



back to the  
**IMAGE**  
OF THE  
**FUTURE**  
SYMPOSIUM 2025  
PROGRAMME

28-29 November 2025



**Mātai**

Te Mata Mātai Hura

TAIRĀWHITI GISBORNE  
NEW ZEALAND

# BACK TO THE **IMAGE OF THE FUTURE** SYMPOSIUM

Kia ora koutou, nau mai, haere mai – a very warm welcome to the Mātai Symposium.

We thank you for being here with us in Tairāwhiti Gisborne. Whether you have travelled from down the road or across Aotearoa, Australia, and beyond, your presence is a powerful expression of support for this kaupapa – bringing together science, medicine, technology, indigenous frameworks, community leadership, and lived experience to imagine better futures for brain, heart, and whole-of-whānau wellbeing.

Over the next two days you will hear from international scientists, research leaders, clinicians, STEMM educators, community partners, iwi and hapori providers, indigenous scholars, innovators, and emerging researchers and students. We extend a heartfelt mihi and thanks to our speakers – many of whom have travelled far – for generously sharing their expertise, insights, and stories with our community. Their contributions span advanced MRI, AI, and digital twins, neuroscience and brain health, precision and genomic medicine, community-led hauora and indigenous health equity, workforce development, creative and emerging technologies, and more. We hope these conversations spark new ideas, unlikely collaborations, and practical pathways that make a difference “in our own backyard” and beyond.

We also acknowledge our local iwi, community organisations, and partners who walk alongside us. Our gratitude goes to our judges and chairs, to our graduate students who dare to step up for lightning talks, and to our high school students who bring courage and innovative ideas. To our interns, students, and volunteers: thank you for the energy and momentum you contribute to this kaupapa.

We are deeply grateful to our sponsors, funders, and supporters. Your belief in the potential of Tairāwhiti Gisborne as a place of world-leading research, education, and community impact underpins everything we do. Finally, thank you for the time, attention, and wairua you bring to this gathering. We invite you to listen deeply, ask bold questions during the breaks, share openly, and carry the insights and relationships from this symposium back into your own communities and organisations.

E ngā mana, e ngā reo, e ngā karangaranga maha – tēnei te mihi maioha ki a koutou katoa.

Nō mātou te honore ki te manaaki i a koutou kua tae mai.

Ngā mihi mahana,

**Mātai whānau**

## **Mātai Symposium Committee:**

Dr Maryam Tayebi • Dr Eryn Kwon • Dr Oka Sanerivi • Dr Sergio Dempsey  
Jeanette Lepper • Zara Potter • Alisha Duncan • Davidson Taylor  
Leigh Potter • Shanon O'Connor (TŌNUI Collab whānau)  
Assoc. Professor Samantha Holdsworth

# DAY 01

# 28.11.25

**VENUE:**  
WAR MEMORIAL THEATRE

8:00am **Off-site Mātai tour**  
For out-of-town visitors  
(led by Dr. Oka Sanerivi)

8:30am **Theatre opens to the public**

9:00am **Mihi Whakatau**  
Led by Pāpā Taharakau Stewart. Supported by: Mātai Kaiārahi Tikanga - Rawiri Taylor, Manutuke School

9:15am **Welcome**  
Assoc. Prof. Samantha Holdsworth & Leigh Potter

## SESSION 1

**Chairs:** Assoc. Prof. Samantha Holdsworth, Dr. Oka Sanerivi

9:30am **Distinguished Prof. Sir Richard Faull**  
The privilege and excitement of researching the human brain in partnership with whānau

9:40am **Prof. Graham Galloway**  
Research imaging infrastructure: An international community

9:50am **Assoc. Prof. Megan Gibbons**  
Enabling communities

10:00am **Anne Davidson**  
The future of imaging

10:10am **Prof. Martyn Nash**  
Accelerating & standardising clinical assessment of heart function

10:20am **Prof. Brett Cowan**  
The magic of MRI and Mātai

10:30am **Morning Tea**

## SESSION 2

**Chairs:** Leigh Potter, Assoc. Prof. Samantha Holdsworth

11:00am **Reweti Ropiha MNZM**  
In our own backyard: Preparedness to have a go with Tūranga Health

11:10am **Dr. Jennifer Rumbel**  
Past, present, future: Australian indigenous, community-led health research

11:20am **Dr. Helen Murray**  
Evidence of neuropathology in head-butting rams

11:30am **Assoc. Prof. Miriam Scadeng**  
One Health: How animal adaptation to extreme environments informs human health innovation

11:40am **Brain Break with Dr. William Peters**

11:50am **Dr. Gonzalo D. Maso Talou**  
From neuron-to-brain: What do we know about ourselves

12:00pm **Dr. Brandi Shah**  
Focus on the 'first environment': Embodying narratives of women's health to actualise collective health

12:10pm **Dr. Jack Scott**  
Biomarkers of cognition in ADHD across late childhood and adolescence

12:20pm **Malcolm Mersham**  
He rangitapu, he tohu ora: Our collective journey to wellbeing

12:30pm **Lunch Break**

- Meet the speakers
- High School Poster Displays
- Graduate Lightening Talks
- Ultra-High Contrast MRI scan workshop - with Paul Condron

## SESSION 3

**Chairs:** Prof. Martyn Nash, Dr. Eryn Kwon

2:00pm **Dexter Waru**  
Mana motuhake in action: Designing a hauora system by us, for us

2:10pm **Dr. Maedeh Amirpour**  
Smart material system for the next-generation of wearable technologies

2:20pm **Katie Blackburne**  
Predicting patient outcome following mTBI

2:25pm **Jethro Wright**  
Making brain-pressure monitoring easier with next-generation MRI tools

2:32pm **Alireza Sharifzadeh-Kermani**  
Better than a stab in the spine: Non-invasive brain pressure method

2:40pm **Brain Break with Dr. William Peters**

2:50pm **Dr. Gil Newburn**  
Traumatic Brain Injury: A major public health problem

3:00pm **Leigh Potter**  
The Mātai Journey: From Tairāwhiti to Aotearoa - building futures through clinical, research, and community pathways

3:10pm **Assoc. Prof. Samantha Holdsworth**  
Shaping the future of health through advanced imaging and research in Tairāwhiti

3:20pm **Current Mātai Interns**  
What am I doing at Uni, and what am I working on at Mātai? (lightning update from current interns)

3:30pm **Afternoon Tea**

## SESSION 4

**Chairs:** Prof. Justin Fernandez, Dr. William Peters

4:00pm **Prof. Karen Waldie**  
Genes, brains, and neurodiversity: A lifecourse perspective

4:10pm **Prof. Justin Fernandez**  
Brain traffic: Towards a new way of looking at ADHD

4:20pm **Dr. Anastasia Mozhaeva**  
Visual artificial intelligence: Unlocking efficiency with psychovisual models

4:30pm **Steven Rodgers**  
Enhancing wide-angle VR video transmission using human perception

4:40pm **Brain Break with Dr. William Peters**

4:50pm **Dr. Vickie Shim**  
Beyond the image: How AI is unlocking biomechanical insights from MRI

5:00pm **Dr. Loxlan Kasa**  
Advanced diffusion MRI reveals glaucoma as a brain network disorder

5:10pm **Dr. Sergio Dempsey**  
Gisborne dementia research using MRI

5:20pm **Dr. Josh McGeown**  
Understanding sports-related concussion

5:30pm **Wrap-up and announcements**

5:35pm **Day 1 concludes**

# DAY 02

# 29.11.25

**VENUE:**  
WAR MEMORIAL THEATRE

8:00am **Off-site Mātai tour**  
For out-of-town visitors  
(led by Dr. Oka Sanerivi)

8:30am **Theatre open to the public**

## SESSION 1

**Chairs:** Assoc. Prof. Samantha Holdsworth, Dr. Josh McGeown

9:00am **Prof. Kjesten Wiig**  
From bench to bedside:  
The work of the Malaghan Institute

9:10am **Prof. Katie McMahon**  
Does shape matter?  
White matter tracts and brain tumours

9:20am **Dr. Hamid Abbasi**  
Spotting the brain: Advancing neuronavigation for real-time intraoperative brain tracking

9:30am **Dr. Ho-Fung Chan**  
Advanced MRI for paediatric digital twin models of the lung

9:40am **Brain Break with Lisa Bates MNZM**

9:50am **Rich Easton**  
Funding for the future

10:00am **Assoc. Prof. Tracy Melzer**  
Pathological proteins and future dementia in Parkinson's disease

10:10am **Dr. Maryam Tayebi**  
Multimodal MRI to track brain and heart recovery from methamphetamine

10:20am **Dr. Josh McGeown**  
Why Gisborne?

10:30am **Morning Tea**

## SESSION 2

**Chairs:** Leigh Potter, Dr. Saralyn MacKenzie

11:00am **Tim Marshall**  
Tauawhi E, Tāiki E!: A partnership creating a community of caring men

11:10am **Wendy Mohi & Ben Bristow**  
He haerenga ki te whakaora: A journey of healing

11:20am **Assoc. Prof. Kate Hill**  
One Health: Animal and human connections

11:30am **Dr. Saralyn MacKenzie**  
Precision health consultancy: Is MRI beneficial in preventive health?

11:40am **Brain Break with Lisa Bates MNZM**

11:50am **Dr. Eryn Kwon**  
Why Big Data?

12:00pm **Dr. Patrick McHugh**  
Tū Wairua: Exploring opportunities in psychedelic therapy

12:10pm **Dr. Ayah Elsayed**  
The growing heart in voxels: Reflections from the Tairāwhiti child wellbeing study

12:20pm **Simeon Alford**  
Generative Horizons: Imaging the future through AI and creative technology

12:30pm **Lunch Break**

- Meet the speakers
- High School Poster Displays
- Graduate Lightening Talks
- Ultra-High Contrast MRI scan workshop - with Paul Condron

## SESSION 3

**Chairs:** Dr. Oka Sanerivi, Shanon O'Connor

2:00pm **Prof. Eileen McKinlay**  
The future of the Tairāwhiti health workforce: 15 years of partnership

2:10pm **Huti Puketapu-Watson**  
Ngāti Porou journey in genomics

2:20pm **Prof. Holly Thorpe, Hadyn Pomana, Dr Oka Sanerivi**  
Healthy hearts with Tūranga Health: Insights from participants & staff of an iwi health provider

2:30pm **Jordon Lima**  
Tikanga Tairāwhiti in biomedical technologies

2:40pm **Brain Break with Lisa Bates MNZM**

2:50pm **Mariska van Gaalen**  
Locally grounded ecosystem approaches to innovation

3:00pm **Nathalie Whitaker**  
The \$8 billion hour pledge

3:10pm **Shanon O'Connor**  
STEMM Equity for Kōhine Māori

3:20pm **Dr. Oka Sanerivi**  
The image of the future is out of the red: Towards understanding Māori and Pacific men's hauora

3:30pm **Afternoon Tea**

## SESSION 4

**Chairs:** Dr. Maryam Tayebi, Dr. William Schierding

4:00pm **Dr. Eryn Kwon**  
Shaken, not stirred? Exploring how natural brain motion changes after mild Traumatic Brain Injury

4:10pm **David Brebner**  
Novel portable device for small scale 3D imaging

4:20pm **Dr. William Schierding**  
Could vision problems be brain problems?

4:30pm **Paul Condron**  
Ultra-high contrast MRI: Making the invisible visible

4:40pm **Dr. Daniel Cornfeld**  
Transforming prostate cancer care: A new public clinical pathway pioneered in Tairāwhiti-Gisborne

4:50pm **Previous Mātai Interns**  
What am I doing now? Updates from former interns

5:00pm **Mātai PhD Students (Katie Blackburne, Ben Bristow, Jethro Wright)**  
Our Journey: From School to Uni to Mātai

5:10pm **Awards Ceremony**  
(Symposium committee), closing remarks

5:30pm **Day 2 concludes**

# OUR SPEAKERS

## DISTINGUISHED PROFESSOR Sir Richard Faull

*Director, Centre for Brain Research / Te Huinga Hinengaro, University of Auckland / Waipapa Taumata Rau, Auckland, New Zealand*

*Co-Director, The Neurological Foundation Human Brain Bank, The University of Auckland, Auckland New Zealand*

*Mātai Patron, Mātai Medical Research Institute, Tairāwhiti Gisborne, New Zealand*



### Talk: THE PRIVILEGE AND EXCITEMENT OF RESEARCHING THE HUMAN BRAIN IN PARTNERSHIP WITH WHĀNAU

Distinguished Professor Sir Richard Faull (Te Āti Awa, Ngāti Rāhiri) has an international reputation for his research studies on the normal and diseased human brain (Alzheimer's, Huntington's, Parkinson's Diseases), established the international leading Neurological Foundation Human Brain Bank with the generous support of whanau to promote worldwide research on human brain diseases. He founded the Centre for Brain Research at the University of Auckland in 2009 to promote collaborative world leading research between researchers, clinicians and the community. His contributions to human brain research have been recognised by numerous awards including the Rutherford Medal, and KNZM.

## PROFESSOR Graham John Galloway

*Emeritus Professor, Australian Institute of Bioengineering and Nanotechnology, Australia*

### Talk: RESEARCH IMAGING INFRASTRUCTURE – AN INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

Professor Graham Galloway is an Australian MR physicist with over 40 years of research experience, more than 100 publications in MR methods and applications, and is a Fellow of the ISMRM. His career spans academia, industry, and 18 years of leadership in research infrastructure. He serves on the Scientific Advisory Boards of Mātai and EuroBioImaging and is the co-chair of the Expert Working Group for Biomedical Imaging within GlobalBioImaging.



## ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR Megan Gibbons

*Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Division of Health Sciences, Ōtakou Whakaihū Waka / University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand*

### Talk: ENABLING COMMUNITIES

Associate Professor Megan Gibbons (Ngāpuhi) was appointed Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the Division of Health Sciences in 2024. The Division encompasses the Faculty of Dentistry, Faculty of Medicine, Faculty of Biomedical Sciences, and the newly established Faculty of Health Professional Programmes. She earned her PhD in Biomedical Sciences from the University of Auckland in 2013 and received the Ako Aotearoa Tertiary Teaching Award for sustained excellence in teaching in 2016. Megan has held senior leadership roles including Deputy Chief Executive at Te Pūkenga and Chief Executive of Otago Polytechnic, bringing extensive experience in tertiary education and health sciences leadership.



## Anne Davidson

*MRI Product Specialist, GE HealthCare ANZ*

### Talk: FUTURE OF MRI

Anne Davidson has a clinical background in Radiography and MRI, working in both Private Radiology and Public Health. Joining GE HealthCare as an MRI Applications Specialist in 2000, Anne has held roles within MRI and Marketing teams and is currently the MR Product Specialist for New Zealand and Queensland, Australia.

## PROFESSOR Martyn Nash

*Deputy Director, Auckland Bioengineering Institute, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand*

*Professor of Biomedical Engineering, Department of Engineering Science and Biomedical Engineering, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand*

### Talk: ACCELERATING AND STANDARDISING CLINICAL ASSESSMENT OF HEART FUNCTION

Martyn Nash is a Professor of Biomedical Engineering, and Deputy Director of the Auckland Bioengineering Institute. He studies the electro-mechanical function of the heart in health and disease, to improve diagnostic techniques, and to facilitate discovery and monitoring of therapies. He is an elected Fellow of the American Institute for Medical and Biological Engineering, and Senior Member of IEEE. Dr Nash collaborates widely and has supervised 39 PhDs, 19 Masters, 78 Honours dissertations, and 79 summer/intern students. He has authored more than 160 journals articles and 40 book chapters, which have collectively attracted more than 9300 citations to-date.



## PROFESSOR Brett Cowan

*Pro-Vice Chancellor and Dean/Tumuaki, Auckland University of Technology, Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand*

### Talk: THE MAGIC OF MRI AND MĀTAI

Brett Cowan has a diverse background including an honours degree in mechanical engineering, registration as a medical practitioner, studies in theology and ancient history, and an MBA from the University of Auckland. Brett is Chief Scientist at ESR, the organisation which performed the genome sequencing and wastewater testing for New Zealand during COVID-19. While at the University of Auckland he setup and directed the internationally recognised Centre for Advanced MRI. He has published over 100 peer-reviewed papers in clinical trials, medical imaging, machine learning and computational modelling, and is the recipient of over 30 academic and business awards including innovation in medicine for neurosurgical equipment and medical diagnostic software. He practiced emergency medicine for over a decade and remains a New Zealand registered medical practitioner.



## Reweti Ropiha MNZM

*CEO, Tūranga Health, Tairāwhiti Gisborne, New Zealand*

*Mātai Board of Trustees, Mātai Medical Research Institute, Tairāwhiti Gisborne, New Zealand*

### Talk: IN OUR OWN BACKYARD: PREPAREDNESS TO HAVE A GO WITH TŪRANGA HEALTH

Reweti Ropiha MNZM is a dynamic and visionary leader whose dedication to community health and well-being has left an indelible mark on Tūranga and beyond. With a career spanning several decades, Reweti has been a driving force behind Tūranga Health, an organisation that has faced and overcome numerous challenges, from designing innovative healthcare solutions to navigating the complexities of the COVID-19 pandemic, and weathering the fury of cyclones. Reweti's leadership has been instrumental in Tūranga Health's ability to adapt, innovate, and continue delivering vital healthcare services to the community. His tireless commitment to improving healthcare access and outcomes has made a profound impact on the lives of those in the Tūranga region. Additional to holding a Master of Business Administration from Waikato University, Reweti has been celebrated as a local hero and recognised with the New Zealand Order of Merit for his outstanding efforts in enhancing the well-being of the community. Reweti will share the remarkable journey of Tūranga Health's adaptability in the face of adversity to make a meaningful difference in Tairāwhiti.



## DR. Jennifer Rumbel

*Indigenous Imaging Fellow, University of Newcastle and Hunter Medical Research Institute, Australia*

### Talk: PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE: AUSTRALIAN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY-LED HEALTH RESEARCH

Dr Jennifer Rumbel, a proud Gamilaraay woman, is a post-doctoral researcher at the University of Newcastle and the Hunter Medical Research Institute. Her PhD developed a circular thesis grounded in Indigenous research methodologies, applying a relational and community-led framework to health research. Over the past three years as an Indigenous Imaging Fellow, she has built partnerships with Elders, Aboriginal Community-Controlled Health Services and community organisations to enhance Indigenous engagement and research capability. Jenn co-leads both the Deadly Images project which develops cultural protocols to improve MRI scanning quality and participant safety among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the Seeds for Growth and Healing project.



## DR. Helen Murray

*Senior Research Fellow, Centre for Brain Research, Department of Anatomy and Medical Imaging, Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand*

### Talk: EVIDENCE OF NEUROPATHOLOGY IN HEAD-BUTTING RAMS

Dr Helen Murray is a senior research fellow at the University of Auckland Centre for Brain Research where she leads the brain injury and neurodegeneration research group. She completed her PhD at the University of Auckland in 2017 and a post-doctoral fellowship at the National Institutes of Health in Washington D.C, USA in 2020. She works with the New Zealand Neurological Foundation Human Brain Bank researching the biology of head injuries and progressive brain disease. Dr Murray is also an athlete, having represented New Zealand in Ice Hockey since 2013 and captained the New Zealand Ice Fernz from 2016-2020.



## ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR Miriam Scadeng

*Anatomy and Medical Imaging - Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences and Centre for Brain Research, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand*

*Principal Investigator, Mātai Medical Research Institute, Tairāwhiti Gisborne, New Zealand*

### Talk: ONE HEALTH - HOW ANIMAL ADAPTATION TO EXTREME ENVIRONMENTS INFORMS HUMAN HEALTH INNOVATION

Dr Scadeng is a research radiologist who has spent much of her career in High-Field MRI in California, USA. Her interests lie in developing MRI techniques to answer scientific questions. She has a special interest in studying how evolutionary-derived adaptations to extreme environments in various animal species, such as penguins, elephant seals, and dolphins, can be used to develop treatment strategies that improve human health.



## DR. William Peters MBChB, MD

*MedTech & Arts Officer and Principal Investigator, Mātai Medical Research Institute, Tairāwhiti Gisborne, New Zealand*

### Talk: BRAIN BREAK WITH DR PETERS

Dr William Peters earned his medical degree from the University of Otago in 1989 and completed his Doctor of Medicine at Monash University in 2002, building on pioneering work in minimally invasive cardiac surgery undertaken during his research fellowship at Stanford University. A globally recognised inventor, he holds numerous patents for surgical devices and techniques widely adopted in cardiac care. Alongside his scientific career, William is also an accomplished sculptor and painter, with works exhibited nationally. His unique blend of clinical expertise, technological innovation, and creative practice informs his leadership of Mātai Institute's medtech and cardioscience initiatives.



## DR. Gonzalo Daniel Maso Talou

*HRC Sir Charles Hercus Fellow and Senior Research Fellow, Auckland Bioengineering Institute, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand*

### Talk: FROM NEURON-TO-BRAIN: WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT OURSELVES?

Gonzalo Daniel Maso Talou is a senior research fellow at the Auckland Bioengineering Institute. He is the leader of the Animus Laboratory and a member of the Breast Biomechanics Research group. In 2022, he founded the Animus Laboratory with the vision of integrating neurodynamics and hemodynamic modelling to describe the systemic interactions between the vascular and nervous systems. This project aims to improve the mechanistic understanding of the nervous system's control over the cardiovascular system and understand how impairments in these systems lead to cognitive decline and pathological conditions.



## DR. Brandi Shah

*Physician Specialist in Youth, Sexual and Reproductive Health, Ngāti Porou Oranga, Tairāwhiti Gisborne, New Zealand*

*Independent Scholar and Creative*

### Talk: FOCUS ON THE 'FIRST ENVIRONMENT': EMBODYING NARRATIVES OF WOMEN'S HEALTH TO ACTUALISE COLLECTIVE HEALTH

Dr Brandi Shah has spent over 20 years working with and alongside medically marginalized communities, with a focus on optimizing health for young people and women. Her work bridges clinical care, narrative medicine, and community-driven advocacy and participatory action. She uses digital storytelling and other story praxis to connect people and imaginations to work towards a more just and holistically healing approach to health. Originally from the US, she now lives in Gisborne, Aotearoa with her whānau.



## DR. Jack Scott

*Assistant Research Fellow, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand*

### Talk: BIOMARKERS OF COGNITION IN ADHD ACROSS LATE CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE

Jack Scott is a neuroscientist from Ōtepoti | Dunedin, where he completed his PhD at Otago in behavioural neuroscience before transitioning into human brain imaging and machine learning. Currently, he is an Assistant Research Fellow investigating cognitive abilities in children and adolescents with ADHD, a condition affecting around 6-8% of young people. Their research uses Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) and machine learning to identify brain patterns that predict cognitive abilities. Scott is also exploring how brain "states" shift in ADHD across development. Their work may help them understand the developmental course of ADHD and inform better treatment approaches for children and adolescents with ADHD.



## Malcolm Mersham

*Data and Information Lead, Trust Tairāwhiti Gisborne, New Zealand*

### Talk: HE RANGITAPU, HE TOHU ORA: OUR COLLECTIVE JOURNEY TO WELLBEING

Malcolm Mersham is a strategic leader and community advocate with a long-standing commitment to regional development and wellbeing across Te Tairāwhiti. In his role with Trust Tairāwhiti, he works at the intersection of economic growth, social impact, and iwi-community partnerships, helping to guide investment that supports sustainable prosperity for the region. Malcolm brings experience in governance, stakeholder engagement, and evidence-informed decision making, with a strong focus on equity, opportunity, and long-term regional resilience. He is recognised for his collaborative approach and his dedication to initiatives that strengthen communities, enhance local capability, and improve outcomes for whānau across Tairāwhiti.



## Dexter Waru

*Transitional Executive Manager, Te Whare Hauora o Te Aitanga a Hauiti, Tairāwhiti Gisborne, New Zealand*

### Talk: MANA MOTUHAKE IN ACTION: DESIGNING A HAUORA SYSTEM BY US, FOR US

Ko Titirangi te maunga.  
Ko Uawa-nui-a-Ruamatua te awa.  
Ko Te Aitanga a Hauiti te iwi.  
Ko Dexter Waru tōku ingoa.

Dexter Waru is the Transitional Executive Manager of Te Whare Hauora o Te Aitanga a Hauiti, guiding a period of stability and future-focused growth for the hauora and wider community. Born and bred in Uawa, he has strong ties to the people and all the marae kaenga within Te Aitanga a Hauiti, with involvement across many spaces - including Uawa Civil Defence, the Tolaga Bay Fire Brigade, and the Community-Led Development Programme. He also brings extensive experience in Business and Media. Looking ahead, Dexter's priorities are clear: emergency readiness, whānau wellness, and a hauora system shaped by the marae and community.



## DR. Maedeh Amirpour

*Senior Lecturer, Engineering Science and Biomedical Engineering, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand*

### Talk: SMART MATERIAL SYSTEMS FOR NEXT-GENERATION WEARABLE TECHNOLOGIES

Dr Maedeh Amirpour is a Senior Lecturer at the Department of Engineering Science and Biomedical Engineering whose research spans advanced materials/manufacturing, computational modelling, and medical device innovation. Her work is guided by the belief that engineering is not only about solving technical problems but also about creating systems that enhance human wellbeing and resilience. By integrating composite materials science, biomechanics and computational modelling, she develops solutions that address both performance and societal impact.

## Katie Blackburne

*PhD Student*

*Anatomy and Medical Imaging, Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand*

*Mātai Medical Research Institute, Tairāwhiti Gisborne, New Zealand*

### Talk: PREDICTING PATIENT OUTCOME FOLLOWING MTBI

Katie has completed a Master of Science in cognitive and behavioural neuroscience at Victoria University of Wellington. She is especially passionate about research that can inform and improve treatment for those who need it most, and is currently working with MRI techniques to better understand outcomes following mild traumatic brain injury (concussions). Her research interests align closely with Mātai Institute's vision, and having the opportunity to return home to Tairāwhiti while continuing her academic journey is a dream come true for her.

## Jethro Wright

*PhD Student*

*Auckland Bioengineering Institute,  
University of Auckland, Auckland, New  
Zealand*

*Mātai Medical Research Institute,  
Tairāwhiti Gisborne, New Zealand*

### Talk: MAKING BRAIN-PRESSURE MONITORING EASIER WITH NEXT-GENERATION MRI TOOLS

Jethro (Jet) previously completed his postgraduate diploma in Neuroscience after earning a bachelor's degree majoring in Neuroscience and minoring in Psychology. Drawn to the brain's mysteries and the many unanswered scientific questions, he is now in his last year of his PhD with Mātai and the Auckland Bioengineering Institute. His research focuses on visualising brain motion to inform clinicians about brain-pressure indices and improve understanding of intracranial dynamics. Jet is committed to applying his growing expertise to research that strengthens health and wellbeing across Tairāwhiti.



## Leigh Potter

**NMDI, PGDip HSc**

*Ngāti Porou, Ngāti Kahungunu,  
Rongowhakaata, Rongomauiwahine*

*Kaiwhakahaere / Chief Operating  
Officer, Mātai Medical Research  
Institute, Tairāwhiti Gisborne, New  
Zealand*

### Talk: THE MĀTAI JOURNEY: FROM TAIRĀWHITI TO AOTEAROA – BUILDING FUTURES THROUGH CLINICAL, RESEARCH, AND COMMUNITY PATHWAYS

Leigh Potter is a founding member of Mātai with more than 23 years' experience in radiology clinical practice and medical research operations. One of the world's first Māori medical imaging technologists, she built deep technical expertise before leading and expanding the Radiology service at Hauora Tairāwhiti (now Te Whatu Ora Tairāwhiti). She has since driven the development of Mātai Institute's operations, IT systems, innovative clinical services, and imaging facilities, guiding complex cross-functional teams. Leigh supports research programmes with strong potential for clinical translation and is passionate about creating opportunities that inspire and uplift the next generation of talent in Tairāwhiti.



## Alireza Sharifzadeh-Kermani

*Research Fellow, Mātai Medical  
Research Institute, Tairāwhiti Gisborne,  
New Zealand*

*Research Fellow, Auckland  
Bioengineering Institute, University of  
Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand*

### Talk: BETTER THAN A STAB IN THE SPINE: NON-INVASIVE BRAIN PRESSURE METHOD

Alireza is a bioengineer specialising in computational modelling, MRI data processing, and control theory, with a passion for applying mathematical methods to improve patient outcomes. He earned his bachelor's and master's degrees in mechanical and applied mechanics engineering from Sharif University of Technology in Iran. For his doctoral research at the Auckland Bioengineering Institute and in collaboration with Mātai, he developed an MRI-informed computational model to estimate brain pressure non-invasively. He is now a research fellow at Mātai in a joint role with the Auckland Bioengineering Institute, focusing on integrating MRI sequences with computational models for clinical innovation.



## ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR Samantha Holdsworth

*Chief Executive & Research Director,  
Mātai Medical Research Institute,  
Tairāwhiti Gisborne, New Zealand*

*Associate Professor, Anatomy & Medical  
Imaging, Faculty of Medical and Health  
Sciences & Centre for Brain Research,  
University of Auckland, Auckland, New  
Zealand*

### Talk: SHAPING THE FUTURE OF HEALTH THROUGH ADVANCED IMAGING AND RESEARCH IN TAIRĀWHITI

Dr Samantha Holdsworth is an MRI physicist specialising in advanced neuroimaging and the development of fast, high-resolution, and motion-robust MRI techniques. During her 11 years at Stanford University, she made innovations in MRI acquisition and post-processing, contributing to improvements in image quality and clinical usability especially for brain imaging. She is internationally recognised for co-developing amplified MRI (aMRI), a technique that reveals subtle brain motion. Samantha is committed to advancing cutting-edge, community-centred medical research and aims to drive meaningful health impact for communities in Tairāwhiti and across Aotearoa New Zealand.



## DR. Gil Newburn

*Clinical Research Fellow, Mātai Medical  
Research Institute, Tairāwhiti Gisborne,  
New Zealand*

### Talk: TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY: A MAJOR PUBLIC HEALTH PROBLEM

Dr Gil Newburn is a neuropsychiatrist with a focus on understanding the interplay between brain function and behavior. His primary interest lies in exploring the myriad challenges that stem from brain injuries, encompassing altered behaviour, cognition, emotional responses, and social functioning following brain damage; and how our brains respond to stressors and adapt. Among his clinical pursuits are attentional disorders and complex issues related to social cognition. These often defy conventional medical diagnoses but represent tangible shifts in brain function, impacting cognition, behavior, emotions, and social interactions, profoundly affecting individuals' control over their lives. In patient care, Dr Newburn places individuals and their whānau/families at the core of the healthcare team, aligning treatment with their beliefs and worldviews. His commitment to improving the lives of those affected by brain injuries is evident in his dedication to multidisciplinary collaboration and patient-centered care, aiming to enhance well-being and autonomy.



## PROFESSOR Karen Waldie

*Professor of Psychology (and Deputy Head  
of School) & Investigator at Centre for  
Brain Research, University of Auckland,  
Auckland, New Zealand*

*Associate Investigator with the ADHD  
study, Matai Medical Research Institute,  
Tairāwhiti Gisborne, New Zealand*

### Talk: GENES, BRAINS & NEURODIVERSITY: A LIFE COURSE PERSPECTIVE

Dr Karen E Waldie is a Professor in the School of Psychology and with the Centre for Brain Research at the University of Auckland. She was born in Vancouver, BC Canada, and received her BSc at the University of Victoria. She received her MSc and PhD (1998; Neuropsychology) at the University of Calgary and went on to become a research fellow with the Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development Study (DMHDS). She became a member of The University of Auckland academic faculty in 2001.



## PROFESSOR Justin Fernandez

*Professor, Department of Engineering Science & Biomedical Engineering, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand*

*Professor, Auckland Bioengineering Institute, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand*

*Principal Investigator, Mātai Medical Research Institute, Tairāwhiti Gisborne, New Zealand*



### Talk: BRAIN TRAFFIC: TOWARDS A NEW WAY OF LOOKING AT ADHD

Justin is a Professor in the Department of Engineering Science and Biomedical Engineering, and the Auckland Bioengineering Institute, University of Auckland. He graduated with a Bachelor of Engineering (Honours first class) in Engineering Science (1999) and a PhD in Bioengineering from the University of Auckland (2004). He is a Principal Investigator in the musculoskeletal modelling group where he leads research into computational biomechanics, orthopaedics, sports science, brain mechanics, and ADHD. His work integrates biomedical imaging, gait analysis, wearable sensors, large population data, statistical models, and computational mechanics. His research strongly focuses on clinician engagement.

## DR. Anastasia Mozhaeva

*Senior Lecturer / Researcher, Eastern Institute of Technology Tairāwhiti Campus, Tairāwhiti Gisborne, New Zealand*

### Talk: VISUAL ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: UNLOCKING EFFICIENCY WITH PSYCHOVISUAL MODELS

Dr Anastasia Mozhaeva is a Senior Lecturer specialising in video processing, visual AI, and psychophysics. With over 10 years in the tech industry and more than seven in academia, she bridges applied innovation with research excellence. Her work integrates academic research with industry partnerships, particularly in visual AI for aerospace.



## Steven Rogers

*Student / Research Assistant, Eastern Institute of Technology Tairāwhiti, Gisborne, New Zealand*

### Talk: ENHANCING WIDE-ANGLE VR VIDEO TRANSMISSION USING HUMAN PERCEPTION

Steven is a final-year Bachelor of Computer Science student at EIT Tairāwhiti, interning as a research assistant/software developer. He grew up in Gisborne, completed a joinery apprenticeship, spent time in Australia, then returned home to pivot into IT - his long-time passion.



## DR. Vickie Shim

*Senior Research Fellow, Auckland Bioengineering Institute, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand.*

*Principal Investigator, Mātai Medical Research Institute, Tairāwhiti Gisborne, New Zealand*



### Talk: BEYOND THE IMAGE: HOW AI IS UNLOCKING BIOMECHANICAL INSIGHTS FROM MRI

Vickie is a Senior Research Fellow at the Auckland Bioengineering Institute. She earned her PhD in 2007 from the University of Auckland, specialising in the computational modelling of hip biomechanics and implant performance. Building on this foundation, she has led and contributed to a wide range of research projects on the musculoskeletal system, integrating computational modelling with advanced medical imaging and bioinstrumentation. In recent years, her work has expanded to brain biomechanics, with a particular focus on brain concussion. Her current research aims to uncover injury mechanisms to support improved strategies for prevention and rehabilitation.

## DR. Loxlan Kasa

*Vision Research Foundation Research Fellow, Mātai Medical Research Institute, Tairāwhiti Gisborne, New Zealand*

*Honorary Research Fellow, Department of Ophthalmology, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand*



### Talk: ADVANCED DIFFUSION MRI REVEALS GLAUCOMA AS A BRAIN NETWORK DISORDER

Dr Loxlan Kasa is a Research Fellow at the Mātai Medical Research Institute. He completed a BSc and Postgraduate Diploma in Physics at the University of Papua New Guinea, an MEng in China, and a PhD in Biomedical Engineering Sciences at Western University, Canada. His research focuses on advanced diffusion and pressure-modulated MRI to investigate the visual pathway and eye pressure in glaucoma. Dr Kasa previously held postdoctoral positions at the Brain and Mind Institute (Western University) and the SickKids Research Institute at the University of Toronto, where he developed computational neuroimaging and machine learning methods to study neurological diseases, including epilepsy and paediatric stroke.

## DR. Sergio Dempsey

*Clinical Scientist - MRI, GE HealthCare*

### Talk: GISBORNE DEMENTIA RESEARCH USING MRI

Dr Sergio Dempsey is a biomedical engineer and GE Clinical Scientist based at Mātai, specialising in advanced MRI post-processing, software development, and computational modelling. His doctoral research used MRI to investigate early indicators of dementia, focusing on cerebrovascular dynamics including cerebral autoregulation and neurovascular coupling. He developed and validated a 4D flow MRI post-processing package now used internationally. Sergio is passionate about scientific communication, MRI software integration, and harmonising sequences across national studies. Based in Gisborne, he works closely with Mātai Institute's clinical and research teams to advance GE MRI capabilities and support cutting-edge imaging projects.



## DR. Josh McGeown

*Philip Wrightson Fellow - Neurological Foundation & Senior Research Fellow, Mātai Medical Research Institute, Tairāwhiti Gisborne, New Zealand*

*Honorary Research Fellow, Anatomy & Medical Imaging, Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences, University of Auckland, New Zealand*



### Talk 1: UNDERSTANDING SPORTS-RELATED CONCUSSION Talk 2: WHY GISBORNE?

Dr Josh McGeown is a postdoctoral research fellow at Mātai supported by the Neurological Foundation First Fellowship. Originally from Canada, Dr McGeown moved to New Zealand in 2018 to pursue a PhD at Auckland University of Technology. Dr McGeown is a subject matter expert in mild traumatic brain injury (mTBI). Josh's passion for mTBI research comes from personal experience with the negative consequences of this injury. His work has focussed on understanding how pathophysiological consequences of mTBI underlie clinical symptoms and outcomes to identify targets for better prevention, assessment, and rehabilitation.

## PROFESSOR Kjesten Wiig

*Director (CEO), Malaghan Institute of Medical Research, Wellington, New Zealand*

*Co-Director, RNA Technology and Development Platform, Wellington, New Zealand*

*Adjunct Professor, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand*



### Talk: FROM BENCH TO BEDSIDE - THE WORK OF THE MALAGHAN INSTITUTE

Professor Kjesten Wiig's career has spanned senior leadership roles in academia, industry, and government, all with a focus on advancing science and innovation. After receiving her PhD from the University of Otago, and completing post-doctoral training at Brown University, Kjesten spent many years working in the competitive drug-discovery industry in the USA and was involved in the spin-out and start-up of two companies from Brown University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. At both companies, Kjesten served as Director of Neuropharmacology and was responsible for all pre-clinical development in neuropsychiatric disease. Kjesten then brought her experience in commercialising science to the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment in New Zealand. There, Kjesten worked as National Manager for Commercialisation and then Director of Innovative Partnerships, a start-up programme aimed at attracting international companies to establish R&D in New Zealand. She is now the Director/CEO of the Malaghan Institute of Medical Research, co-director of New Zealand's RNA Technology Development Platform and adjunct Professor at the Ferrier Institute at Victoria University of Wellington.

## PROFESSOR Katie McMahon

*Academic Lead Research, School of Clinical Sciences, Queensland University of Technology, Queensland, Australia*

*Deputy Director, Herston Imaging Research Facility, Royal Brisbane and Women's Campus, Herston, Queensland, Australia.*



### Talk: DOES SHAPE MATTER? WHITE MATTER TRACTS AND BRAIN TUMOURS

Prof McMahon's research delves into the features of the brain which can impact how we speak, learn, and develop, looking at genetic and environmental factors that might be contributing to the brain's structure and function. Her key interest is translating this fundamental understanding to what goes wrong in disease and what the best therapy and approach might be after understanding what has happened in the brain.

## DR. Hamid Abbasi

*Senior Research Fellow, Auckland Bioengineering Institute, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand*

### Talk: SPOTTING THE BRAIN: ADVANCING NEURONAVIGATION FOR REAL-TIME INTRAOPERATIVE BRAIN TRACKING

Dr Hamid Abbasi is a Senior Research Fellow at the University of Auckland's Auckland Bioengineering Institute and Centre for Brain Research, where he leads the Advanced NeuroTech Lab. His work spans AI-driven neurosurgical navigation, brain-shift compensation, and neonatal brain injury analysis. He is also Co-Founder and CEO of Neurofanos, a MedTech spin-out developing real-time, sub-millimetre-accurate AI guidance systems for brain surgery, built on NVIDIA's advanced platforms. Dr Abbasi collaborates widely across clinical, academic, and industry partners to translate advanced imaging and computational intelligence into next-generation precision neuroscience.



## DR. Ho-Fung Chan

*Senior Research Fellow, Auckland Bioengineering Institute, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand*

*Honorary Senior Research Fellow, Mātai Medical Research Institute, Tairāwhiti Gisborne, New Zealand*

### Talk: ADVANCED MRI FOR PAEDIATRIC DIGITAL TWIN MODELS OF THE LUNG

Dr Ho-Fung Chan is an Aotearoa Foundation Senior Research Fellow at the Auckland Bioengineering Institute. He completed his PhD in 2018 at the University of Sheffield, UK, where he helped establish hyperpolarised xenon lung MRI as a novel clinical tool for monitoring lung disease in both adult and paediatric patients. In 2022, he returned to New Zealand, and his current research is focused on developing digital twin lung models for lung disease management in New Zealand children by combining advanced lung MRI techniques and computational physiology modelling.



## Lisa Bates MNZM

*Philanthropy Director, Mātai Medical Research Institute, Tairāwhiti Gisborne, New Zealand*

### Talk: BRAIN BREAK WITH LISA

Lisa Bates brings over 15 years of governance experience and was appointed a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit in 2017 for her leadership in the arts. Formerly the youngest female producer on Shortland Street, she moved into community and cultural fundraising, leading major campaigns for organisations such as the NZSO, Royal New Zealand Ballet, and Q Theatre. Her career spans both strategic philanthropy and creative sector development. With two children studying medicine, Lisa is motivated by a strong personal commitment to improving health outcomes, and she now directs her expertise toward securing philanthropic support for transformative medical research in Aotearoa.



## Rich Easton

*CEO, Neurological Foundation of NZ  
Chair, Neurological Alliance  
Board Chair, Project Employ*

### Talk: FUNDING FOR THE FUTURE

Rich has a charity & business background, currently leading the Neurological Foundation. Previously working in the commercial sector in technology, business change / customer service roles. He Chairs the Neurological Alliance, 20 charities advocating for better outcomes for those living with neurological conditions, plus Chairs Project Employ which enables young people with learning challenges into the workforce. Rich has previously been Chair of Volunteering Auckland, First Foundation, and Make-A-Wish Pacific. Outside of work you might find him riding his motorbikes.



## ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR Tracy Melzer

*Associate Professor in Applied Neuroscience, Te Kura Mahi ā-Hirikapo | School of Psychology, Speech and Hearing, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand*

*Imaging Research Manager, New Zealand Brain Research Institute, Christchurch, New Zealand*

### Talk: PATHOLOGICAL PROTEINS AND FUTURE DEMENTIA IN PARKINSON'S DISEASE

Tracy Melzer is an Associate Professor at Te Kura Mahi ā-Hirikapo | School of Psychology, Speech and Hearing, University of Canterbury. His research focuses on the application of brain imaging techniques (MRI and PET) to study health and disease. While his interests are broad, his primary research area examines cognitive impairments and the development of dementia in Parkinson's disease.



## DR. Maryam Tayebi

*Hugh and Moira Green Senior Research Fellow, Mātai Medical Research Institute, Tairāwhiti Gisborne, New Zealand*

*Honorary Research Fellow, Auckland Bioengineering Institute, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand*

### Talk: MULTIMODAL MRI TO TRACK BRAIN AND HEART RECOVERY FROM METHAMPHETAMINE

Dr Maryam Tayebi is a researcher with a background spanning Medical, Physics, and Engineering faculties. She earned her BSc in Radiology in Iran and a master's degree in Medical Imaging from The University of Manchester, recently completing her PhD at the Auckland Bioengineering Institute, The University of Auckland. Throughout her studies, she contributed to multiple research groups, publishing papers and presenting at national and international conferences. Her doctoral research focused on identifying biomarkers of mild traumatic brain injury using diffusion MR imaging, supported by her strong interdisciplinary training. At Mātai, Dr Tayebi coordinates a major research project investigating brain recovery in individuals abstaining from Methamphetamine use and is recognised for her strengths in designing comprehensive multidisciplinary projects. She holds a Hugh Green Foundation research fellowship and leads the Mātai research internship programme.



## Tim Marshall

*Kaiahutu | Coordinator, Tauawhi Men's Centre & Charitable Trust, Tairāwhiti Gisborne, New Zealand*

### Talk: TAUAWHI-E, TAIKI-E!: A PARTNERSHIP CREATING A COMMUNITY OF CARING MEN

Tim Marshall (KSM) has undertaken work with men for over 20 years in both paid and voluntary capacities, locally and nationally. Currently, he leads the Tauawhi Men's Centre, a unique and locally generated community response to addressing a gap in service for men in Tairāwhiti/Gisborne. Tauawhi also partners with Taiki E! on the Hikitia! Tane Ora local prevention project and National Changemakers campaign. Tim has lived in Gisborne for 33 years with his partner Whetumarama and together they have one son and two daughters, George, Amiria and Ngahuaia and six mokopuna.



## Wendy Mohi

*Research Associate, Mātai Medical Research Institute, Tairāwhiti Gisborne, New Zealand*

*CAYAD, Tūranga Health, Tairāwhiti Gisborne, New Zealand*

### Talk: HE HAERENGA KI TE WHAKAORA: A JOURNEY OF HEALING

Wendy plays a key leadership role in a world-first methamphetamine recovery programme, He Haerenga Ki Te Whakaora: A Journey to Healing (Hikoi), based in Tairāwhiti and co-led with Dr Maryam Tayebi and alongside Mātai Clinical Research Fellow Dr Gil Newburn and University of Auckland's Associate Professor Miriam Scadeng. The programme integrates advanced imaging, neuropsychiatric care, outreach, and Mātauranga Māori to support whaiora and their whānau. A former NZ Police Sergeant, Wendy brings deep experience in drug management, community engagement, and harm-reduction education. She has delivered drug-education programmes across Tairāwhiti and Wairoa for seven years and also works in a CAYAD role with Tūranga Health. Wendy is driven by a commitment to a drug-free Tairāwhiti and empowering communities through knowledge and connection.



## Ben Bristow

*PhD Student, Anatomy and Medical Imaging, Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand*

*Mātai Medical Research Institute, Tairāwhiti Gisborne, New Zealand*

**Talk: HE HAERENGA KI TE WHAKAORA: A JOURNEY OF HEALING**

Ben's interest in neuroscience grew from a fascination with the brain's complexity and the breadth of research within the field. Since beginning his Mātai internship in 2022, he has become a core contributor to Mātai's methamphetamine recovery kaupapa, working closely with community leaders - particularly the late Tuta Ngarimu - through abstinence-based programmes that support whaiora across Tairāwhiti. Ben completed his postgraduate diploma in Neuroscience and began his PhD in 2024 under the supervision of Assoc. Prof. Miriam Scadeng and Dr Maryam Tayebi. His doctoral research involves analysing data from the abstinence programme and contributing to the development of the Hīkoi Programme, with a focus on understanding neural changes during withdrawal and recovery while maintaining strong engagement with participants and their whānau.



## ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR

### Kate Hill

**BVSc MANZCVS DipACVIM PhD**

*Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand*

*Chair, New Zealand Veterinary Association*

**Talk: ONE HEALTH: ANIMAL AND HUMAN CONNECTIONS**

Associate Professor Kate Hill is a veterinary specialist, educator, and sector leader. A Diplomate of the American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine, she has held senior clinical and academic roles at Massey University since 2005 and is currently Programme Lead for the Master of Veterinary Medicine. She is the immediate past President of the New Zealand Veterinary Association (2022–2025), and widely recognised for her advocacy, mentorship, and leadership across the veterinary and One Health sectors.



## DR.

### Saralyn (Sari) MacKenzie

*Director, Clinical Medicine Services, Mātai Medical Research Institute, Tairāwhiti Gisborne, New Zealand.*

*Physician, Te Whatu Ora Tairāwhiti Gisborne, New Zealand*

**Talk: PRECISION HEALTH CONSULTANCY SERVICE – IS MRI BENEFICIAL IN PREVENTIVE HEALTH?**

Dr. Saralyn (Sari) MacKenzie is a highly experienced Internal Medicine Specialist with over 25 years of clinical and leadership experience across the US and New Zealand. Trained at Boston University and the University of Cincinnati, she founded one of the first hospitalist programmes in the USA and later became Chief of Staff at Cape Cod Hospital. Since moving to Gisborne in 2009, she has been a Consultant Physician at Te Whatu Ora Tairāwhiti and has held multiple leadership roles, including Clinical Director and Head of Medicine. Dr MacKenzie plays a key role in bridging research and clinical care, helping translate innovative science into real-world health outcomes. Sari leads Mātai Institute's Precision Health Consultancy Service, exploring MRI as a tool for preventive health and wellbeing.



## DR.

### Eryn Kwon

*Senior Research Fellow, Mātai Medical Research Institute, Tairāwhiti Gisborne, New Zealand*

*Senior Research Fellow, Auckland Bioengineering Institute, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand*

**Talk 1: WHY BIG DATA? Talk 2: SHAKEN, NOT STIRRED? EXPLORING HOW NATURAL BRAIN MOTION CHANGES AFTER MILD TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY**

Dr Eryn Kwon, is a Mātai Senior Research Fellow funded by the Hugh Green Foundation. Dr Kwon completed a Bachelor of Engineering and Science (conjoint) from the University of Auckland, majoring in biomedical engineering, physics, and chemistry. She started working on a forensic modelling project (in brain ballistic modelling of gun-shot wounds) first as her Master's degree in Mechanical Engineering at the University of Auckland, which continued into her PhD. Eryn's expertise and dedication have now led her to Tairāwhiti, where she leads a remarkable Gisborne-based collaborative research project focused on the early detection and modelling of mild traumatic brain injury (mTBI).



## DR.

### Patrick McHugh

**FRNZCGP, FDRHM, FRNZCUC, Dip Com Em Med, Dip Mus M, Dip GU Med, MBChB, BMedSc**

*Community Research Liaison, Mātai Medical Research Institute, Tairāwhiti Gisborne, New Zealand*

*GP, Tūranga Health and Health NZ Tairāwhiti, Gisborne, New Zealand*

**Talk: TŪ WAIRUA: EXPLORING OPPORTUNITIES IN PSYCHEDELIC THERAPY**

Dr Patrick McHugh works with community, national and international organisations to identify priority health needs and support the research-led work of Mātai Medical Research Institute and Turanga Health. He embeds scientific enquiry within areas of need while fostering a holistic, community-centred approach to wellbeing. Patrick also collaborates with the Tū Wairua team to explore emerging psychedelic-assisted therapy approaches that may enhance mental health outcomes in Tairāwhiti. His role includes guiding innovative health solutions, facilitating collaborations, and mentoring students and trainees. Based in Gisborne, he is a founding trustee of the Tairāwhiti Health Research Trust and the Plant Based New Zealand Health Trust, and a leader in regional inter-professional education.



## DR.

### Ayah Elsayed

*Senior Lecturer & Programme Lead, Auckland University of Technology, Auckland, New Zealand*

*Researcher, Auckland Bioengineering Institute, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand*

*Honorary Research Fellow, Mātai Medical Research Institute, Tairāwhiti Gisborne, New Zealand*

**Talk: THE GROWING HEART IN VOXELS: REFLECTIONS FROM THE TAIRĀWHITI CHILD WELLBEING STUDY**

Ayah's research explores cardiovascular and cerebral hemodynamics across different cardiac conditions, combining 4D flow imaging with computational modelling and digital twin development. At Mātai, Ayah is working on cardiac modelling within the Tairāwhiti Child Wellbeing Study, aiming to better understand cardiac development in children as they grow.



## Simeon John Alford

*Co-founder, Aroha AI*

### Talk: GENERATIVE HORIZONS: IMAGING THE FUTURE THROUGH AI AND CREATIVE TECHNOLOGY

Simeon Alford is co-founder of Aroha AI, dedicated to exploring how generative AI intersects with creativity, community, and human-centred design. He supports communities and organisations to navigate rapid technological shifts, highlighting AI's potential to enhance wellbeing, education, and collaborative innovation. By demonstrating practical yet imaginative applications of AI, Simeon advocates for thoughtful integration that respects human judgment and community values. At the Mātai Symposium, he will explore how creative technologies enable new ways of imagining and shaping our collective future, emphasising the role of AI as a partner in addressing societal and community-level challenges.

## PROFESSOR Eileen McKinlay

*Director, Centre for Interprofessional Education, Division of Health Sciences, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand*

### Talk: THE FUTURE OF THE TAIRĀWHITI HEALTH WORKFORCE: 15 YEARS OF PARTNERSHIP

Eileen McKinlay is a Professor of Primary Health Care and Director of the Centre for Interprofessional Education, Division of Health Sciences, University of Otago. She leads the delivery of IPE learning activities to health sciences students across their training programmes and campus sites including the Tairāwhiti Interprofessional Education Programme. Eileen is a nurse by background and an experienced researcher in interprofessional education, and primary health care.



## Huti Puketapu-Watson

*(Ngāti Porou, Tainui)*

*Senior Fellow, Atlantic Fellowship for Social Equity (AFSE)*

*Te Paratene Ngata Centre of Excellence, Te Whare Hauora o Ngāti Porou, Tairāwhiti Gisborne, New Zealand*

### Talk: NGĀTI POROU JOURNEY IN GENOMICS

Huti Puketapu-Watson has more than 25 years of experience in Indigenous health promotion and development across Australia and Aotearoa. A former Chair and Deputy Chair of the Ngāti Porou Hauora Board, she is currently leading Ngāti Porou Oranga's role in Māori-led genomic medicine initiatives, including Rakeiora and He Kākano – Aotearoa Variome. Huti also serves in key governance roles, such as Co-Chair of Toitu Te Ora Tairāwhiti and Chair of the Aotearoa Genomic Variome Project. Her genomics mahi focuses on pharmacogenomics, cardiometabolic risk, and tikanga-based data governance that protects whakapapa and ensures genomic benefits for Māori communities.



## PROFESSOR Holly Thorpe

*Professor and Associate Dean Research, Te Huataki Waiora Division of Health, University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand.*

### Talk: HEALTHY HEARTS WITH TŪRANGA HEALTH: INSIGHTS FROM PARTICIPANTS & STAFF OF AN IWI HEALTH PROVIDER

Holly Thorpe (PhD) is a Professor and Associate Dean Research in Te Huataki Waiora Division of Health, University of Waikato, Aotearoa New Zealand. Over the past twenty years her research has focused on the social, cultural, and gendered complexities of health and wellbeing. She has published more than 100 articles and chapters and has written or edited ten books on related topics. Holly is an Honorary Professor at the University of Bath and a Principal Investigator for Te Pūnaha Matatini. Since moving back to her hometown of Tairāwhiti, she has been collaborating with community researchers and partners on the impacts of climate change on health systems and community health and wellbeing.



## Hadyn Pomana

*Tūranga Health, Tairāwhiti Gisborne, New Zealand*

### Talk: HEALTHY HEARTS WITH TŪRANGA HEALTH: INSIGHTS FROM PARTICIPANTS & STAFF OF AN IWI HEALTH PROVIDER

Ko Hikurangi te Maunga  
Ko Waiapu te Awa  
Ko Maraehara te Takiwa  
Ko Te Whanau a Karuwai te Hapu  
Ko Ngati Porou te Iwi  
Ko Hadyn Pomana toku ingoa  
Kei te mahi au mo Turanga Health  
Ko taku hiahia he awahina i nga tangata  
Mauri Ora!

## Jordon Lima

*PhD Candidate (submitted), Ōtākou Whakaihū Waka, Dunedin, New Zealand  
Research Assistant, Mātai Medical Research Institute, Tairāwhiti Gisborne, New Zealand*

### Talk: TIKANGA TAIRĀWHITI IN BIOMEDICAL TECHNOLOGIES

Ko Hikurangi me Titirangi ngā maunga.  
Ko Waiapu me Ūawanuiarumatua ngā awa.

He uri ahau nā Ngāti Porou, nā Te Aitanga-a-Hauiti hoki.  
Ko Jordon Lima tōku ingoa.

Jordon Lima is a researcher whose work bridges precision medicine, kaupapa Māori values, and community wellbeing. Her Doctorate explored the clinical potential of a cancer-specific blood test for Te Tairāwhiti, demonstrating how innovative diagnostics can be tailored to meet local needs. Jordon also developed an educational game that translates complex genetic concepts into engaging, accessible learning for whānau. Her work reflects a deep commitment to equity, innovation, and community-led science, ensuring that emerging health technologies uphold Māori aspirations and improve outcomes.



## Mariska van Gaalen

*Whānau, Tāiki e!, Tairāwhiti Gisborne, New Zealand*

### Talk: LOCALLY GROUNDED ECOSYSTEM APPROACHES TO INNOVATION

Mariska is one of the whānau at Tāiki e! Impact House, a collaborative space for entrepreneurship, innovation and community action. Tāiki e! is on a mission to kickstart the Aroha Economy from Tairāwhiti, expressing a future that is generous, generative and generational. Mariska has been active at Tāiki e! for the past 5,5 years alongside her work as a gardener, consultant and designer.



## Nathalie Whitaker

*Co-Founder & CEO, Toha Network  
Co-Lead, East Coast Exchange, Tairāwhiti  
Gisborne, New Zealand*

### Talk: THE \$8 BILLION HOUR PLEDGE

Nathalie Whitaker is a social innovation and impact-systems leader focused on strengthening community resilience and environmental regeneration across Aotearoa. She is the co-founder and CEO of Toha Network, a platform connecting community action, nature-finance, and digital tools to accelerate large-scale ecological and social outcomes. Nathalie is part of the leadership team behind East Coast Exchange, a Tairāwhiti initiative established after Cyclone Gabrielle to recognise and reward community-led recovery and environmental mahi. Previously, she founded Givealittle, New Zealand's pioneering charitable crowdfunding platform. She brings deep experience in collaborative design, systems thinking, and purpose-driven entrepreneurship, empowering local strengths to create equitable outcomes for whānau and whenua.



## Shanon O'Connor

*Founder and Director, Tōnuī Collab,  
Tairāwhiti Gisborne, New Zealand*

### Talk: STEMM EQUITY FOR KŌHINE MĀORI

Shanon O'Connor (Ngāti Porou, Ngai Tahu) is the Founder and Director of Tōnuī Collab, a STEMM Education partner creating reo rua STEMM learning opportunities for taitamariki so that they might explore the diversity of STEMM - Science, Technology, Engineering, Maths and Mātauranga - through culturally affirming learning experiences. Tōnuī Collab collaborates with whānau, kura and marae to create opportunities for taitamariki to bring ancestral narratives to life, creating space for them to transition from passive technology consumers into creators, building meaningful, culturally rich digital artifacts. Tōnuī Collab demonstrates the transformative potential of culturally responsive STEMM education, ensuring that communities are not just prepared for the digital future but are also actively shaping it with their own voices, stories, and creativity.



## DR. Oka Sanerivi

*Senior Research Fellow, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand*

*Senior Research Fellow, Mātai Medical Research Institute, Tairāwhiti Gisborne, New Zealand*

### Talk: THE IMAGE OF THE FUTURE IS OUT OF THE RED: TOWARDS UNDERSTANDING MĀORI AND PACIFIC MEN'S HAUORA

Oka is a Samoan, Tongan, physiotherapy clinician, early career researcher and governor. He was born in Aotearoa New Zealand and raised between Aotearoa, Samoa, Tonga and Fiji. He is a Senior Research Fellow at the Va'a o Tautai: Centre for Pacific Health at the University of Otago and the Mātai Medical Research Institute in Tairāwhiti. He recently became the first Pacific person to be awarded a PhD in Physiotherapy and has also been awarded the Mana Tūāpapa Future Leaders Fellowship by the Royal Society of New Zealand / Te Aparangi. He bears the chief title of Lilo from the district of Lefaga in Samoa.



## David Brebner

*Doctoral Candidate, Department of Anatomy and Medical Imaging, Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand*

*CEO, Umajin*

### Talk: NOVEL PORTABLE DEVICE FOR SMALL SCALE 3D IMAGING

David expertise ranges from user interaction, software design, programming language design, 3D machine vision, VR, AR, IoT, AI and solutions architecture. This thinking is put into practice with the powerful Umajin digital platform. Umajin is used as a platform to create enterprise applications utilising native edge hardware and cloud compute with over 30 million instances shipped with partners like PwC, NTT, Dell, HP, Intel, IBM and Sony.



## DR. William Schierding

*Vision Research Foundation Senior Research Fellow, Department of Ophthalmology, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand*

*Honorary Senior Research Fellow, Mātai Medical Research Institute, Tairāwhiti Gisborne, New Zealand*

### Talk: COULD VISION PROBLEMS BE BRAIN PROBLEMS?

Dr Schierding works at the intersection of genomics, epigenetics, and AI-driven predictive modelling to advance precision medicine. After earning a Master's in Genetic Epidemiology in the U.S. and completing his PhD at the Liggins Institute on genome architecture, William's current research is at the cutting edge of ophthalmology, genomics, AI, and precision medicine. With over 10,000 citations, his research focuses on using large global cohorts to develop machine learning models that identify biomarkers (clinical and genetic) for early detection and personalized care in eye diseases such as glaucoma.



## Paul Condron

*MRI Charge Technologist, Mātai Medical Research Institute, Tairāwhiti Gisborne, New Zealand*

*Honorary Professional Teaching Fellow, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand*

### Talk: ULTRA-HIGH CONTRAST MRI - MAKING THE INVISIBLE VISIBLE

Paul Condron is the Charge MRI Technologist at Mātai and a co-inventor of Ultrahigh Contrast (UHC) MRI. Paul's role at Mātai assists in advancing innovative imaging techniques to answer clinical and research questions. Over the past three years Paul has been at the forefront of advancing the understanding of UHC MRI and working to refine this technique and validate its use. His pioneering work gained international recognition, earning second place in the 2025 ISMRT Proffered Clinical oral presentation Awards in Hawaii for Ultra-High Contrast (UHC) MRI with Bipolar Filters: Obvious Abnormalities in Normal Appearing Brain, Spinal Cord and Optic Nerve.



## DR. Daniel Cornfeld

*Clinical Lead, Mātai Medical Research Institute, Tairāwhiti Gisborne, New Zealand*

*Head of Department, Radiology, Te Whatu Ora, Tairāwhiti Gisborne, New Zealand*

*Honorary Research Fellow, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand*

### Talk: TRANSFORMING PROSTATE CANCER CARE: A NEW PUBLIC CLINICAL PATHWAY PIONEERED IN TAIRĀWHITI GISBORNE

Dr Daniel Cornfeld has an AB in Physics from Princeton University and a Doctorate in Medicine from the University of Maryland, both with High Honors. He completed his medical internship at the University of California, San Diego; his residency at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston (a Harvard Hospital), and an imaging fellowship in Body MRI at Yale-New Haven Hospital. Daniel is the clinical lead for Mātai, additionally to holding the role of Head of Radiology at Te Whatu Ora Tairāwhiti.



## PREVIOUS MĀTAI INTERNS

### Rikki Noble

*Software Engineering Graduate, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand*

Rikki Noble is a Māori graduate from the Tairāwhiti region. He recently completed a Bachelor of Engineering (Hons) in Software Engineering at the University of Auckland, where he developed a deep interest in how technology can be used to uplift communities.

Rikki was a participant in the 2022–2023 and 2023–2024 internship programmes, experiences that allowed him to apply his skills to real-world projects while strengthening his commitment to kaupapa that serve and empower local communities. Looking ahead, Rikki hopes to start his career in agricultural automation, contributing to innovations that support sustainable practices. He ultimately wishes to use his skills to better the people in and around Gisborne.



### Imogen Amor-Bendall

*Neuroscience Graduate, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand*

Imogen Amor-Bendall has completed a BSc Majoring in Neuroscience at the University of Otago in 2024. Imogen was a Mātai School Leaver Scholarship recipient, and has participated in the 2023–2024, 2024–2025 and 2025–2026 summer internships.

To Imogen, Mātai has given her the opportunity to practice her degree in a real-world setting, guiding her journey into research. It has influenced her study plans and brought a new passion into her life. "This internship is an amazing opportunity for any student in Tairāwhiti. It allows us to be able to explore health-focused research and have a positive impact on our community."



### Paige Richter

*Fourth Year Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand*

Paige Richter is a Māori medical student from the Tairāwhiti region, currently entering her fourth year of medical school. Her connection to her community has strongly shaped her values, particularly her commitment to hauora Māori and improving health outcomes for her people.

Paige was a participant in the 2022–2023 and 2023–2024 internship programme, opportunities that allowed her to grow her skills, contribute to meaningful projects, and deepen her passion for kaupapa that uplift and empower Māori communities, particularly in the field of Ophthalmology. These experiences strengthened her drive to pursue medicine as a pathway to make a real difference. Looking ahead, Paige hopes to continue developing as a clinician who serves her community with compassion, cultural grounding, and a dedication to equitable healthcare. She ultimately aims to use her skills to support the health and wellbeing of the people in and around Gisborne.



### Ella Arthur

*Bachelor of Dental Surgery, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand*

Ella Arthur was born and raised in Gisborne, and her roots in Tairāwhiti have strongly shaped both her values and her aspirations. She recently completed her second year of a Bachelor of Dental Surgery at the University of Otago, where she is working toward a career dedicated to supporting the oral health and wellbeing of her communities.

This summer, Ella returned home to take part in the Mātai Summer Internship Programme. As a Mātai intern in both 2024–2025 and 2025–2026, she has contributed to locally driven research while deepening her understanding of how science, healthcare, and community impact intersect. Ella is enthusiastic about continuing to build the skills that will support her future mahi as a dentist and reinforce her commitment to giving back to Tairāwhiti.



# MĀTAI SUMMER INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME 2025-26

**Programme lead:** Dr. Maryam Tayebi, Hugh and Moira Green Senior Research Fellow, Mātai Medical Research Institute

Named Internship	Intern Name	University	Year	Field of Study	Project Area / Research Interests	Supervisors
Mātai-University of Auckland Internship	<b>Imogen Amor-Bendall</b>	Otago	3rd	Neuroscience	Neuroscience, psychology, and medicine	Assoc. Prof. Miriam Scadeng, Dr Maryam Tayebi
Mātai-University of Canterbury Internship	<b>Jamila Kate Miriama Fleming</b> <i>Ngāti Porou, Ngāti Kahungunu</i>	Canterbury	3rd	Psychology	Māori health equity; developmental neurology; trauma, ACEs, resilience; neuroplasticity; integration of Western science & mātauranga Māori	Assoc. Prof. Tracy Melzer, Assoc. Prof. Samantha Holdsworth
Mātai-HRC Internship	<b>Ella Arthur</b> <i>Ngāi Te Rangī</i>	Otago	2nd	Dentistry	Dentistry	Dr Joanna Ngo, Leigh Potter
Mātai-CBR Internship	<b>Ky Bartlett</b> <i>Ngāti Porou</i>	Auckland	1st	Exercise Science	Exercise science	Dr Josh McGeown, Dr Sergio Dempsey
Mātai-Lions Internship	<b>Ned Clarke</b> <i>Ngāti Porou, Ngāpuhi, Rongowhakaata</i>	Auckland	1st	Biomedical Science	Biomedical science; pathway toward MBChB	Dr Maryam Tayebi, Dr Eryn Kwon, Christian Saludar, Ben Bristow
Mātai-Sir Woolf Fisher Internship	<b>Mathew Sung</b>	Otago	2nd	Medicine and Surgery	Health care, neurology, nervous system, heart & cardiology	Dr William Schierding, Dr Eryn Kwon
Mātai-Rapanui Internship	<b>Nicholas Kane</b>	Auckland	4th	Biomedical Science	Concussion, optic nerve, ADHD research	Dr William Schierding, Dr Maryam Tayebi
Mātai-Freemasons Internship	<b>Frankie Muir</b>	Otago	2nd	Medicine and Surgery	Meth addiction & dementia; brain degeneration/regeneration	Dr Itamar Terem, Assoc. Prof. Samantha Holdsworth, Jet Wright
Mātai/Quest Internship	<b>Naiya Powley</b>	AUT	1st	Health Science / Physiotherapy	Neurological physiotherapy; concussion rehabilitation; neurological disorders	Dr Sergio Dempsey, Dr Josh McGeown
Mātai-Tindall Internship	<b>Miah Somerton</b> <i>Te Atiawa, Ngāti One One</i>	AUT	1st	Physiotherapy	Mental health impacts of injury; injury prevention	Dr Oka Sanerivi, Leigh Potter
Mātai-Tūranga Health Internship	<b>Cheidan Moetara</b> <i>Rongowhakaata, Ngāti Porou</i>	Auckland	1st	Health Science	Bioengineering tools; mātauranga Māori; medical imaging; community engagement	Leigh Potter
Mātai-Pultron Internship	<b>Keeley Cairns</b>	Victoria	3rd	Biomedical Science / Genetics	Human health biology; genetics; molecular pathology	Dr Tim Salmond
Mātai-Royal Society Hawke's Bay Internship	<b>Noah Mason</b>	Auckland	1st	Biomedical Science	Biomedical Science	Dr Sergio Dempsey, Assoc. Prof. Samantha Holdsworth, Jet Wright
Mātai-Sir Woolf Fisher Internship	<b>Tui Cave</b>	Canterbury	1st	Engineering	Chemical & Process Engineering; Biomedical Engineering	Dr Maryam Tayebi, Dr Eryn Kwon, Christian Saludar, Ben Bristow
Mātai-Sir Woolf Fisher Internship	<b>Paris Maxwell</b> <i>Ngāti Rangiwewehi, Ngāti Tūwharetoa, Te Aitanga-a-Mahaki</i>	Toi Ohomai	1st	Applied IT	Neuroscience; data analysis; research	Dr William Schierding, Dr Maryam Tayebi, Wendy Mohi

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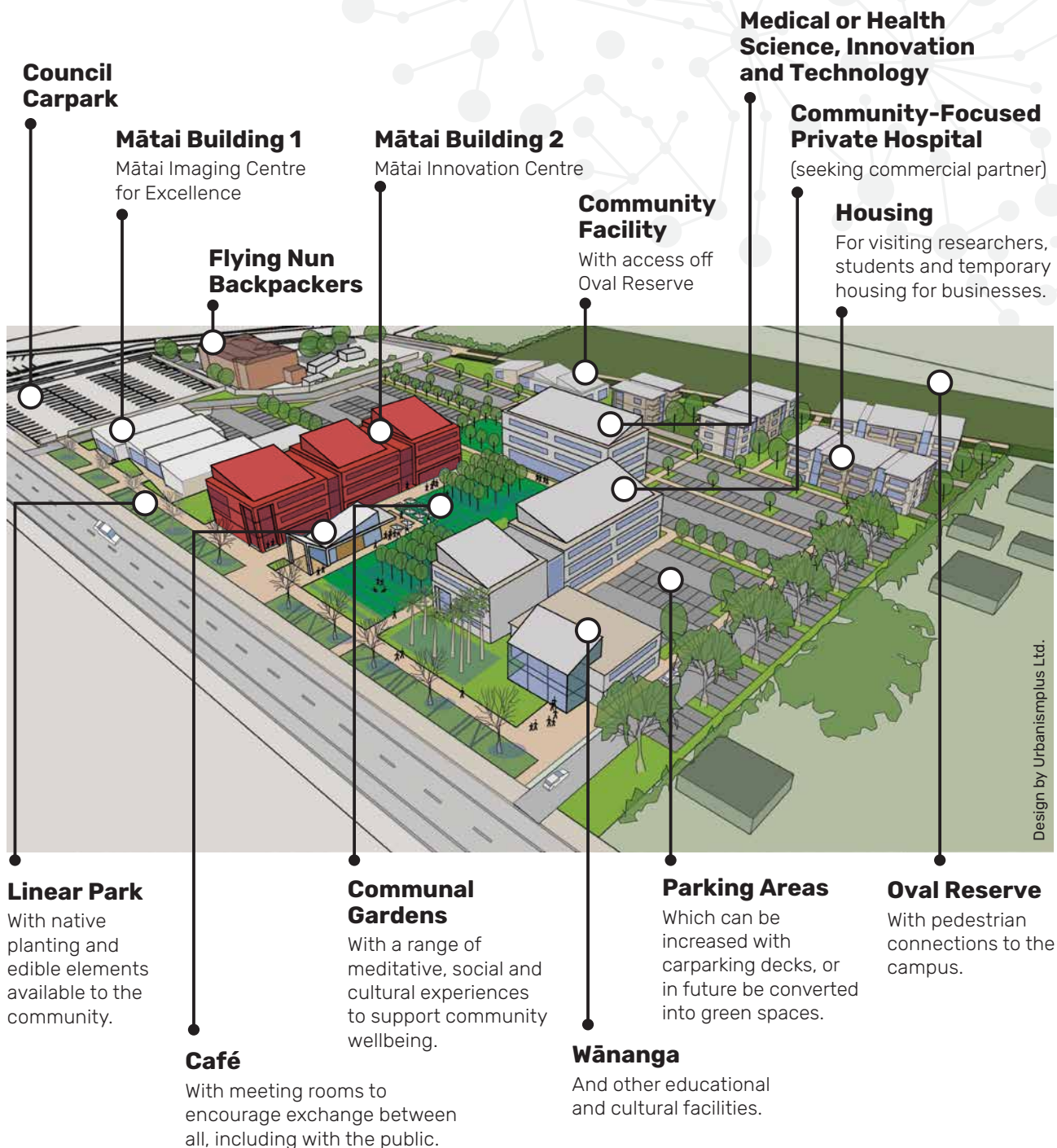
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He mihi tēnei ki a Te Whānau ā Iwi, ki a Ngāi Tāwhiri, ki a Rongowhakaata, otirā ki ngā whānau, ngā hapū, me ngā iwi katoa o te Tairāwhiti.

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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We also acknowledge with gratitude all those who participate in and engage with our research and education programmes, contributing so meaningfully to our kaupapa.

A special note of thanks goes to Mark Kopua, who gifted Mātai our name and whakataukī; to Pāpā Taina Ngarimu and Pāpā Taharākau Stewart for their guidance; and to Pāpā Dave and Nanny Molly Para for the taonga of our Mātai waiata.

We are deeply appreciative of all our supporters [matai.org.nz/supporters](https://matai.org.nz/supporters) whose generosity spans research funding, school leavers scholarships, summer intern scholarships, in-kind support, Mātai building and opening support, our local artists, governance and advisory boards, Kāhui Pakeke, Mātai campus committee & supporters, Mātai Tairāwhiti Relief Fund contributors, and the Friends of Mātai committee and supporter tiers.

To everyone who has contributed – through funding, in-kind support, partnership, encouragement, creativity, or belief in our vision – we offer our heartfelt thanks.

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## Thank you for joining us at the Mātai 2025 Symposium

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Ehara taku toa i te toa takitahi, engari he toa takitini.

