



7 May, 2018

For immediate release

New role to help build on Sudden Unexpected Death in Infancy (SUDI) work among Māori

Multiple initiatives have contributed to a 63% drop in Māori infant mortality across the Waitemata DHB catchment since 2001.

Jennifer Fletcher plans to build on them as she works to bring numbers down even further in her new role as Sudden Unexpected Death in Infancy (SUDI) Prevention Programme Manager for the Waitemata and Auckland DHBs.

Smoking is a leading factor behind SUDI rates which are still disproportionately higher nationwide among Māori.

Jennifer looks forward to supporting Māori communities in their efforts to quit – but it's not just pregnant women she wants to connect with.

“Often they're surrounded by other whanau members and partners who smoke,” she says. “That makes it very difficult for them to stop. A wider community approach is needed and good role models play a big part within the whanau.”

Jennifer, who is of Ngā Puhi and Tainui descent, will also work collaboratively with her DHB counterparts at Counties Manukau and Northland.

Smoking reduction is a major part of SUDI prevention – along with education about the dangers of bed sharing with babies. Both factors combine to make the risk of SUDI 32 times more likely to occur.

Waitemata DHB runs robust smoking cessation programmes and encourages expectant Māori mums to take part in a traditional weaving project that leaves them with a woven basket (wahakura) suitable for newborns to sleep safely in.

The idea is simple but effective and part of the reason why the Māori infant mortality figure has dropped by 63% – well ahead of the national 30% decline.

Mothers are also educated about safe breast feeding practices and the importance of ensuring babies sleep face-up.

Jennifer is keen to expand on the work that is already underway and is focussed on getting the wider community and whanau engaged.

“We need more of a more holistic view on the subject,” the mother of two says. “Older relatives in particular have a huge influence on our young Māori mums so we really need to involve them as well.”

Jennifer started her academic career with a Health Science degree in Acupuncture and wanted to specialise in women's health.

She continued her studies by completing a midwifery degree in 2011 and found she had a deep liking for it. She also felt she could make more of a difference in the Māori community as a midwife.

Jennifer has worked as a self-employed and community midwife for the past six years and continues to share a caseload with the National Women's hospital Māori midwifery team, Te Manawa o Hine - predominantly caring for Māori pregnant women.

She also oversaw a safe sleeping programme for the Auckland DHB from 2015.

“Waitemata has been particularly innovative in creating the weaving wananga which has proved to be quite a successful concept for Māori whanau to grasp - engaging people in a practical and culturally supportive way. We need to keep working collaboratively with our partner agencies on initiatives like this”.

Waitemata DHB CEO and National Lead Chief Executive for Māori Health Dr Dale Bramley says every opportunity must be taken to reduce health inequalities and deliver best care to everyone.

“The number of Māori families affected by SUDI nationwide is higher than any other ethnic group and we are doing everything we can to close the gap,” he says.

“A collaborative approach is required – especially as we work to address avoidable contributing factors, such as smoking and bed sharing.

“We have made huge headway in recent years and it is good to see those improvements and learnings being built on and shared across multiple DHBs.”

Caption: Newly appointed SUDI Prevention Programme Manager for the Waitemata and Auckland DHBs Jennifer Fletcher will also work closely with her counterparts at Northland and Counties Manukau.

Ends

For further information contact

Waitemata DHB media line

09 4871276