**Empowering Mothers with Diabetes: The Impact of Peer Support During Pregnancy and Early Parenthood**

Women living with diabetes face unique and complex challenges during pregnancy and early motherhood. These include increased health risks, more intensive medical management, and emotional stress. These challenges are often compounded by feelings of isolation and a lack of tailored, accessible support networks. While there is strong evidence supporting the benefits of peer support in chronic disease management, a significant gap exists in Australia for women with diabetes who are pregnant, planning pregnancy, or navigating the postpartum period.

This project explores the question: How does participation in a peer support group and online community impact the emotional wellbeing, diabetes management, and sense of connection among women with diabetes during the journey to motherhood?

PDC Health Hub designed and implemented a dedicated peer support program to address this unmet need. The program includes in-person and online events, access to diabetes health professionals, and a moderated online community that facilitates ongoing connection and support. Content is currently tailored to the experiences of women with type 1 diabetes, with intentions to soon expand the scope to type 2 diabetes and gestational diabetes.

Early outcomes show strong engagement, increased access to reliable information, and enhanced emotional wellbeing. Participants report improved confidence in managing their diabetes, reduced feelings of isolation, and a deeper sense of community with peers who understand the unique complexities of diabetes and motherhood. The initiative has also helped raise awareness of the specific needs of this cohort among healthcare professionals and the wider diabetes community.

This model demonstrates that peer support is a powerful and scalable intervention that can significantly improve the mental health and diabetes self-management of women during pregnancy and postpartum. It offers a valuable framework to guide future initiatives and inform best practice care for this underserved population.