

Unborn child referrals

For Family Services and Child FIRST practitioners

The *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* will allow anyone in the community to contact Child Protection or Child FIRST before the birth of a child, if they have significant concerns for the wellbeing of a child after their birth. For example, a hospital may contact Child Protection, indicating that an expectant mother has a serious drug problem that is likely to place a newborn infant at risk of harm.

These referrals will provide an important opportunity for earlier intervention and prevention. In response to a referral, Child Protection or a family service can provide assistance and support to the pregnant woman to reduce the likelihood that her child, when born, will be at risk of harm. Child Protection and family service practitioners will be encouraged to work in partnership with maternity services and other professionals to:

- encourage and support expectant mothers' participation in ante-natal and primary health care
- support expectant mothers to access high quality care during birth
- provide information about nutrition and self-care during pregnancy
- establish adequate plans for the unborn child's safety, stability and development upon birth.

Practitioners may also assist expectant mothers to prepare for the birth of their child – for example by providing them with essential baby goods.

Strong partnerships between professionals prior to the birth of a child will also enable effective planning about supports and interventions that may be required to ensure a child's safety and healthy development after they are born.

In order to support effective assessment, planning and support to expectant mothers, the following procedures are advised:

- a Community Based Child Protection practitioner should be consulted if significant risk or needs issues are identified in a referral about an unborn child
- the Community Based Child Protection practitioner will then arrange for the High Risk Infant program to be involved in future planning and support
- both Child FIRST and Community Based Child Protection practitioners must record the details of any consultation about an unborn referral
- where significant risk and needs issues arise, a case conference must be arranged. This case conference should involve relevant professionals, including maternity services. Where the mother consents, parents/extended family should be invited to participate in the case conference – unless there are exceptional circumstances.

Following the birth of the child, Child Protection can make applications to the Children's Court if they consider that a child is in need of protection. No court application can be made prior to the birth of the child.

More information:

For more information, fact sheets and supporting documents, see the every child every chance website: www.dhs.vic.gov.au/everychildeverychance

Related fact sheet:

- Role of consultation at intake