

MEDIA RELEASE



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www.sandsvic.org.au

Recognising and destigmatising stillbirth

SANDS (Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Support), welcomes today's launch of *The Lancet's Stillbirth Series* – a series of articles from the world-leading medical journal which will help place the issues surrounding stillbirth on the international public agenda.

The series has been published in partnership with the International Stillbirth Alliance, of which SANDS is a member organisation. SANDS is a non-profit support group founded around thirty years ago, comprised of parents who have experienced the death of a baby through miscarriage, stillbirth, or shortly after birth. Recommended by many maternity hospitals in Australia, SANDS offers bereaved parents much needed peer-to-peer phone support from psychologist-trained volunteers who have all experienced a similar loss (national number: 13 000 SANDS, or 13 000 72637).

Natalina Scapin, member of SANDS Australia's Council and President of SANDS Victoria, is a bereaved parent who relied on the services of SANDS in the early 90's after her first child died during birth due to a cord accident.

"No one can be prepared for the devastating grief that follows the death of a baby – and it's essential that we continue to work towards recognising and destigmatising what are normal grief responses," explained Natalina.

"It's incredibly important that bereaved parents know they can access free phone support around the clock from trained supporters who've all been through similar experiences – people who truly understand and empathise. You feel as if your grief is truly acknowledged and it helps normalise and destigmatise the intense, ongoing grief you find yourself having to navigate."

One of The Lancet's series of papers presents a large global scale survey of health care providers and parents who highlight the lack of recognition and stigmatisation surrounding stillbirth. In particular, a parent's deep sense of grief is compounded when friends and family feel unable to help and can't understand why they are still grieving after what they might consider to be a reasonable period of time. However, bereaved parents report that their feelings of emptiness, longing and sadness are not time-defined and are far more difficult to navigate when they feel alone in their suffering. The grieving process is ongoing and milestones such as birthdays, or even milestones that a subsequent child reaches, can be painful reminders of where their lost baby would have been in life at that point in time.

SANDS helps facilitate the normal grieving process for the recently bereaved, as well as for parents whose natural grief was denied appropriate expression at the time of their baby's death. Phone-support is also provided for parents who have experienced a loss and are understandably suffering more heightened anxiety throughout a subsequent pregnancy.

Since the early 1980s SANDS has supported bereaved parents with individual telephone support and monthly group support meetings. SANDS also aims to help change community attitudes that fail to recognise the death of a baby, no matter what stage of pregnancy, as a real loss and legitimate to mourn. The parent-run organisation also regularly conducts in-services at major Victorian hospitals, helping educate midwives and other health professionals on the specific needs of bereaved parents.

To talk to a SANDS parent phone-supporter call SANDS on 13 000 SANDS or 13 000 72637. SANDS also offers monthly group support meetings, with parent-run associations across Australia.

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Further information/to arrange an interview with a bereaved parent or a clinical psychologist please contact: Jenny Mina, SANDS (Vic) Public Relations Manager, Mobile: 0424 423 562

Key Links: www.thelancet.com; www.stillbirthalliance.org