

Support needed for multiple-birth families to improve outcomes

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Over the last 40 years, multiple births in Australia have almost doubled with 9056 multiple-births in 2017, compared to 4740 in 1975. Credit: Donnie Ray Jones, Flickr

Having multiple-birth babies can be a time of wonder and excitement, however, according to the first-ever international collaborative report released today, these babies and their families can face serious

disadvantages compared to parents of single-birth babies.

Led by Twins Research Australia based at the University of Melbourne, the report identifies common challenges facing these families, including greater risk of pregnancy complications and [premature birth](#), infant development delays and special needs, as well as financial, psychological and social support obstacles.

Researchers are calling for [urgent action](#) in the areas of research, education, policy and practice to ensure [health services](#) and professionals can better meet the needs of multiple-birth families.

Over the last 40 years, multiple births in Australia have almost doubled with 9056 multiple-births in 2017, compared to 4740 in 1975. This is a 91 per cent increase.

Murdoch Children's Research Institute Honorary Fellow Christie Bolch said the report showed that [health](#) knowledge, services and practices have not kept pace with this rise.

"Twins—plus triplets and above—bring many special experiences. But at every point of contact in our health system these families experience disadvantage, and this is not well recognised," Dr. Bolch said.

"There is a pressing unmet need for adequately funded resources for parents of young multiples to address their unique challenges such as increased [social isolation](#), anxiety and depression, inadequate bereavement support when one or more babies do not survive, and caring for infants with special needs."

University of Melbourne Director of Twins Research Australia John Hopper said adequate support must be provided to ensure all children receive the best start in life.

"These findings demonstrate where our knowledge is lacking—such as the challenges of staggered discharge for the families of multiple-birth [babies](#), the long-term costs to a [family](#) when multiples are born prematurely and the factors that contribute to developmental delays," Professor Hopper said.

"We also show how to close these gaps through better research to understand the physical and mental health concerns of these families, improved education for health professionals and parents, and robust policies to address the financial disadvantage experienced."

Strategies identified in the report include extended recovery services, special care and postnatal ward policies, as well as better training about the heightened support needs of families with multiples, and structured, multiple-specific early parenting education programs.

Provided by University of Melbourne

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