

TOO YOUNG TO PARENT? WHAT SHOULD WE DO TO HELP YOUNG PARENTS.

Births to women aged 15 to 19 years have plateaued at historic lows in Australia. While the numbers of young parents and their children may be relatively small in our population, these families have challenges, which span health, welfare and social justice; they have vulnerabilities that are life-long and may even be carried to the next generation. Teenage mothers are more likely to have experienced family, sexual, and partner violence, family disruption, and socioeconomic disadvantage. For their infant, preterm birth, low birth-weight, stillbirth and neonatal death is more common; and for the mother, gestational anaemia, urinary tract infection and pregnancy-induced hypertension. Later, maternal mental health, rapid repeat pregnancy, educational underachievement and socioeconomic disadvantage. Young parenthood occurs most commonly in communities where poverty, Indigenous status and rural/remote location intersect. Health care providers play a critical role in 1) early identification of at-risk teens, 2) prevention of unintended teenage pregnancy, 3) clinical care of pregnant teens, and 4) promotion of health and well-being of teenage mothers and their children. This talk will review current evidence, highlight some areas of contention in our approach to the care of this group, and propose better ways to improve outcomes for this vulnerable group.