

Barriers and potential solutions to improve access and equity in prenatal screening for all pregnant women

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Abstract

Recent studies show that prenatal screening tests are not being offered universally in all regions of Australia.¹⁻⁵ This study aimed to assess why discrepancies exist and identify barriers and potential solutions to improve access and equity in screening for all pregnant women.

Method

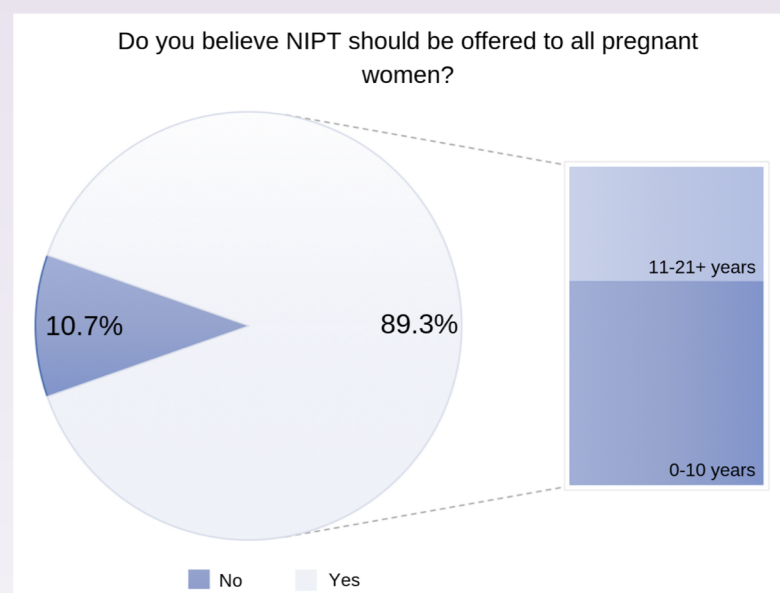
Twenty practices in regional Australia employing general practitioners or private obstetricians were contacted in this cross-sectional study. The practitioners received a 12-question survey via email or hard copy, asking about current practice and knowledge of prenatal screening. The survey was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical tests; responses were compared based on their current role (GP/obstetrician) and length of experience.

Results

A total of 28 practitioners completed the survey. 100% of practitioners stated the main reason women chose not to have prenatal screening was the time involved, followed by costs (79% of total). There were no significant differences between GPs' and obstetricians' responses, nor between length of practice except in regard to non-invasive prenatal testing (NIPT) being offered to all pregnant women – a greater proportion of participants with 10 years or less of practice supported the practice compared with those with > 10 years.

Conclusion

This study demonstrated numerous barriers limiting pregnant women accessing prenatal screening tests in regional Australia, with all practitioners agreeing that time and costs are the most important of these barriers. Introducing Medicare-funded prenatal screening tests such as NIPT is a potential solution to improve equity of access for all pregnant women in Australia.



	Total N (%)	GP N (%)	Private Obstetrician N (%)
Profession	28	25 (89.3)	3 (10.7)
Length of Practice			
0-5 years	9 (32.1)	8 (32.0)	1 (33.3)
6-10 years	7 (25.0)	7 (28.0)	0
11-15 years	5 (17.9)	4 (16.0)	1 (33.3)
16-20 years	2 (7.1)	2 (8.0)	0
21+ years	5 (17.9)	4 (16.0)	1 (33.3)
Feel well informed about CFTS			
Yes	25 (89.3)	22 (88.0)	3 (100.0)
No	3 (10.7)	3 (12.0)	0
Feel well informed about NIPT			
Yes	23 (82.1)	20 (80.0)	3 (100.0)
No	5 (17.9)	5 (20.0)	0
Feel well informed about invasive tests which may follow a high-risk CFTS/NIPT result			
Yes	22 (78.6)	19 (76.0)	3 (100.0)
No	6 (21.4)	6 (24.0)	0
Do you offer prenatal screening to all pregnant women			
Yes	27 (96.4)	24 (96.0)	3 (100.0)
No	1 (3.6)	1 (4.0)	0
Which prenatal screening tests do you offer			
CFTS	2 (7.1)	2 (8.0)	0
Second trimester triple screening	0	0	0
NIPT	1 (3.6)	1 (4.0)	0
CFTS and NIPT	25 (89.3)	22 (88.0)	3 (100.0)
None	0	0	0
Who do you believe prenatal screening should be offered to			
Younger women			
Yes	4 (14.3)	4 (16.0)	0
No	24 (84.7)	21 (84.0)	3 (100.0)
Women of increased maternal age			
Yes	9 (32.1)	9 (36.0)	0
No	19 (67.9)	16 (64.0)	3 (100.0)
Women with a family history of fetal anomalies			
Yes	9 (32.1)	9 (36.0)	0
No	19 (67.9)	16 (64.0)	3 (100.0)
Multiparous women			
Yes	5 (17.9)	5 (20.0)	0
No	23 (82.1)	20 (80.0)	3 (100.0)
Indigenous women			
Yes	5 (21.4)	6 (24.0)	0
No	22 (78.6)	19 (76.0)	3 (100.0)
All pregnant women			
Yes	24 (85.7)	21 (84.0)	3 (100.0)
No	4 (14.3)	4 (16.0)	0
Do you offer prenatal screening to women past 13 weeks gestation			
Yes	21 (75.0)	18 (72.0)	3 (100)
No	7 (25.0)	7 (28.0)	0
Do you believe NIPT should be offered to all pregnant women			
Yes	25 (89.3)	23 (92.0)	2 (66.7)
No	3 (10.7)	2 (8.0)	1 (33.3)
What do you think are the main reasons women choose not to have prenatal screening			
Termination of pregnancy is not an option	19 (67.9)	16 (64.0)	3 (100.0)
Invasive tests increase risk of miscarriage	6 (21.4)	6 (24.0)	0
Prepared to care for a child with down syndrome	13 (46.4)	12 (48.0)	1 (33.3)
Women believe they are low-risk	12 (44.4)	12 (50.0)	0
Costs associated with prenatal screening	22 (78.6)	21 (84.0)	1 (33.3)
Test is time consuming	28 (100.0)	25 (100.0)	3 (100.0)
Religious reasons	5 (17.9)	4 (16.0)	1 (33.3)
Other	6 (21.4)	6 (24.0)	0

References

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