

# Leading Japan in Childcare Support Policies: Expanded and Improved Fertility Treatment Costs Assistance; Free Postpartum Care; and High School Travel Expenses Assistance



## Background and Reasons for Deciding to Undertake the Project

Since the founding of the “Child Care Kingdom Tottori” in 2010, Tottori Prefecture has been leading Japan in undertaking childcare support initiatives such as providing free nursery care for a family’s third child and assistance with paediatric medical expenses in cooperation with local municipalities.

As a result, the prefecture’s total fertility rate, which had fallen to as low as 1.43 in 2008, is recovering and has remained in the 1.6 range for seven consecutive years since 2013. However, the desired birth rate (1.95) has not been achieved, with the number of births continuing to decline year-on-year.

Accordingly, in response to prefecture residents saying that the burden of childcare is enormous, in FY2020 Tottori Prefecture newly launched a project that pushes prefectural childcare support a step ahead of the rest of the country.

## Project Aims

In order to achieve the desired birth rate (1.95) by 2030, the project aims to develop childcare support that is appropriate for “Childcare Kingdom Tottori” in going a step beyond the rest of the country and that “lessens the economic burden of households with small children” and “lessens the physical and mental burden of pregnancy, childbirth, and childcare”.

## Project Outline

1. Programme Supporting Desired Pregnancy and Childbirth (Expansion and improvement of fertility treatment costs assistance)

Assistance for testing costs is provided as an incentive for beginning fertility treatment early, as well as a means of lessening both the economic burden of infertility testing costs and anxiety about infertility.

- (1) Infertility testing expenses assistance  
\*First government body in Japan to subsidise the entire cost of testing)  
Subsidisation of the full cost (up to 26,000 yen) of testing costs not covered by health insurance for married couples who have been married for less than three years, or when the wife is less than 35 years of age.
  - (2) Artificial Insemination Subsidy Programme  
\*Highest subsidy amount in Japan  
Subsidisation of 70% (up to an amount equivalent to the amount covered by insurance) of the cost of artificial insemination undertaken when the wife is less than 35 years of age.
  - (3) Specific Fertility Treatment Expenses Subsidy Programme  
\*Highest subsidy amount in Japan  
Substantial expansion and improvement of prefecture-managed assistance for a specific fertility treatment (in vitro fertilisation, intracytoplasmic sperm injection)
  - (4) Recurrent Pregnancy Loss Medical Costs Subsidy Programme  
Assistance with testing and treatment for recurrent pregnancy loss
2. Postpartum Mothers and Babies Health Subsidy

## Programme

### (1) Free postpartum care

\*First government body in Japan to make out-of-pocket payments free of charge

In order to support a smooth start to childcare in addition to preventing postpartum depression and child abuse, Tottori Prefecture has made users' out-of-pocket payments for postpartum care programmes (usage fees) free of charge in cooperation with local municipalities.

### (2) Expansion of (accommodation-type) postpartum care providers by improving maternity home facilities/equipment

Subsidisation of costs for the extensions and renovations necessary for creating maternity homes with beds.

### 3. High School Travel Expenses Subsidy Programme

\*Only system in Japan with "no limitations on income" for eligibility

So that high school students need not abandon studies they wish to pursue because of the cost of travelling to school, with the cooperation of local municipalities, Tottori Prefecture is subsidising the travel expenses of students at high schools in Tottori Prefecture who use public transportation to travel to and from school.



Fertility treatment

## Project Features and Innovation

Questionnaires asking prefecture residents about measures to address the declining birth rate were conducted; measures were formulated based on respondents' sense of burden regarding childcare and childcare support policies they want improved; and Tottori Prefecture and local municipalities worked in collaboration to create, expand, and improve systems that are a step ahead of the rest of Japan.

## Results of the Project

[Expansion and improvement of fertility treatment costs assistance]

- Testing expenses assistance approximately doubled.
- First-time artificial insemination or specific fertility treatment assistance also increased.
- Testing is becoming an entry point for early treatment.

[Free postpartum care]

- Project led to a large increase in mothers utilising postpartum care programmes.

[High School Travel Expenses Subsidy Program]

- Changing from the existing municipality-managed programme to a joint municipality-prefecture-managed programme has been received favourably as it has increased the number of assistance recipients and expanded and improved assistance.

## Issues and Responses

[Fertility treatment costs]

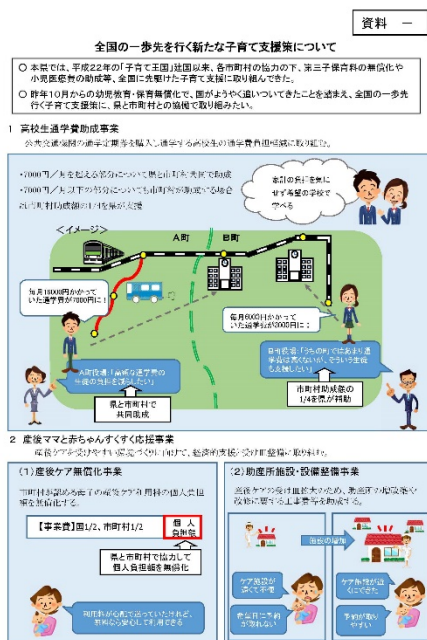
- Accurate knowledge about fertility needs to be disseminated and taught, leading to early infertility testing after marriage.
- Information about the programme will be disseminated through education provided in collaboration with infertility specialist consultation centres and local municipalities' marriage notification acceptance windows.

[Postpartum care programmes]

- In order for postpartum care programmes to become established, Tottori Prefecture is working in collaboration with local municipalities, medical institutions, and maternity homes to build a stable system for providing expectant mothers in the region with peace of mind and rest.
- Expectant mothers may have minor concerns that they are reluctant to consult medical institutions or local municipalities' public health nurses about, as well as feeling alone or lonely, and their physical and mental burden needs to be alleviated.

[High school travel expenses assistance]

- To ensure a stable programme budget moving forward, prefecture residents' understanding of the necessity of this programme needs to be obtained.



Assistance with school travel expenses, free postpartum care

**Future Developments (Anticipated Results, Outlook for the Project, Issues, etc.)**

[Expansion and Improvement of Fertility Treatment Costs]

- We will closely observe national movements (insurance coverage) and consider how the system can be further enhanced.

[Free postpartum care]

- In parallel with promoting the postpartum care programme, we will create places in each area where expectant and nursing mothers who are not eligible for the postpartum care programme but are experiencing anxiety can easily consult with a midwife, exchange information with others, or otherwise take a mental break (respite).
- We will endeavour to enhance the role of maternity homes as places in the community that expectant and nursing mothers can depend on (regular maternity home).

[High school travel expenses assistance]

- By carrying out PR as part of our child care support policies that are a step ahead of the rest of Japan, we will encourage families with children to move to Tottori from outside the prefecture.

[Future developments aimed at further enhancing childcare support]

- Aspiring to create a “Child Care Kingdom Tottori” where people can say, “I’m glad I was born in Tottori”, or “I want to raise my children in Tottori”, we will continue to promote policy measures aimed at enhancing seamless child care support.

**Reference URLs**

[Free Postpartum Care] Prepartum and Postpartum Care Questionnaire Survey Report  
<https://www.pref.tottori.lg.jp/secure/787368/sannzennsangohoukokusyo.pdf>

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**Key Terms**