

The Safe Sleep Enablers Project

Development of ideas for hospitals, health services and homes for enabling safe sleep for babies

BACKGROUND

This project is responding to evidence, from research and coroner reports, of the prevention shift needed for further reducing sudden infant death. In the past, knowledge has been enough to enable the majority of parents to change to recommended sleep positions and practices for their babies. Now the persisting behavioural risks are '**smoking, especially in pregnancy**' and '**bed sharing with more vulnerable babies**'. More than knowledge is needed now. The prevention strategy needs to move **from 'inform' to 'enable'**; to enable more vulnerable families and whanau to believe the safety advice and adopt the recommended practices of 'face-up, face clear, smokefree' sleep. The following are examples of 'enablers' that currently are being explored in Canterbury, and some other regions.

ENABLERS

Wahakura: The Maori community has taken the 'enabling' lead with the 'wahakura', a dedicated sleeping space for babies. This beautiful baby bed, hand woven from flax, enables babies to be both close and safe to their parents and enables parents to protect their more vulnerable babies from sudden infant death. It is being promoted for use at every one of a baby's sleeps whether in or out of the adult bed.



Nicotine replacement (NRT): Nicotine replacement products (patch, lozenge or gum) are a critically important enabler for people who smoke, especially if pregnant. These products enable women to protect their babies from smoking effects in pregnancy. They also enable all in the whanau who smoke, to be protected from cravings as they become smokefree for their baby. Using NRT is an essential first step in preventing a smoke-exposed pregnancy and needs to become a normal part of pregnancy care.



Clip-on cots: Christchurch hospitals are trialling two clip-on cots. This three-sided version of the traditional perspex hospital cot for newborns is also being trialled in several places across the country. The local trial is an opportunity to learn how the clip-on cot might act as an enabler, for staff and mothers alike, in finding that balance of closeness and safety for individual babies. A report from a similar trial at Counties Manakau is attached.



'Bednest': Change for our Children has purchased two of a recent innovation developed in the UK. These will be trialled locally with parents and babies in the home setting. This side-car cot attaches to the adult bed and the height can be adjusted for a same-level sleeping surface. It has been designed to enable closeness and safety at night and can be three sided to enable **easy access to a parent** for breastfeeding and soothing. This is a beautifully designed product, but expensive and needs to be imported.



‘Close and secure sleeper’: This is one of a variety of products available to enable parents and babies to



be close and safe during the more vulnerable first months. We understand it is available for about \$60 from K-Mart. It comes with an inbuilt night light and can be folded up making it compact to carry. Being portable, it enables a baby to have the same sleeping space in a variety of environments, both at home and away.

Peepi-Pod: The Peepi-Pod is a very new and **low cost option** being explored to complement the



wahakura. Being hand-woven, the wahakura is not available in large numbers, so there is a need for another option as well as the wahakura that can be

supplied more readily. Options are needed to enable all parents to act on safe sleep recommendations.

These are: **face-up + face clear + smokefree + in own ‘baby bed’ if more vulnerable** every time and place a baby sleeps.

THE MORE VULNERABLE BABY

All babies can be considered vulnerable to sudden infant death because it is a developmentally specific event, striking most commonly during the transitional first six months of life. However, some babies are more vulnerable than others. Safe positioning (face-up) has reduced vulnerability for many babies, while others are exposed to multiple risk factors, or risk factors in combination. The more vulnerable baby is defined as one having all or any of these characteristics:

- smoke-exposed, especially in pregnancy
- born before 36 weeks
- birth weight < 2500 grams
- a NICU stay
- have parents who are extremely tired or large
- in environments where carers are under the influence of smoking, alcohol, drugs or are partying

Babies need to be close for settling, but that closeness must be safe. Coroners’ report that **challenges with settling** caused some SUDI parents to stray from the safe sleep advice. The wahakura and Peepi-Pod options, could be offered to every family of a more vulnerable baby as a dedicated and protected sleeping place for their baby. It is a way to transition the protection of their baby from NICU/hospital to home.