

## Therapy for infants showing early signs of autism



Early Years



### Background

Significant work is being done to lower the age of autism diagnosis, and therefore achieve better outcomes for children.

This study investigated whether a targeted pre-emptive therapy can make a positive difference to development of children who are showing early signs of autism but are too young for diagnosis.



### Aim

To run a full scale clinical trial to investigate the effectiveness of a pre-emptive therapy for young infants showing early signs of autism in a real-world health-care referral setting.

The therapy aimed to support infants and caregivers through a low-intensity, non-stigmatising, home-based program, when first signs are identified, rather than waiting for children to reach an age when an autism diagnosis might be given.



### Who took part?

**103** infants and their families



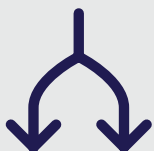
### How we did the research



Research was conducted across two sites: Melbourne and Perth



Infants were identified by community health care workers, using a screening tool called the SACS-R



Eligible families were seen for baseline assessment and then randomised into two groups



Half of the families were assigned to a six month home-based therapy program called iBASIS-VIPP, while the other half continued with standard community care



At baseline and outcome, parents completed questionnaires and our teams completed behavioural assessments with the infants.

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### What did we find?

Ninety-five percent of families who were enrolled participated in all parts of the study.



Caregivers in the iBASIS-VIPP therapy group reported that their child had improved communication and language skills, compared to caregivers of infants accessing usual services.



Specifically, caregivers of **toddlers who received the six months of early iBASIS-VIPP therapy** reported that their child **understood an average of 37 more words, and spoke an average of 15 more words**, than those who received usual services.



As most children were not using words at the start of the therapy period, these parent-reported language gains are an important improvement.



There was no significant change in early autism behaviours and assessed verbal and non-verbal skills among infants in the iBASIS-VIPP therapy group compared to those who accessed usual services.



### Who did the research?



Government of Western Australia  
Department of Health



### Acknowledgments

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### Find out more

Scientific publication:

[thelancet.com/journals/lanchi/article/PIIS2352-4642\(19\)30184-1](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanchi/article/PIIS2352-4642(19)30184-1)

Download the final report and executive summary on the Autism CRC website:

[autismcrc.com.au/report/early-therapy](https://autismcrc.com.au/report/early-therapy)