



Federal Budget Pre-submission 2020

**Building National Virtual
Breastfeeding Support Clinics**

**Scaling the “Help Me Feed”
Breastfeeding Support App**

20th August 2020

Overview

We welcome the opportunity to provide our submission to Commonwealth Government Treasury for consideration in the next Federal Budget.

Karitane is a leader in parenting and child health services, delivering a wide range of early intervention, secondary and tertiary supports to families in NSW and across Australia. Established in 1923, Karitane has a strong history of innovation and care, pioneering new models of care and delivering trusted support to families across our 97 year history. We hold partnerships with multiple universities, are a leader in child and family health workforce development, and are a respected member of multiple inter-agency bodies (e.g. Chair of the Australasian Association of Parenting and Child Health).

Since 2015, Karitane's strategic direction has prioritised a shift to digital health, recognising that virtual clinical delivery has enormous potential to overcome barriers to accessing care faced by families, particularly those in rural and regional communities. Our Digital Health Hub, opened in 2018 and launched by the NSW Health Minister, delivers a Virtual Continuum of Care model that supports families through online delivery of stepped clinical intervention services. Our telehealth services range from early intervention and prevention services such as evidence based parent education groups (e.g. Circle of Security and Tuning Into Kids multi-week therapeutic group programs, virtual supported playgroups, bespoke packages of video resources to address specific needs) to intensive clinical intervention services (e.g. the internationally renowned evidence-based I-PCIT therapeutic intervention program for young children with mental health behavioural conduct disorders), Virtual Home Visits and our recently launched tertiary support and care services – virtual residential unit stays, launched in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We have an impressive track record of peer-reviewed journal publications based on our virtual and digital healthcare services for parents across Australia.

Delivering parenting and child health virtual care services help parents overcome significant barriers to access, including travel from remote areas, ability to access childcare for other children, access to interpreters and support liaison officers (e.g. our Aboriginal Liaison Officer), issues around safety and infection, and other concerns. There are also significant efficiency gains to be realised in the digital delivery of clinical services, enabling limited resources to be used more effectively. Karitane has supported our clinical teams to competently develop digital delivery skills and clinical tools to help them reach more families in need and achieve our vision of families and children that are confident, safe and resilient.

The Proposal

The proposed solution will deliver digital clinical care by creating virtual breastfeeding clinics that support new mothers across Australia. This will enable new mothers to access support when and where they need it, irrespective of their capacity to travel or the availability of specialist lactation consultants in their own local community. Digital delivery to new mothers in their own homes will ensure the safety of mothers and babies, including those with compromised immune systems. The proposed solution will increase efficiency of clinical care, helping qualified nurses and lactation consultants to reach more new mothers and enhancing the resources that they can draw on. Home-based clinical care will be improved, **The proposed solution has had a soft launch at Karitane in NSW. The solution has been successfully used in the USA and UK. The solution is targeting national adoption with**

significant benefits for health systems across all Australian states and territories, but there are some technological, policy and adoption barriers that need to be overcome.

Solution

Karitane has recently implemented the app to connect new mothers with trained lactation consultants and child & family health nurses to improve breastfeeding rates and support infant and maternal health across Australia. The app will enable lactation consultants and child & family health nurses to deliver support to new mothers virtually using video call, text messaging, and bespoke resource packages such as instructional videos. This will help new mothers access needed support in their own homes, ensuring babies are well-nourished and healthy, and helping to develop a strong mother-baby attachment relationship which is critical for a variety of lifetime health outcomes.

Despite a significant investment in funding for breastfeeding support, and agreement from COAG who recently endorsed and ratified the National Breastfeeding Strategy, Australia's breastfeeding rates are continuing to decline against the benchmarks set by the WHO, which recommends all infants are exclusively breastfed until 6 months old.

Rather than a lack of resources, we believe that there is a misalignment in the way that breastfeeding support is delivered and patient/consumer preferences. Millennial and Generation Z mothers have repeatedly shown strong preference for accessing healthcare support via instant digital and app-based communication, rather than traditional 1800 phonelines, photocopied instructional sheets and long wait-times to clarify information in a clinic-based setting. It is essential to remember that breastfeeding support is a health issue primarily affecting young women, with the average age of new mothers 28.9 years. Many new mothers lack access to traditional breastfeeding support networks such as extended family, and show a strong preference for seeking support online.

The Help Me Feed app, developed by Small World Social with support from Karitane and already deployed in the USA and the UK, provides a scalable and secure platform for expert lactation consultants to deliver clinical support digitally. Free for parents, lactation consultants can video call and text parents to deliver services when and where they are needed, without either party needing to travel. Remote patient triage and monitoring is supported, with all data stored securely. Consultants also have access to an extensive library of instructional videos which can be sent to parents experiencing specific challenges. Karitane has been instrumental in developing content, ensuring all advice is appropriate and in line with current best practice in Australia.

Help Me Feed was developed out of a highly successful Australian trial in 2014 using Google Glass to support breastfeeding mothers. Intuitive and designed with new parents in mind, the app delivers a positive user experience and trials have shown a strong increase in breastfeeding confidence. Parents are able to remain connected to the same lactation consultant over the breastfeeding period through text and video calling, supporting greater rapport and a trusting relationship. The app complies with the Australian Privacy Act 1988 as well as HIPAA and is GDPR compliant.

The project is strongly aligned with the National Digital Health Strategy, particularly

strategic priority 5: digitally enabled models of care that improve accessibility, quality, safety and efficiency. Reduced travel, the availability of text messaging, and the library of best-practice video resources will result in significant efficiency gains, enabling nurses and lactation consultants to see a larger number of patients and reducing wait times. This will result in significant improvements in Australia's digital healthcare landscape for child and family health, building in resilience to future emergencies and pandemics while simultaneously enabling support to be delivered to families with existing access barriers, such as rural and remote families. Better early intervention support services will reduce the number of families who need to access tertiary or hospital services, which will reduce acute hospital admissions for infant respiratory infection and a range of other known high cost public health conditions for infants.

Help Me Feed is a collaboration between Karitane and Small World Social, an Australian-founded technology company focused on digital knowledge transfer and behavioural change, working with clients in the fields of health, science, medical device and manufacturing. It holds a portfolio of technology patents and has a research and development centre based in Melbourne. In 2014, Small World Social's Breastfeeding Support Project was awarded a Bronze Medal at the 2014 IDA International Design Awards for excellence in Multimedia Interface design, and an honourable mention at the 2014 Victorian Public Healthcare Awards for optimising healthcare through e-health and communications technology excellence. Through collaboration with Karitane, the Help Me Feed app combines strong consumer focus and technological excellence with deep subject matter expertise and a strong and trusted brand.

IMPACTS & BENEFITS

The proposed solution will increase access to breastfeeding support in Australia by delivering support remotely to new parents in their own homes, and by enabling efficiency gains that support lactation consultants to increase their caseload. This will increase both the capacity and resiliency of the Australian child and family health system, enabling better response to future emergencies and supporting increased access from families who experience existing barriers to care.

The app will contribute to:

- Increased breastfeeding rates for infants and reduced breastfeeding complications, leading to a wide range of beneficial health outcomes
- Fewer new mothers needing to seek clinic-based help for breastfeeding support, freeing up capacity and resources at over-subscribed parenting clinics.
- Workforce efficiency gains with trained breastfeeding support volunteers working closely with parents and health professionals, reducing the direct face to face requirements of the health professional
- Greater geographical reach and breastfeeding support for mothers in rural and

regional Australia

- Overall breastfeeding rates increased in line with WHO guidelines, particularly amongst vulnerable groups such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mothers and very young mothers, and emerging vulnerable groups such as mothers returning to work.

The initial rollout will see twenty Karitane nurses form a National Virtual Breast Feeding Clinic. Parents will be triaged to the clinic and the nurses will use Help Me Feed to provide breastfeeding support. This is expected to see them increase their caseload from 2 consultations per day to 5 consultations per day (i.e. from 500+ consultations per week). As we train our workforce to use the app, we expect to see significant efficiency gains resulting in more care delivered, more staff trained and increased uptake.

With some 310,000 babies born per annum in Australia (AIFS, 2018) and 288,300 (93%) commenced on breastfeeding, this number sharply declines so that only 89,900 (29%) (ABS, 2019) of babies are still being exclusively breastfed at 6 months of age in Australia, well below WHO guidelines. The scope for this app to support hundreds of thousands of mums struggling to continue to exclusively breastfeed to 6 months across Australia is truly significant.

The app is highly scalable across Australia. As part of the design and implementation process under the Innovation Challenge, we intend to undertake a benchmarking process to establish metrics to track the benefits of the app. This will include:

- Caseload of lactation consultants/Child & Family Health Nurses prior to using the app
- Caseload of lactation consultants/Child & Family Health Nurses using Help Me Feed
- No. of established Virtual Breastfeeding Clinics
- Time taken for parents to gain confidence breastfeeding using Help Me Feed vs not using the app
- Parent preference for app-based vs traditional breastfeeding support
- Increase in volume of parents exclusively breastfeeding to 6 months of age at 12 months post implementation and next ABS Census

This will enable the demonstration of quantifiable gains in the healthcare system.

Increasing breastfeeding rates in Australia to meet the minimum benchmarks set by the WHO has enormous potential to increase the health and wellbeing of the Australian population as a whole. The benefits of breastfeeding are extensive and well-established, with better health outcomes in both mothers and babies across a wide range of indicators. According to The Lancet Breastfeeding Series Group 2016, breastfeeding reduces infant mortality and protects against serious diseases such as SIDS, NEC,

respiratory infections, otitis media, diabetes, and childhood leukaemia, influences the development of a baby's microbiome and contributes to better health for mothers including reduced invasive breast cancer, ovarian cancer and maternal depression.

However, breastfeeding rates in Australia do not meet WHO benchmarks. The WHO recommends that all babies be exclusively breastfed to 6 months, however the 2019 Census data found that just 29% of Australian infants are exclusively breastfed at 6 months, and 66% are fed with some breastmilk at that age. Younger mothers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mothers are less likely to breastfeed. Families in rural areas have limited access to specialist support.

Funding Sought

We are seeking **\$2,400,000 inc GST** to facilitate national scale up of Karitane's HelpMe Feed Breastfeeding Support Clinics across Australia.

Capacity to deliver

Karitane is a large NGO with a strong financial position and strong, evidence based digital capability. We deliver a virtual continuum of care from our Digital Health Hub, including Virtual Home Visits and Virtual Residential Unit Stays. We have a highly trained, competent and skilled workforce of child and family health nurses and practitioners, over 75 digital health-trained clinicians and are an accredited breastfeeding facility. Delivery of Help Me Feed will sit within our Digital Health Hub, leveraging existing equipment and processes already used in the delivery of digital clinical care. We have capacity to deliver the proposed project under the Innovation Challenge.

The Karitane CEO will oversee participation in the Innovation Challenge, supported by the Director Education & Business Development and the Director Clinical Services. At Small World Social, key participants will include Kathy Phelan, CEO and Madeline Sands, Project Leader. This team has the capability and capacity to deliver design and implementation plans including clear visibility on our capability to support increased digital clinical care, detailed technical understanding of our proposed solution, and a clear understanding of the needed resources to roll out Virtual Breast Feeding Clinics and app-based breastfeeding support and care nationally.