

## Whānau Āwhina Plunket says ‘it takes a village’ this World Maternal Mental Health Day

Whānau Āwhina Plunket – Aotearoa New Zealand’s largest provider of healthcare services for children under five – is encouraging people to ‘become their village’ for new parents and caregivers this World Maternal Mental Health Day.

Acting Chief Nurse Karen Magrath says World Maternal Mental Health Day, held on 4 May, draws attention to essential mental health concerns for mothers and families.

“Becoming a parent is life-changing, and there’s nothing that can really prepare you for the changes that a new baby will bring,” Ms Magrath says.

“It’s a steep learning curve that brings huge joy and huge responsibilities. When you add sleep deprivation, reduced income, limited whānau support, and the curve balls COVID-19 keeps throwing at us, the transition to parenting can be a tough one that takes its toll on parental mental wellbeing.”

Ms Magrath says the adage ‘it takes a village to raise a child’ still stands, and there are lots of ways everyone can support new parents as they navigate the complexities of raising tamariki.

“Family and friends can make a real difference to the health and wellbeing of new parents, especially as they find their way through the increased pressure of the pandemic.”

To support new parents, family and friends can:

- **Stay in touch.** If you can’t physically see a friend who has a new baby, give them a call or catch up via video. Send them a message first to find out the best time for them.
- **Provide practical support.** Offer to cook a meal, do a load of laundry, grab some groceries, or take the dog for a walk. Some people find it hard to accept help so if they turn you down, don’t be put off from offering again.
- **Encourage them to seek help.** If you feel like your friend or relative needs more support, encourage them to reach out to their Whānau Āwhina Plunket nurse or GP. PlunketLine is available 24/7 on 0800 933 922.

Ms Magrath says in many ways, parenting has never been tougher – and this additional stress is reflected in the number of maternal mental health-related calls the charity’s PlunketLine team and nurses in the field respond to.

“We know the pandemic has hit people hard, socially and emotionally, and we have seen an increase in stress and anxiety in our whānau and families,” Ms Magrath says.

“Our PlunketLine team has seen year-on-year increases in mental health support-related calls. Right now, we’re seeing increased anxiety about doing the ‘right’ thing with the ever-changing rules of the pandemic, and a lot of concern and how to keep young tamariki safe from the virus and supporting their healthy development.”



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Ms Magrath is encouraging friends, neighbours, workmates and whānau to reach out and help lighten the load for parents.

“Let’s wrap support around our new parents – parenting can be tough, and parenting in a pandemic even tougher!

“But we can all pitch in to help new parents as they navigate this exciting, messy, loud, worrying – but ultimately joyful – time in their lives.”

**ENDS**

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