



PRESS RELEASE

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CHILD spearheads the advancement of health, development and learning outcomes of young children at inaugural conference

Trials on eating self-regulation skills underway in six childcare centres

Singapore, 27 October 2022 — Families with young children in Singapore can look forward to helping their children get a good start to life as policymakers, researchers, practitioners and global thought leaders in the early childhood space come together at the inaugural conference organised by the Centre for Holistic Initiatives for Learning and Development (CHILD), based at the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, National University of Singapore (NUS Medicine).

Held from 26 – 28 October 2022, the inaugural CHILD Biennial Conference is the first conference of its kind in Singapore focused on translating child development research into policy and practice. Aptly themed ‘Emerging Issues and Advances in Early Childhood: Knowledge + Collaboration = Transformation’, conference participants discussed key trends, developments and research in early childhood, explored collaborations and shared interventions and policies with the aim to improve the most critical early years of children in Singapore.

The opening ceremony was graced by Guest-of-Honour Mr Masagos Zulkifli, Minister for Social and Family Development and Second Minister for Health. Ms Sun Xueling, Minister of State for Ministry of Home Affairs and Ministry of Social and Family Development, and Ms Rahayu Mahzam, Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Ministry of Health and Ministry of Law discussed ways to better support women, parents and families in Singapore to bring to life a future their children deserve, at an intimate fireside chat during the conference.

Keynote speaker Professor Philip A. Fisher from Stanford Graduate School of Education outlined findings from key pieces of research conducted by Stanford Center on Early Childhood that has profound implications on the way mental health and other support services should be structured to mitigate the impact on development and well-being across the lifespan caused by uncertainty and unpredictability in the early stages of life. In particular, he outlined critical areas of strength and resilience demonstrated by families with young children during the COVID-19 pandemic and how that can inform the design of support services to young families.

Building the foundation of healthy eating

Developing targeted intervention programmes that aim to improve the health and well-being of children form a key outcome of work at CHILD. An example is the 'The Appetite Toolbox', a new programme aimed at cultivating healthy eating behaviours early in life and which may potentially open up new ways of thinking and solutions to tackling obesity and eating behaviours of pre-school children in Singapore.

The programme, a partnership between the A*STAR Singapore Institute for Clinical Sciences (SICS), CHILD and PCF Sparkletots, is currently being trialled across six childcare centres in Singapore where children and caregivers are provided with tools designed to enhance eating self-regulation skills during preschool.

"Evidence from the GUSTO cohort in Singapore indicates that eating behaviours, such as larger serving sizes, eating faster and eating when not hungry, are associated with increased food intake and the likelihood of developing an unhealthy body weight during the preschool years. Children and adults who are more sensitive to internal hunger and fullness cues are better able to adjust their food intake in response to their needs and are more likely to have a healthy body weight. We have to start building good habits from young in order to set them up for life," said Dr Keri McCrickerd, Research Scientist at A*STAR's Singapore Institute for Clinical Sciences (SICS) and Assistant Professor, Department of Paediatrics, NUS Medicine and lead Principal Investigator for the Appetite Toolbox.

Realising the potential of every child

The work of CHILD is aligned to the Singapore Government's Research, Innovation and Enterprise (RIE) 2025 plans on Human Health and Potential, which aims to realise the full potential of every child through improving prenatal and early childhood development and learning outcomes in schools. CHILD, whose founding partners include NUS Medicine, Lien Foundation, Centre for Evidence and Implementation (CEI), and A*STAR's SICS, was set up last year to lead the way in translating critical research to intervention, to improve the health and developmental outcomes of children in Singapore and beyond. The mission of CHILD also ties in well with the work of Singapore's Child and Maternal Health and Well-being Task Force to support and help women prepare for motherhood, and help children attain good health and well-being from their early years.

An inclusive and multi-collaborative effort, much of the work of CHILD is a direct result of the Growing Up in Singapore Towards healthy Outcomes (GUSTO) study, which many of CHILD's leads and members are involved with. The landmark study, which for more than a decade has gathered valuable data about how conditions in pregnancy and early childhood influences maternal mental health and child neurodevelopment, is a major collaborative research effort involving the National University Health System, KK Women's and Children's Hospital, and A*STAR's Singapore Institute for Clinical Sciences as well as international researchers in New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and other countries.

"CHILD was established to maximise the holistic developmental potential of children by reducing the time it takes for research to translate into policy and practice. Global research shows that it takes more than a decade for children to benefit from research evidence but our children cannot afford to wait that long. I am glad we are taking decisive steps now to rectify and close that gap. The inaugural CHILD Biennial Conference provided early childhood stakeholders the platform to discuss challenges and solutions. The next step is for us to implement what works effectively for children and families in Singapore," said Professor Adrian Sandler, Executive Director of CHILD at NUS Medicine.

“The period from birth to pre-school are critical windows of opportunity to inculcate habits for a lifetime, optimising human potential early in life. The inaugural CHILD Biennial Conference is an important starting point to congregate the best minds in early childhood development, healthcare and education to realise the full potential of every child in Singapore. Children deserve the best start they can get in life. We have to work together now to give them the chance of a successful future,” said Professor Chong Yap Seng, Dean of NUS Medicine, and Chief Clinical Officer at SICS. Professor Chong is also the Lead Principal Investigator for Growing Up in Singapore Towards healthy Outcomes (GUSTO) and Singapore Preconception Study of Long-Term Maternal and Child Outcomes (S-PRESTO).

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About National University of Singapore (NUS)

The National University of Singapore (NUS) is Singapore’s flagship university, which offers a global approach to education, research and entrepreneurship, with a focus on Asian perspectives and expertise. We have 16 colleges, faculties and schools across three campuses in Singapore, with more than 40,000 students from 100 countries enriching our vibrant and diverse campus community. We have also established our NUS Overseas Colleges programme in more than 15 cities around the world.

Our multidisciplinary and real-world approach to education, research and entrepreneurship enables us to work closely with industry, governments and academia to address crucial and complex issues relevant to Asia and the world. Researchers in our faculties, research centres of excellence, corporate labs and more than 30 university-level research institutes focus on themes that include energy; environmental and urban sustainability; treatment and prevention of diseases; active ageing; advanced materials; risk management and resilience of financial systems; Asian studies; and Smart Nation capabilities such as artificial intelligence, data science, operations research and cybersecurity.

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About the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine (NUS Medicine)

The Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, National University of Singapore (NUS Medicine) is Singapore’s first and largest medical school. Our enduring mission centres on nurturing highly competent, values-driven and inspired healthcare professionals to transform the practice of medicine and improve health around the world.

Through a dynamic and future-oriented five-year curriculum that is inter-disciplinary and inter-professional in nature, our students undergo a holistic learning experience that exposes them

to multiple facets of healthcare and prepares them to become visionary leaders and compassionate doctors and nurses of tomorrow. Since the School's founding in 1905, more than 12,000 graduates have passed through our doors.

In our pursuit of health for all, our strategic research programmes focus on innovative, cutting-edge biomedical research with collaborators around the world to deliver high impact solutions to benefit human lives.

The School is the oldest institution of higher learning in the National University of Singapore and a founding institutional member of the National University Health System. It is one of Asia's leading medical schools and ranks among the best in the world (Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2022 by subject and the Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World University Rankings by subject 2022).

For more information about NUS Medicine, please visit <https://medicine.nus.edu.sg/>