

RELEASE OF NEW SOUTH WALES MOTHERS AND BABIES 2001

Lee Taylor

*Centre for Epidemiology and Research
NSW Department of Health*

New South Wales Mothers and Babies 2001, the NSW Department of Health's latest report on the health of mothers and babies in NSW, was released on 21 January 2003. The Report found that the trend towards more mothers aged 35 years and over has continued to grow, as has the number of caesarean births over the last five years. The Report also found:

- there were 85,858 babies born to 84,379 mothers in 2001, the lowest number for the last five years;
- the number of teenage mothers continued to decline, falling from 4,291 (4.9 per cent of all mothers) in 1997 to 3,797 (4.5 per cent) in 2001;
- there was an increase in the number of mothers aged 35 years and over from 13,465 in 1997 to 15,250 in 2001, an increase from 15.5 to 18.1 per cent;
- caesarean section rates increased from 18.2 in 1997 to 23.6 per cent in 2001;
- around one in four mothers in 2001 were born overseas, most commonly in the United Kingdom (2.8 per cent), New Zealand (2.4 per cent), China (2.1 per cent), Vietnam (2.0 per cent), and Lebanon (2.0 per cent).

Over the past five years, the rate of low birthweight and perinatal mortality (a stillborn or livebirth but subsequent death within 28 days) has remained stable. In 2001, 6.4

per cent of babies were low birthweight and there were 9.2 perinatal deaths per 1000 births. An interesting finding of the Report was that, despite 2001 recording the lowest number of births in the last five years, there was an increase in the number of multiple births of twins and triplets from 2.7 to 3.4 per cent.

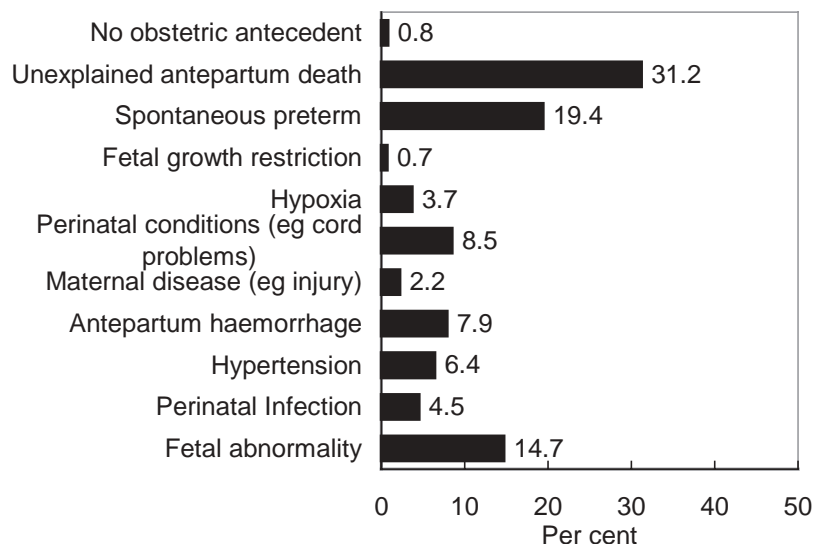
New South Wales Mothers and Babies 2001 is the fifth annual report on mothers and babies in NSW, and includes an additional chapter this year on chromosomal abnormalities detected by prenatal testing by amniocentesis or chorionic villus sampling.

The Report consolidates findings of the NSW Midwives Data Collection (MDC), the NSW Birth Defects Register and the Neonatal Intensive Care Units Data Collection. It also contains summary information on maternal deaths and perinatal deaths in NSW, each of which are reviewed by the NSW Maternal and Perinatal Committee. The most common cause of perinatal death was found to be unexplained death prior to birth (Figure 1), accounting for 31.2 per cent of all perinatal deaths. The high proportion of unexplained perinatal deaths highlights the importance of hospital or area-based reviews to assist in identifying potentially preventable factors.

New South Wales Mothers and Babies 2001 is available on the NSW Department of Health's website at www.health.nsw.gov.au/public-health/mdc/mdcrep01.html. ☒

FIGURE 1

OBSTETRIC CAUSES OF PERINATAL DEATHS, NSW, 2001



Source: Centre for Epidemiology and Research, NSW Department of Health. *New South Wales Mothers and Babies 2001*. *N S W Public Health Bull* 2002; 13(S-4).