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## Grant funds obesity research in children under 5

Research into childhood obesity has received a significant funding boost this week with the announcement of the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) Grants.

The Australian Government awarded \$2.4 million to fund a Centre for Research Excellence in the Early Prevention of Obesity in Childhood that will aim to reduce the prevalence of obesity and obesity-related behaviours in children aged 0-5 years.

With the new funding, Professor Louise Baur A.M, Department Head of The Children's Hospital at Westmead's Clinical School, will lead a team of ten Chief Investigators and ten Associate Investigators from around the world to bridge the current gaps in research, practice and policy and help improve the health outcomes for children as they grow into adulthood.

"At only five years old, 1 in 5 Australian children are overweight or obese, which is quite a startling figure. This may have implications for the rest of their life because early childhood is a period when physical inactivity and poor eating habits become established," Professor Baur said.

"Previous studies have shown us that larger body size and rapid growth in the first two years predict the development of obesity, both in later childhood and in adulthood but that if we intervene in the early years of life, when biology is most responsive to change, we are more likely to have sustained effects on health."

"Our project aim is to target children in these early years before unhealthy habits are set in place and develop new methods of intervention that will lead to physical change (BMI), behavioural change and in time, policy change," Professor Baur said.

The project will pave the way both nationally and internationally in discovering new knowledge and evidence about effective implementation, monitoring and evaluation of early childhood obesity prevention programs – an area for which there has been limited effective research previously.

Over the next five years researchers will focus on five key areas:

- analysing data from intervention trials
- developing new methods and tools to monitor obesity-related behaviours in the 0-5 age group
- assessing the economic implications of different early childhood interventions
- identifying the factors that promote successful implementation of prevention programs
- translating research evidence into policy and practice by working with researchers, practitioners and policy-makers

"Our Centre for Research Excellence will make a substantial contribution to ending the burden of childhood obesity in Australia and beyond, as well as making inroads internationally, by address these outstanding questions and gaps in knowledge," Professor Baur said.

The Centre for Research Excellence will be located at the University of Sydney. Professor Baur is also Professor, Discipline of Paediatrics and Child Health, Sydney Medical School. Professor Baur is a paediatrician and an internationally renowned child obesity researcher.