

Keynote speaker:
Professor Laurie McLay



#ASfAR2023

Biography

Professor Laurie McLay is a Senior Research Fellow and Associate Director of the Child Well-being Research Institute at Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha - the University of Canterbury. Over the past 10 years she has developed a systematic programme of research into sleep support for autistic children, including evaluating the impact of insufficient sleep on child and family wellbeing. Most recently, her research has focused on developing and evaluating caregiver implemented, telehealth-delivered supports for a variety of health promoting behaviours and caregiver well-being. During the course of her career, she has received over \$5million in external grant funding and has published over 50 journal articles, and 16 book chapters.

Sleep matters: Understanding the importance of sleep for autistic children and adolescents

Sleep is an essential biological process that affects all aspects of health and wellbeing. Many autistic children experience insufficient sleep, which is often left unaddressed, resulting in numerous lifelong effects on their physical and mental health and well-being. In spite of the rate and impact of sleep problems, provision of sleep support remains unacceptably low due to the limited accessibility of services, scarcity of clinicians with appropriate training, lack of recognition of the interaction between sleep and well-being, and minimal integration into clinical supports. Further, services that are available are often medical. Thus, they do not address the psychosocial factors that often underpin sleep difficulties. Within this presentation I will explore current understandings of sleep in autistic children with an emphasis on the urgent need for targeted efforts to translate evidence-informed sleep supports into clinical services. In doing so, I hope to challenge others to think about how sleep research and services can provide a fundamental lever for improving the well-being of autistic people.