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"Mind The Gap": Allied Health Provision of Therapy in the Neonatal Units in New Zealand

**Presented by:
Danielle Atkins, Occupational Therapist**

➡ 12pm - 12.30pm | Tuesday 4 August, 2026 | [Hosted on Teams](#)

Infants admitted to neonatal units in Aotearoa New Zealand often require specialised neurodevelopmental therapy from birth to optimise development and support the transition home. A comprehensive, multidisciplinary and collaborative team approach, inclusive of infant, whānau and health professionals, improves outcomes for infants and whānau. Neonatal Therapists play a vital role in the team; however, little is known about the equity and reach of neonatal therapy services across Aotearoa New Zealand.

Danielle Atkins, Occupational Therapist, will present key findings from her research, *Allied Health Provision of Therapy in the Neonatal Units in New Zealand: A Cross-Sectional Survey*. The benchmarking study included feedback from clinical directors and the neonatal therapy workforce including Occupational Therapists, Physiotherapists, and Speech Language Therapists, on the content and amount of service provision of neonatal neurodevelopmental therapy, and views on workforce priorities for the future.

Links to pre-reading:

[Allied Health Provision of Therapy in the Neonatal Units in New Zealand: A Cross-Sectional Survey.](#)

This will be followed by a **knowledge translation session on 15 September**, where the following questions will be discussed:

- What do these findings mean for the infants and whānau you care for?

- How could we make the best use of the neonatal therapy workforce skills we already have to support each other?
- How can we generate some 'small wins' and advocate for the changes we want to see in the future?

About the Speaker:

Danielle Atkins is an Occupational Therapist with the Child Development Service at Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora, working alongside infants and their whānau in the Special Care Baby Unit (SCBU) and supporting high-risk infants following discharge. In addition to her clinical work, she leads regional workforce development initiatives across the Central Region, providing coaching and mentoring to support the wider network of Visiting Neurodevelopmental Therapists.

Her work is grounded in infant mental health and evidence-based neurodevelopmental care delivered in a relational way. Danielle is a certified trainer in the Newborn Behavioral Observation (NBO) system and the Neonatal Behavioral Assessment Scale (NBAS), and is co-developer of the Newborn Traffic Light Tool, which aims to support clinicians and parents to notice, interpret, verbalise and respond to infants' behavioural cues particularly during painful or stressful interactions or procedures. She is deeply passionate about working alongside infants and their whānau to achieve good relational health, and is a strong advocate for the vital role of Allied Health in securing equitable developmental outcomes for all families. She is currently collaborating on several international projects and research.

Access the session here



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For any technical issues or queries please reach out to the Neurodevelopment Network Project Coordinator, Kati Wilson, by email to neurodevelopment@paediatrics.org.nz or phone: 021 237 9903.