

*Health 4 Life is one of several initiatives announced by the Ministry of Health in 2013 that focuses on early intervention to encourage the best start to life for New Zealand families.*

Our goal is to enable the maternal and early childhood sector in Wellington to deliver consistent messages on staying active and eating healthily to vulnerable pregnant women and new parents.



**Making healthy changes during pregnancy is beneficial, especially for overweight and obese women. High body mass index during pregnancy is associated with an increased risk of adverse health outcomes for both women and infants.**

While observational studies<sup>1</sup> suggest that healthy diet and lifestyle advice given during pregnancy has been associated with improved outcomes for women and infants, vulnerable pregnant women and new parents often receive inconsistent advice on how to stay active and eat healthily.

The Health 4 Life partnership draws on the collective experience of four agencies including Regional Public Health, SIDU – the service integration and development unit of the three DHBs (Capital and Coast, Hutt Valley and Wairarapa), Te Awakairangi Health Network and Compass Health to improve nutritional status and increase physical activity for women and families.

#### **Actions we have taken**

Focus groups were conducted to better understand the needs and priorities of health workers, pregnant women and new parents, along with a review of the evidence and clinical guidelines. A social marketing approach was then used to develop audience-focused messages to encourage targeted behaviour change in the health workforce.

Early in 2015, we co-created key messaging resources in partnership with health workers and consumers. Our work with Māori and Pacific providers and their clients identified that our starting point in conversations needed to be about the big picture.

A short course for health workers was then developed to provide them with tools and strategies to have healthy conversations with women, helping them deliver the right information at the right time in the right way for each woman - inspiring action to make baby and whānau stronger.

The short course provided access to Health 4 Life's new resources including the conversation guide for health workers and resources for pregnant women in Te Reo Māori



and English. The Health Promotion Agency also provided education sessions on their infant feeding resources about what, when and how to introduce solid foods at around six months of age.

Additionally, a team of Māori and Pacific advisors led workshop sessions to demonstrate the importance of cultural and social beliefs when engaging with women and their whānau.

An evaluation report is due August 2015 that will report back to the workforce and communities on the impact of Health 4 Life interventions.

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**Reference:**  
1. Moses RG, Luebcke M, Davis WS, Coleman KJ, Tapsell LC, Petocz P, Brand-Miller JC. Effect of a low-glycemic-index diet during pregnancy on obstetric outcomes. *Am J Clin Nutr.* Oct 2006; 84 (4): 807-812.