



Media Release

+64 9 923 1966 contact@abetterstart.nz

Private Bag 92019, Auckland Mail Centre, Auckland 1142, New Zealand

Tuesday 21 May, 2019

Better Together 2019 symposium focuses on ways to give our tamariki a better start in life

Our Aotearoa New Zealand tamariki are facing an increasing number of serious health and wellbeing issues from the day they are born. A Better Start National Science Challenge is working to ensure that young New Zealanders have a healthy weight, are confident at reading and learning, and addressing mental health problems in children and teenagers.

Last year A Better Start National Science Challenge secured \$20.5m funding to continue for the next 5 years, which recognised the creativity and innovation shown by the Challenge researchers. The findings of the first phase of the Challenge will be shared at the annual He waka eke noa Better Together Symposium on Friday 24 May, 2019 at the Kelliher Estate, Mangere, Auckland.

- How do we achieve our goal for all New Zealand children to have a healthy weight?
- How do we provide Māori and Pacific students, schools and communities with advice to maintain good mental health?
- What can we do to ensure that children reach their learning and literacy milestones?

These questions and more will be discussed at the symposium, by multi-disciplinary teams of researchers, who will explain why starting early is the best way to respond to the health and wellbeing challenges that we have in New Zealand; why working with Māori and Pacific students, schools and communities to offer young people and their families easier access to advice is vital to maintain good mental health; and how we aim to ensure that children reach their first important learning milestones, such as becoming a confident reader.

“I am delighted that our symposium is being opened by the Hon Jenny Salesa, who has Associate Minister responsibilities for Education, Health, Housing and Urban Development,” says Professor Wayne Cutfield, A Better Start National Science Challenge Director.

“The synergy that Minister Salesa will bring to the symposium opening address through her portfolio responsibilities are very closely aligned with the Challenge’s mission and our focus on improving the potential of our tamariki to lead healthy and successful lives, and we look forward to hosting her,” he says.

A Better Start National Science Challenge is hosted by the University of Auckland and funded by the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment.

The symposium will outline the excellent progress that the Challenge has made over the past 5 years in the three themes of the Challenge – Healthy Weight, Resilient Teens and Successful Learning – underpinned by the big data theme.

Hoani Lambert, Deputy Chief Executive, Orangi Tamariki, Ministry for Children, is the keynote speaker and will be speaking about his views on joining up the three ministries for child wellbeing - Oranga Tamariki, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education.

“More than 160 researchers are engaged with A Better Start and we are looking forward to a dynamic symposium as our research teams tell us what works in the real world to ensure that all our tamariki have the best start in life,” says Professor Cutfield.

A highlight of the symposium programme is a session on healthy weight and obesity prevention for children and adolescents for a project led by Professor Boyd Swinburn from the University of Auckland. This session will include a fun, novel, presentation group of teenage students from the Ormiston Junior College Accelerator Programme, which aims to have a real impact on the health of their wider community. The students aged 13 – 15 have been learning STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) and entrepreneurial skills to improve the health of their community, and ultimately improve the community around them.

At the end of the symposium there will be an International Expert Panel session about future science direction and how this will potentially impact on A Better Start National Science Challenge.

For more information about He waka eke noa Better Together 2019 and a copy of the programme please go to the website <https://www.abetterstart.nz/he-waka-eke-noa-better-together/>

ENDS

If you would like to attend a session at the Symposium please email contact@abetterstart.ac.nz.

For media inquiries, or to interview **Professor Wayne Cutfield, A Better Start Challenge Director**, please contact Kristine Scherp, Communications Advisor A Better Start National Science Challenge. Kristine.scherp@auckland.ac.nz Mobile: 021 644 158.