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ENHANCING THE *IMMUNISE AUSTRALIA* PROGRAM

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Childhood immunisation coverage has risen substantially since the inception of the *Immunise Australia* (IA) program. National immunisation coverage exceeds herd protection levels, however some areas have substantially lower childhood immunisation rates. This literature and data review explores the distribution of and reasons for sub-optimal immunisation rates. Potential strategies to enhance the IA program to increase immunisation rates are discussed.

Literature and publically available data was explored and analysed in an attempt to understand the extent of and reasons for parental failure to immunise their children^{1, 2}. An attempt is made to characterise the psycho-demographics of the communities with low immunisation rates.

The IA program has achieved considerable success in raising immunisation rates nationally. Registered conscientious objection rates have steadily risen since 1999, and all active vaccine refusers are estimated to account for 2.5-3% of Australia's births.

The Australian Vaccination-skeptics Network (AVN, formerly known as Australian Vaccination Network) and other public opponents of immunisation appear to be having an impact on parent's willingness to vaccinate their children. Pockets of very low vaccination coverage exist in some Australian cities and some rural areas. Demographics of parents choosing to not vaccinate are diverse, but many are affluent and well educated.

A strategy to mitigate increasing vaccine refusal rates and to immunise other unvaccinated children is proposed. Increased advertising coverage (print, transit and internet) of disease risks and of vaccine benefits and risks is proposed. Improved communication materials appealing to different cognitive styles and to consumers with differing information complexity requirements should be developed. Enhanced identification of non-vaccinated children is proposed, particularly Indigenous children in urban areas, with more active follow-up to make vaccination appointments or home immunisation visits.

Selected References:

1. Lawrence GL, et al., *Australian Family Physician*. 2004;33(7):568–71.
2. Poland GA, Jacobson RM, *Human Immunology*. 2012 Aug;73(8):859–66.