

# Children's health: Many answers already available

November 22 2013

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The government's Health Committee report released this week includes 12 key recommendations for building a better future for New Zealand children and much of the research needed is already underway in the ground-breaking Growing Up in New Zealand study.

One of the Health Committee's recommendations centres on the need for further research into [child health](#) with a primary focus being from pre-birth to the age of three years.

"Much of the data we have collected from some 7,000 New Zealand [children](#) over the past four years holds the key information required to support the government as they respond to this Health Committee report," says Growing Up in New Zealand project director Associate Professor Susan Morton, who heads this University of Auckland-led study.

Growing Up in New Zealand welcomes the fact that the Health Committee has highlighted the need for early interventions to promote children's wellbeing in New Zealand, prevent child abuse and break cycles of disadvantage for children. The need for these interventions to be evidence-based is also important, and the participants of the Growing Up in New Zealand study (which include those from all socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds as well as 24% Maori and 21% Pacific kids) are able to provide this critical evidence.

Growing Up in New Zealand is a longitudinal study based at the

University of Auckland which is tracking the health, social, cultural and environmental factors that impact the lives of children in New Zealand, from before they were born. The study began in 2009 and has already delivered a wealth of information to partnering government agencies.

"What our families are telling us for example is that sixty percent of the children being born are the result of a planned pregnancy. This is relevant here because if we focus on booking and assessing women at 10 weeks of pregnancy, we may miss a substantial number of unplanned pregnancies and we need to be careful that this does not increase inequalities for those families that do not even know that they are expecting" says Associate Professor Susan Morton.

This ground-breaking child health and development study in New Zealand is able to consider the effective development of new policies for children before they were born and to three years of life as well as evaluate those that exist, across the policy spectrum of health, education, welfare and parental leave, social support, and vulnerability.

The Growing Up in New Zealand team also supports the reports recommendation that research into human development and fetal and child health be strongly supported and sustained and believes that without the voices of contemporary New Zealand families within this research and policy space then there will be continued ineffective spend on interventions and programmes that either do not work, or perhaps even more importantly do not work for those that need them the most.

**More information:** For more information, see [www.growingup.co.nz/](http://www.growingup.co.nz/)

Provided by University of Auckland

Citation: Children's health: Many answers already available (2013, November 22) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-11-children-health.html>

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