grow into middle childhood and adolescence, the disparity in QoL increases between children with a healthy weight, overweight or obesityⁱⁱ.

Figure 1: Effect of children's weight status on health-related Quality of Life (PedQL)³



¹ calculations modified for Victoria, based on the methodology used in: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1753-6405.12628>

² PedsQL Version 4.0 Generic Core Scales (PedsQL) is a validated scale for 2–18 year olds, measuring children's health-related Quality of Life.

³ Data sourced from the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC), involving more than 10,000 children across Australia. growingupinaustralia.gov.au



3. Investment in early prevention in the First 2,000 days is highly likely to be one of the most cost-effective approaches to obesity prevention.

- Proven interventions such as INFANT can help families to establish healthy lifestyle behaviours that lay the foundation for a healthy weight.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Children with a healthy weight in early childhood are very likely to remain a healthy weight in later childhood and teens.^{iv}

4. Effective parenting support can help to establish healthy behaviours in early childhood.

- **INFANT** (Infant Feeding, Active play and Nutrition) is a low cost, universal intervention that enhances existing child and family services.^v The cost of INFANT is approximately \$42 per person, per session.^{vi}
- INFANT is based on 15 years of research and demonstrated positive effects on the health behaviours of parents and children at age two.^{vii} These benefits on health behaviours were sustained at five years of age.^{viii}
- INFANT has *sustained, positive effects* on the health behaviours of parents and children including fruit, vegetable and water intake, reduced sugar-sweetened beverage intake and less television watching.^{ix} More evidence and history of INFANT infantprogram.org

Overview of INFANT

Low cost, universal intervention that enhances existing early years services:

- Provides parents with evidence-based approaches to feeding, nutrition and active play
- Supports early years practitioners with workforce development and integrates into existing child and family services at low cost
- Engages priority groups and suitable for metro, regional and rural areas
- Utilises low-cost digital technologies including facilitated online training for practitioners and the evidence-based My Baby Now app for parents

INFANT's focus on developing healthy behaviours early in life and connecting parents with expert-led, evidence-based resources offers an effective and cost-effective approach to maternal and child health and wellbeing in the First 2,000 Days.

References:

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