

# CASE STUDY



## Increasing vaccination coverage through consumer-researcher partnerships

Catherine Hughes AM – Director, Immunisation Foundation of Australia

### The work and its impact

In 2015, Catherine's four-week-old son, Riley, died from whooping cough (also known as pertussis). In Australia, babies don't receive their first whooping cough vaccination until they are 6–8 weeks old.<sup>1</sup> People can help protect babies from catching whooping cough during this vulnerable period by making sure they and their children are vaccinated. Pregnant women can also get a booster vaccine to pass protective antibodies against whooping cough to their babies.

When Riley was born, whooping cough vaccines were not routinely offered to women during pregnancy. Catherine wanted to change this. She started the [Light for Riley](#) campaign, sharing Riley's story with the media, researchers, and politicians. Her advocacy was a huge success. By 1 July 2018, free whooping cough vaccinations were available to all pregnant women nationwide. In Catherine's home state of Western Australia, whooping cough vaccination rates in pregnant women increased from 5% in 2014 to 89% in 2020.

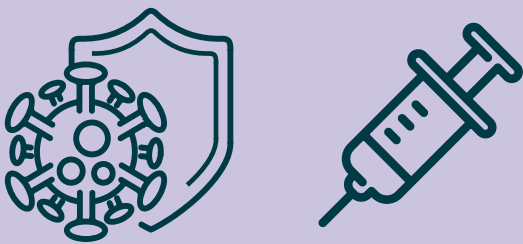
In 2017, Catherine started the [Immunisation Foundation of Australia](#) (IFA) to raise awareness of other vaccine-preventable diseases, including respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), measles, and meningococcal. IFA collaborates with research institutions including the Kids Research Institute Australia and the National Centre of Immunisation Research and Surveillance (NCIRS) to increase public awareness of vaccination and its importance.

<sup>1</sup> [Pertussis \(whooping cough\) | The Australian Immunisation Handbook](#)

### Vaccination awareness campaigns

The impact of Catherine's involvement in research is clear through the IFA's awareness campaigns.

[RSV awareness week](#) takes place every June. There are free resources about RSV and vaccination on IFA's website. All these resources have been co-produced by consumers and researchers. This ensures that the resources can be understood by the general public and that they are scientifically accurate.



[Whooping cough awareness day](#) is on November 8 each year. The awareness day encourages Australians to check they are up to date with their whooping cough vaccination. This awareness day is needed now more than ever. In 2024, there was a nationwide increase in whooping cough cases, mostly in older children and teenagers.<sup>2</sup> While newborn babies are especially vulnerable, whooping cough can cause serious illness in all age groups.

Catherine's work shows the transformative potential of consumer and community involvement in research. Through her leadership and partnering with researchers, Catherine's work has led to real-world results: more people getting vaccinated against many diseases including whooping cough. In recognition of her efforts, Catherine was named West Australian's Young Australian of the Year in 2016, and in 2022 she was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) for services to immunisation.

<sup>2</sup> [Whooping cough \(pertussis\) | Australian Centre for Disease Control](#)



*“Catherine remains laser-focused on ensuring consumers and the community are at the forefront of all aspects of immunisation into the future, from policy and research to awareness campaigns and immunisation programs. With the development of new vaccines and rise in vaccine hesitancy, her highly driven advocacy – fueled by her own lived experience and characterised by curiosity, courage and a steadfast determination to prevent other families from suffering the loss of a child due to preventable disease – will remain relevant and necessary for years to come.”*

Professor Jonathan Carapetis  
The Kids Research Institute Australia

