

### **Increased support for families an important step forward for Aotearoa**

Whānau Āwhina Plunket, the country's largest provider of healthcare services for children under five, has welcomed increases in support for families, particularly those in the lowest incomes announced in today's Budget.

Whānau Āwhina Plunket Chief Executive, Amanda Malu, says the organisation, which works directly with tens of thousands of families every year, has witnessed firsthand the impacts that poverty have had on our youngest Kiwis.

"We know that the first 1000 days are the most important time in a child's development, so having food on the table, in warm, healthy homes, is absolutely critical.

"These are issues we have been advocating about for years with successive Governments, and we are delighted that there has finally been a move towards increasing benefit rates and lifting our children out of poverty. There is still a long way to go, but we are encouraged by the direction provided by this year's Wellbeing Budget," said Ms Malu.

"Another area where we need to see progress is through urgent investment in maternal mental health support - this is something we are calling for with our Five to Thrive partners Barnardos, Te Kahui Mana Ririki, and Save the Children.

"Our PlunketLine service is seeing year-on-year increases in mental health calls, with a 22% increase in 2020 compared to 2019, and 2021 numbers have already surpassed those of 2020 when we have not yet reached the halfway point of the year.

"Our people are going into homes every day and seeing the toll that compounding issues such as living below the poverty line, unhealthy homes – or a lack entirely of one – and a dearth of proper mental health support are having on parents, caregivers.

"If we are truly going to support our tamariki to thrive, we need to look at the whole system and ensure that we are providing solutions that ensure all of our tamariki truly get the best start in life," said Ms Malu.

**ENDS**

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