



IRISH ASSOCIATION FOR
INFANT MENTAL HEALTH

PRESS RELEASE



WORLD ASSOCIATION FOR
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Importance of Infant Mental Health in Early Childhood Development to be Focus of Major International Conference in Dublin

1400 international delegates across 5 continents to gather to discuss mental health and wellbeing in newborn and toddlers.

“The first 3 years of life are a time of massive brain development, with lifelong implications for future mental health”.

A major international conference focusing on early childhood mental health and wellbeing that brings together over 1400 delegates from across the globe and that includes world-renowned experts in the field of infant mental health is set to be held in Dublin from 15-19 July.

Entitled ‘Early Relationships Matter: Advancing Practice, Policy & Research’, this conference is the [18th World Congress](#) of the [World Association for Infant Mental Health \(WAIMH\)](#) and is the first international gathering of its kind in Ireland focusing on all facets that support early childhood mental health and wellbeing. This event will take place in the [Convention Centre in Dublin](#).

The 1400 delegates at the event represent many occupations within the wider healthcare and early childhood education fields and include early childhood educators, social workers, psychiatrists, psychologists, social care workers, speech and language therapists, nursing specialists, health researchers all with specific interests in infant and early childhood development, typically classified as from birth to three years of age. Drawn from across the five continents, they will gather in Dublin to learn of the latest developments from the leading experts in the growing field of infant mental health research and practice.

These experts include Professor Kevin Nugent, Emeritus Professor at the Brazelton Institute at Boston Children’s Hospital who is the invited speaker at the opening ceremony who previously addressed the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Health & Children. His strong message then, as it is today, is that the first 3 years of life are a time of massive brain development, with lifelong implications for future mental health. Mr Bernard Gloster CEO of the HSE is delighted to play a part in the opening ceremony on Saturday 15th July.

Each day of the Congress will involve close to 20 parallel sessions including workshops, symposia, oral presentations plus a huge number of poster presentations – a testament to the enormous interest in this critical period of development.

Topics are vast and varied and will include subjects related to the COVID 19 pandemic and the impact of this on babies and their parents, as well as the latest brain science research on how the architecture of babies' brains is shaped by their early experiences.

According to Catherine Maguire, Senior Clinical Psychologist/IMH Specialist and co-chair of the local organising committee, “This World Congress is hosted by the [Irish Association for Infant Mental Health \(I-AIMH\)](#) which has worked hard over the last few years to bring this event to fruition. It also offers an important opportunity to raise the profile of the importance of infant mental health both in Ireland and internationally as a pivotal period of early development which lays the foundation for health and wellbeing across the life span”

“Infant mental health is an emerging field in Ireland and there is increasing recognition of the importance of early caregiving relationships in laying the foundation for all aspects of our future lives. We have become much braver in recognising and talking about the mental health of children and teenagers as well as parents, but we have yet to fully understand and embrace the fact that babies have mental health needs too that are just as important as their physical health needs,” stated Audrey Lonergan, Principal Psychologist/IMH Specialist and co-chair of the local organising committee.

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