

Charities to invest £1.5 million into research to help babies born too soon

Premature birth and its complications are the leading cause of death and disability among children under five years of age across the world.¹ Tragically, over 1,000 babies die in the UK each year after being born too soon.^{2,4} For those lucky enough to survive, it can cause years of life-changing disability. While some things are known to increase a woman's chances

of giving birth too soon, many early births remain unexplained.⁵

Children's charity Action Medical Research and preterm birth research charity Borne are joining forces to fund £1.5 million of new research projects over the next three years (2017-2019), to help identify the causes behind prematurity and find ways to prevent it. These new research projects will develop from applications that Action and Borne look forward to receiving during 2017. The new research will complement research currently supported by Borne within the Imperial College laboratories at Chelsea and Westminster Hospital and also build on Action's programme of research into prematurity, pregnancy complications and helping to treat sick and vulnerable babies.

In the UK, one in 12 babies are born prematurely, or over 61,000 children each year.^{6,9}

Worldwide, over 15 million are born too soon each year. Preterm birth complications are the leading cause of death among children under five years of age, responsible for nearly one million deaths and the likelihood of being born early has been rising in almost all countries with reliable data.¹⁰

Despite these numbers, and the enormous impact premature birth has on babies and their families, obstetrics and obstetric research is chronically under-funded and under-resourced, and there is limited effort to develop treatments to help prevent preterm birth.¹¹ Action

Medical Research and Borne believe that only by investing in research can the devastation caused by premature birth be stopped, and their combined investment will play a vital role in achieving this goal.

"All newborn babies are vulnerable, but those born very early are particularly so," says David Edwards, Professor of Paediatrics and Neonatal Medicine at King's College London and Action Medical Research Trustee. "They can face difficulties with breathing, feeding and fighting infections, and are at increased risk of developing lifelong disabilities.

This investment into much-needed medical research can help deepen our understanding of why babies are born prematurely and move us towards being able to develop treatments to help reduce the numbers of babies being born too soon and to improve the lives of those born too early."

Will Greenwood, former England World Cup Rugby player and Ambassador for Borne, plays an active role in the campaign for better awareness surrounding preterm birth. Will and his wife Caro's first baby Freddie was born at 22 weeks and lived for only 45 minutes. He credits Borne Founder Professor Mark Johnson with the survival of his three healthy children after Caro was diagnosed with a genetic condition leaving her at high-risk of preterm births.

He says: "There is so much yet to learn about why babies, like Freddie, are born too soon. We must focus on research to find answers to the problems that can accompany childbirth that cause so much heartbreak for families all over the world."

Professor Mark Johnson, Chair of Obstetrics and Chelsea and Westminster Hospital and Borne Founder and Chief Scientific Officer says: “Research into the causes of preterm birth is so important because it's all about giving babies a chance of a normal life, who would otherwise not have one. The loss of life and devastating disabilities caused by premature birth are unimaginable. Borne's vision is a world in which a child's first day on earth won't have to be their hardest.”

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Action and Borne believe that putting a stop to preterm birth and helping our most vulnerable babies who are born too soon is achievable, but only through investing in medical research and expertise in this area.

Find out more about how you can help fund medical research to help tackle premature birth and save and change babies' lives at www.action.org.uk and www.borne.org.uk

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Notes to editors:

1. Please contact Sarah Moss, Director of Communications at Action, on 01403 327423 email smoss@action.org.uk if you would like request an interview with David Edwards.
2. Please contact Jenny Palmer, Operations Manager at Borne, on 0203 3157930 email jenny@borne.org.uk if you would like to request an interview with Mark Johnson; we will do our best to arrange this but please note that it will be subject to his availability in consideration of his clinical work with patients.

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Action Medical Research is a leading UK-wide charity saving and changing babies and children's lives through medical research. For more than 60 years we've helped pioneer ways to prevent disease and develop treatments benefiting millions of people. Our research has helped to beat polio in the UK, develop ultrasound, fight meningitis and prevent stillbirths. We are working to tackle premature birth, prevent pregnancy complications that threaten babies' lives, and find the best ways to care for sick and vulnerable babies.

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Charity reg. nos 208701 and SC039284.

Borne is a medical research charity that aims to identify the causes of premature birth.

Through our research we are working to save lives, prevent disability and create lifelong health for mothers and babies. Our research to date has changed our understanding of labour, re-focused our work and redirected our efforts. Through more vital research, we will identify the key interventions which will improve pregnancy outcomes and optimise fetal development.

Borne's vision is a world in which a child's first day on earth won't have to be their hardest. And, through our pioneering research, we can make that vision a reality.

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