

# Centre to focus on children's physical and mental health

The first of its kind in Asia, it will draw experts from different sectors to research, build data

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A new research centre set up by Lien Foundation and National University of Singapore medical school will study how best to improve the physical and mental health of young children.

The Centre for Holistic Initiatives for Learning and Development or Child will bring together experts from across a range of disciplines, including health, education, sociology, psychology, artifi-

cial intelligence and data analytics. The experts will focus and build on research from the Growing Up In Singapore Towards Healthy Outcomes or Gusto study to provide data on mothers and children for community partners and policymakers.

Child, which is being set up with \$30 million in funding from the Lien foundation, is a partnership by NUS Medicine, Lien Foundation, Centre for Evidence and Implementation and A\*Star's Singapore Institute for Clinical Sciences. It will be launched tomorrow.

The centre is the first of its kind in Asia and aims to work with organisations such as the Health Promotion Board, social service agencies and pre-schools.

It will also will bring together professionals from different industries like scientists, researchers and policymakers, and help translate research into policy.

One key plank will be to see how health screening for children in Singapore can be improved so those at risk of developmental and mental health concerns can be identified early and get the help they need.

Lien Foundation chief executive Lee Poh Wah, in a statement yesterday, said: "In a time of rapid social and technological change, we believe the convergence of disci-

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plines and collaborative talents will inspire and propel new ways of uplifting the early childhood ecosystem."

Professor Chong Yap Seng, dean of the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, in a virtual media briefing yesterday, said the centre's work will be made available to the public.

Prof Chong, who is also executive director of the Singapore Institute for Clinical Sciences (SICS) at A\*Star, said: "Child is not in the business of delivering these services ourselves; we are delivering information and sharing best practices to people who are delivering services to children."

Child has put out two research briefs so far, on maternal mental

health and the impact of digital media use on the brain development of children.

Both reports draw on the collaborative research effort Gusto, which has been put together by the National University Health System, KK Women's and Children's Hospital, and SICS as well as international researchers.

Clinical psychiatrist Carol Balhetchet, who specialises in issues involving family, youth and children, said: "It's good that a centre like this is coming up.

"It's very useful because we really need more research in a lot of topics concerning the well-being of children in Singapore."

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