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Study reveals concerns about financial barriers to equitable provision of prenatal testing in Australia

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Greatest barriers to noninvasive prenatal testing are cost and patient awareness



New research from Monash University has found substantial variation in prenatal screening across Australia, with healthcare professionals reporting ongoing challenges in providing equitable access and pretest counselling.

In Australia, pregnant people can choose to have a screening test to detect common genetic conditions, such as Down syndrome, in their unborn baby. Noninvasive prenatal testing, or NIPT, is recognised as the most accurate screening test for such conditions, but it currently has no Medicare rebate. While most healthcare practitioners recommend NIPT to their pregnant patients, this research study suggests that the $500 price tag is a major barrier to equitable care.

The study *Disparities in integrating non-invasive prenatal testing into antenatal healthcare in Australia: A survey of healthcare professionals* surveyed several healthcare professional groups about their clinical experience of providing NIPT. While previous studies have focused on the views of obstetricians, this is the first study of its kind in Australia to survey a cross section of healthcare professionals, providing a more comprehensive overview.

The research found the greatest barriers to NIPT were cost (94.1 per cent), patient awareness (31.6 per cent) and health professionals not informing patients of the option of NIPT (26.7 per cent).

The study also found differences in who the test is offered to, with providers in private practice or metropolitan areas more likely to offer the test to all pregnant patients, than providers in the public sector and those working in regional and remote areas. A key concern for healthcare professionals was around overall adequacy of pre- and post-test counselling, with many emphasising the impact of time constraints on the quality of pre- and post-test counselling and the need for more funding.