

Media release

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### **Whānau Āwhina Plunket seeing a significant increase in maternal mental health calls**

For many families, this time of year can place additional stress on them, and 2020 is no exception; PlunketLine has seen a 75% increase in maternal mental health calls in the last month, with the amount of maternal mental health calls received having tripled compared to November 2019.

Anne Marie Morris, Acting PlunketLine Manager said “maternal mental health affects 10-15% of women every year, but we believe this figure is just the tip of the iceberg. Covid has magnified many issues that previously existed for families. Families and whānau are calling our nurses notably more distressed.”

“Depression and anxiety can affect parents at any time in their life, but there is an increased chance during pregnancy and the first year following the birth of a baby.” Anne Marie added.

2020 has been particularly hard for new parents and for anyone already struggling, adjusting to parenthood it can be harder.”

Antenatal and postnatal depression can lead to poor child health and development outcomes and is the leading cause of maternal death in New Zealand,” she said.

Maternal mental health isn’t the only struggle families are facing this time of year. There has been an increase in calls to PlunketLine with families needing additional assistance such as food, housing, clothing or access to financial/budgeting advice, as well as concerns about other family members mental health.

“This data is really starting to highlight the effects 2020 has had on parents’ welfare and their worry about just getting by during the holiday season,” Anne Marie added.

Before the election, Whānau Āwhina Plunket, Barnados, Save the Children and Mana Ririki partnered together for the Five to Thrive campaign to raise awareness about five key areas that are affecting families and tamariki’s ability to thrive in Aotearoa today.

“Currently, parents and caregivers do not have appropriate access to mental health support, however this can change.

“We can improve health outcomes for tamariki/children and their whānau and families through ensuring all political parties support and commit to ensuring there is adequate investment and support into mental health services throughout Aotearoa.”

While most regions have mental health services for mothers and infants with acute mental health problems – or access to a shared service – the development of these mental health services has been piecemeal and often don’t cater for the full range of perinatal, infant mental health, and alcohol and other drug services.

“In the meantime PlunketLine will be here 24/7 during the holiday season to support families and whānau who need parenting advice and support,” said Anne Marie.

“It’s also important as this unprecedented year comes to a close, that we also continue to check in and support loved ones, particularly those with newborns and young tamariki. A simple ‘are you doing ok?’ could make the world of difference to a family member or friend at this time of the year,” she added.

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For more information please contact

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