

## Media Release

Strictly embargoed until 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2024

### NEW ALLERGY LIFELINE TO REPLACE DR GOOGLE FOR ANXIOUS PARENTS

Parents of children and babies with eczema will be offered a lifeline to fast-track access to expert advice while waiting to see allergy and dermatology specialists across Australia.

**Eczema Connect**, a national pilot program and research project developed by Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia, launches today at Perth Children's Hospital, the first location to offer the program.

The free service provides parents and caregivers with evidence-based information and practical tools to help them manage their child's eczema, as they wait to see a dermatologist or allergy specialist.

"Across Australia, demand for dermatologists and allergy specialists has seen wait times blowout. While severe cases of eczema are prioritised, some children and babies can wait more than six months for an appointment," according to Maria Said AM, Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia CEO.

"Eczema is a chronic condition, and when severe it places a huge burden on the whole family. While they wait, parents are left feeling helpless and desperately hunt for answers from Dr Google, social media or advice from family and friends, which can be well-intended, but often misguided and even dangerous.

"Many parents remove foods from their child's diet thinking it may be the cause, when it is not. Eczema is rarely linked to a child's diet and removing foods can place them at an increased risk of developing a food allergy."

**Eczema Connect** has been developed by experts from Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia, including eczema nurses, allergy specialists and a dermatologist. It includes resources from the National Allergy Council and the Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy.

The program has been designed to provide support when parents need it most. Referred parents will receive a range of easy-to-understand fact sheets, videos and webinars with evidence-based advice from allergy specialists, including nurses trained in eczema.

The information aims to quickly increase their knowledge about eczema, everyday eczema management, as well as what to do when eczema flares. Parents waiting to see a specialist also have access to a support line so they can speak directly with a qualified Allergy Educator from Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia.

"The information includes step-by-step videos about applying steroid cream, bleach baths and wet dressings. These common treatments for eczema are often recommended by GPs, but they can leave parents daunted and too scared to try them," explained Ms Said.

#### IMPACT OF ECZEMA

Eczema affects up to 35% of Australian children under six years of age.<sup>1</sup>

This debilitating skin condition can leave children feeling constantly itchy and irritable.

It can disrupt their sleep, put them at risk of skin infections and impact their development, schooling and self-esteem.

Children with severe eczema can spend up to 6.5 days a year in hospital.<sup>2</sup>

In Australia, expenditure on eczema in 2019-2020 was **\$593M** with the highest spending on hospital stays and GP visits.<sup>3</sup>

“Eczema Connect will be there for parents as a go-to for support and advice. We want parents to feel supported, like they have an expert holding their hand every step of the way.”

Clinical Immunology/Allergy Specialist and Professor at the University of Western Australia, Professor Michaela Lucas said early, credible information and support was crucial.

“We are excited to be trialling a program that could successfully bridge the gap and empower parents with credible information right from the start.” said Professor Lucas.

“When treated and managed correctly eczema can clear up in a matter of weeks, helping to reduce suffering from relentless itchiness and inflammation.

“Credible, easy to understand information for parents and carers is critical, so they can help their child as best they can while they are waiting to be seen by a specialist. The program also helps reinforce what the general practitioner has communicated in relation to management of eczema.”

The **Eczema Connect** pilot will also be the focus of a research trial in collaboration with the University of Western Australia, to evaluate the effectiveness of the program as an intervention. The results of the study will inform the rollout of the program in other states.

The **Eczema Connect** pilot program and research trial are funded by the Federal Government, Department of Health and Aged Care through the National Allergy Council, a partnership between Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia and the Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy, the peak patient and medical bodies for allergic disease in Australia. The project has also received support from sponsors of Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia.

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*Issued on behalf of Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia*

#### **LAUNCH PRESS CONFERENCE**

**Date:** Tuesday 3rd December 2024

**Time:** 11.00am – 12.00pm

**Location:** Perth Children’s Hospital

**Available for interviews:**

- Rachel and daughter Ivy who was diagnosed with eczema at 18 months
- Palesa and Michael whose daughter Kat was diagnosed with eczema at four months.
- Maria Said AM, Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia CEO
- Professor Michaela Lucas, Clinical Immunology/Allergy Specialist

**Available videos:**

- What is eczema – [video animation](#)
- Managing eczema – educational [videos](#)

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#### **More about the pilot project research**

The Parent Eczema Education and Support Program is a research collaboration with the University of Western Australia and Perth Children’s Hospital and the first of the Eczema Connect programs. The education and support study has been developed by Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia to independently evaluate the effectiveness of the **Eczema Connect** program. One hundred parents of patients will be recruited for the randomly controlled trial, which will evenly divide the participants into an intervention

group that receives the **Eczema Connect** information and a control group that receives no information. At three weeks, the participant's understanding of eczema and how to manage the allergic disease will be evaluated. Control group participants will then be provided with the **Eczema Connect** information and support. The trial is expected to take until mid 2025 and results will be published in a peer-reviewed medical journal.

### **About Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia**

Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia is a registered charity and patient support organisation that aims to improve awareness of allergy in the community through education, advocacy and support. Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia develops a range of educational materials, resources, workshops and seminars and operates the National Allergy Helpline. Part of an international alliance of like-minded organisations, Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia works closely with peak medical bodies including the Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy.

### **References**

1. Zeleke BM, Lowe AJ, Dharmage SC, et al. [Epidemiology of eczema in South-Eastern Australia](#). *Australas J Dermatol*. 2023;64(1):e41-e50. doi:10.1111/ajd.13966.
2. Su, J. C., Kemp, A. S., Varigos, G. A., & Nolan, T. M. (1997). Atopic eczema: Its impact on the family and financial cost. *Archives of Disease in Childhood*, 76(2), 159. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/adc.76.2.159>
3. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2023). Disease expenditure in Australia 2019-20. Updated Dec 2022. Accessed 7 August 2024. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/health-welfare-expenditure/disease-expenditure-in-australia-2019-20/contents/about>