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Funding expands Sunshine Coast child development service

A $1.3 million Australian Government funding boost will expand Sunshine Coast Hospital and Health Service’s ability to care for children dealing with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) and their families.

The funding will result in an increase in the total number of clients by 45 per year and will run until 2020.

Service director Dr Heidi Webster said the additional funding was timely, with September being FASD awareness month.

“Our child development service forms part of a consortium comprising the Gold Coast and Sunshine Coast University hospitals, led by Professor Sharon Dawe from Griffith University’s Menzies Health Institute, along with the University of the Sunshine Coast, The University of Queensland, Queensland Institute for Urban Indigenous Health and Kummara Association,” Dr Webster said.

“This substantial investment in the health of our community will allow us to provide accurate assessment and support of children who have had prenatal alcohol exposure. There will also be the opportunity to provide support in the community and across early childhood and school settings.

“Our collaboration with university partners offers exciting opportunities for students in psychology and occupational therapy to develop new skills that are very much in demand, alongside current FASD clinic staff.

“The expanded service will also provide much needed research opportunities.

“Early diagnosis and support is essential for children with a FASD. Early to middle childhood is a time when children learn important foundational skills around managing their own behaviours, learning to plan activities and follow more complex instructions.

“These skills are essential for success in school and life,” Dr Webster said.
“Children with a FASD need extra help in developing these skills; and there is growing evidence that supporting children and their families at this critical time reduces some of the detrimental effects of prenatal alcohol exposure.

“We are delighted to receive this funding so we can help more children improve foundational skills in early childhood and to work with carers, parents and teachers to support their children’s development.”

The Child Development Service was relocated from Nambour General Hospital to a larger space at Wises Road in Maroochydore in 2014, thanks to $1.4 million worth of funding through Wishlist. This investment was the second-largest financial commitment for the hospital foundation.

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