

***Baby Makes 3* Group Program for first-time parents: Challenging gendered expectations, promoting equal co-parenting**

Baby Makes 3 (BM3) is unique, evidence-based health promotion and social change initiative that builds understanding, appreciation and mutual respect among first-time parents to foster equal and healthy relationships that optimise collaborative co-parenting of infants and children.

The initiative has three components:

1. A **group-based program** for first-time parents promoting equal co-parenting
2. **Capacity building** approaches with antenatal and postnatal service providers, including local government Maternal and Child Health services (see *Case Study 2*)
3. **Advocacy** activities that promote gender equality across society.

BM3 outcomes directly align with multiple local government priority areas including:

- Gender equality
- Mental health and wellbeing
- Prevention of violence against women and other forms of family violence
- Development outcomes for children (social, health, education)
- Community health and wellbeing
- Community safety

What started in 2009 as a VicHealth-supported pilot program in one local government area has thrived to become a state-wide initiative working with 35 Victorian LGAs.

All parents and their children have the right to live a happy, safe and healthy life. However, many parents find themselves in unequal parenting roles which are predetermined by their gender and reinforced by social norms and expectations.

These outdated expectations are often inadvertently reinforced in early years services that work directly with parents.



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A core component of *Baby Makes 3* is a three-week (3 x 2 hours) program for first time parents that focuses on maintaining equal and respectful relationships after the birth of a baby.

Parents attend three evening or weekend sessions with their babies, with 6 – 12 other families.

The program is co-facilitated by a male and female facilitator, who have successfully completed healthAbility's facilitator training.

Ideally, the group program is integrated into existing first-time parents' programs that are delivered by local Maternal and Child Health services.

The parent group program helps prepare participants for the transition to parenthood:

- has a specific focus on relationship equality
- increases knowledge of, and skills to challenge, outdated and potentially damaging gendered stereotypes and expectations of parenting
- encourages parents to be equally active and responsible for parenting and housework.

The program can be tailored to the needs of your community in consultation with healthAbility. BM3 recognises the diversity of Victorian families and the importance of cultural safety. Supporting families from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, culturally and linguistically diverse, rainbow and regional communities, through direct engagement and program co-design is a central focus of BM3.

A partnership with healthAbility provides participating local governments with access to BM3 resources and support including training for both facilitators and early years staff and guidance around program monitoring, evaluation and ongoing quality control.

Broader organisational capacity building activities that focus on embedding gender equality into practice and organisational systems is an additional component of BM3 (see *Case Study 2*).



Find out how BM3 can support your LGA: bm3@healthability.org.au or www.healthability.org.au/services/baby-makes-3/