Investment in research saves lives and money

facts about:

Prematurity

Today:

- Each year, more than half a million babies are born premature (gestation period of less than 37 weeks) in the U.S. That’s one in every eight births.*
- Of the nearly 30,000 babies who die each year before their first birthday, 68% are born preterm.*
- Preterm infants (less than 37 weeks) are 15 times as likely to die as full-term babies during the first year of life, and very premature infants (less than 32 weeks) are 73 times as likely to die during this same period.*
- Preterm infants are at significantly higher risk for cognitive deficiencies, cerebral palsy, respiratory problems, vision and hearing loss, and feeding and digestive problems.**

The Cost:

- In 2005, preterm births in the United States cost more than $26 billion for medical care, delivery, early intervention services, special education and lost productivity.*
- First-year average medical costs totaled more than $32,000 for preterm infants compared to about $3,300 for term infants in 2005.**
- The cost of saving a life of a very low weight (less than 3 lbs., 5 oz.) preterm newborn is nearly $550,000.***

*SOURCE: INSTITUTE OF MEDICINE (WWW.IOM.EDU)
**SOURCE: MARCH OF DIMES (WWW.MARCHOFDIMES.COM)

Survivor:

NAME: LAUREN FLEMING
AGE: 7
CONDITION: BORN 3 MONTHS EARLY

Lauren Fleming was born in 2004 at just 26 weeks, weighing 2 pounds, 1 ounce, and doctors prepared her parents for the worst. During her 5-month stay in newborn intensive care, Lauren was treated for respiratory distress syndrome in premature babies.**

Research funded by the National Institutes of Health found that the hormone hydroxyprogesterone reduces the risk of preterm birth by up to 42% in high-risk women.***

*SOURCE: DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES (WWW.HHS.GOV)
**SOURCE: WEBMD (WWW.WEBMD.COM)

HOW RESEARCH SAVES LIVES:

- Medical research has played a significant role in decreasing infant death rates fourfold since 1950.*
- The use of steroids to improve fetal lung development has been successful in reducing potentially fatal infant respiratory distress syndrome in premature babies.**
- Research funded by the National Institutes of Health found that the hormone hydroxyprogesterone reduces the risk of preterm birth by up to 42% in high-risk women.***

*SOURCE: MEDICINE OF THE MOTHER (WWW.IOM.EDU)
**SOURCE: WEBMD (WWW.WEBMD.COM)

HOW RESEARCH SAVES MONEY:

- By preventing preterm births, hydroxyprogesterone is estimated to save more than $450 million in medical costs each year and may save more than $2 billion over the lifetimes of those babies who would have otherwise been born premature by preventing major health problems associated with prematurity.*
- NIH-funded research has developed noninvasive respiratory assistance procedures, like Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (CPAP) for use in preterm infants with respiratory distress. CPAP is less expensive and easier to operate than mechanical ventilation, can shorten length of hospital stays, requires less intensive care, and can save $10,000 for every six infants treated.**

*SOURCE: AGENT FOR HEALTHCARE RESEARCH AND QUALITY (WWW.AHRQ.GOV)
**SOURCE: BUCKMASTER AG, ET. AL. PEDIATRICS. 2007. 120: 509-518.
Hope for the Future:

- Research by the NIH and Wayne State University has found that a progesterone gel can reduce the risk for preterm birth for women with a short cervix.*
- Research has indicated that thyroid dysfunction during pregnancy puts mothers at risk for preterm pregnancy. Proper treatment of thyroid conditions may significantly reduce the risk of a premature birth.**

The Bottom Line:
Medical research has identified effective strategies for the prevention of preterm births and the treatment of premature babies. These advances have made a remarkable difference, saving lives and preventing serious disabilities. However, the high incidence of preterm births and resulting complications remain a major health concern in the U.S. The complex nature of preterm birth requires additional research on the biological and psychosocial causes of, and treatments for, prematurity to address this serious medical problem.

**SOURCE: NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH (WWW.NIH.GOV)