



McGill Researcher Receives CIHR Funding to Test Psychosocial Intervention for Pregestational Diabetes

By Duncan Preston (Regina)

The prevalence of depression and anxiety symptoms in people with type 1 or type 2 diabetes is two to four times greater than in the general population. During the pregnancy planning and perinatal period (pregnancy and postpartum), people with pregestational diabetes may experience elevated psychological distress due to unique and complex psychosocial challenges. A growing body of research has recently identified the pregnancy planning and perinatal periods as top priority in the area of pregestational diabetes. However, no interventions have been tailored to promote mental health and the transition to parenthood for women and birthing persons with pregestational diabetes during this life stage.



Dr. Deborah Da Costa
Associate Professor
McGill University

To improve the needs of women and birthing persons with pregestational diabetes, Dr. Deborah Da Costa, an Associate Professor in the Department of Medicine at McGill University, and her team proposed a study to adapt and evaluate an engagement-enhanced digital intervention called HealthyMoms DM+ to promote diabetes-specific psychosocial and mental health outcomes during the pregnancy planning and perinatal periods. She was successfully granted funding for her study by a grant offered by CIHR in partnership with the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation in the spring of 2023. Her study will qualitatively explore the digital intervention, HealthyMoms DM+, and identify possible barriers and facilitators for the program's uptake and engagement. To guide the adaptation of the intervention, her team will administer a needs assessment survey to gather the perspectives of individuals with pregestational diabetes related to their experiences of pregnancy planning, pregnancy and early parenting with a chronic condition, barriers, and facilitators to seeking help for emotional wellness, informational needs, and factors affecting the decision to visit and engage with the HealthyMoms DM+ website. Dr. Da Costa and her team plan to provide a subgroup of participants with access to HealthyMoms and perform qualitative interviews to identify features and content to be included or modified in the prototype. Following the diabetes-specific refinements, a pilot randomized control trial will be conducted with individuals with pregestational diabetes who are either planning a pregnancy, are currently pregnant or are in the postpartum period.

HealthyMoms DM+ will fill an important gap in current healthcare and web-based resources targeting the prevention of maternal psychological difficulties during the pregnancy planning and perinatal period for individuals with pregestational diabetes. Ultimately, the hope is that HealthyMoms DM+ will reduce the risk of perinatal mental health problems by enhancing maternal mental well-being and facilitating diabetes self-management during this critical life stage in ways that can be disseminated by diabetes providers.