CHILD COHORT STUDY

NEWSLETTER
WINTER 2026

Dear CHILD Cohort Study youth, parents & families:

CHILD youth showed up again!

We launched the CHILD Youth Advisory Council on October 18 and were delighted with the turnout:

Over 90 youth showed up, full of commitment and ideas and ready to discuss the things that matter to them.

Of course, you have all been showing up for us for years, but this was something new and only possible now, as our participants reach a new level of maturity.

It is an exciting step forward in our partnership, and we are keen to continue working with you to plan the Study's future.

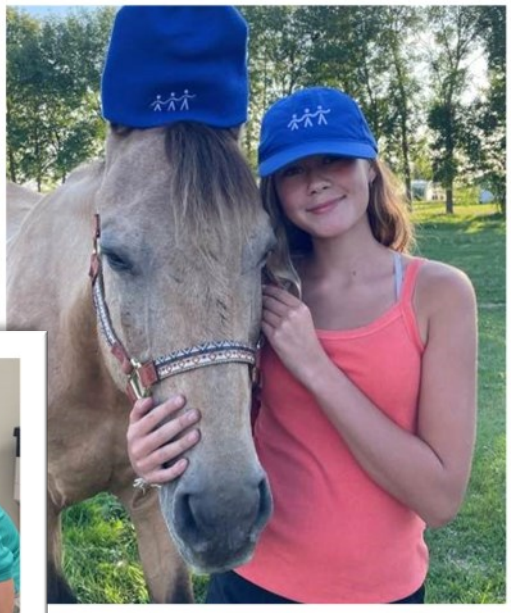
Speaking of the Study's future, it won't be long before we officially launch the 16-year round of data collection.

The research design this time around has been more deeply informed than ever by input from you, our Study participants.

We have lightened the load, especially when it comes to questionnaires, and seek more information directly from youth rather than from their parents. We're also increasing our focus on mental health, in response to your telling us that this is a priority for you.

Another addition of interest is a new wearable: an Oura ring, described further in this newsletter, below. We hope you'll share our enthusiasm for this new device.

Staff at CHILD's Hamilton headquarters



Lindsey & her horse Doc in Manitoba

Edric & family with staff Doug & Scarlet in Winnipeg

Members of the Edmonton site team

I anticipate talking to you about all this and more soon, in our first national CHILD Town Hall.

Until then, thank you for being a part of CHILD's continuing growth in 2026!

Padmaja (PJ) Subbarao
CHILD Director

v01 Dec2025

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Meet the people behind the Study

Max

CHILD Youth Vancouver

What do you like about being part of CHILD?

Overall, it's a very fun experience because of activities such as conferences and engagement events. I find that they're very inclusive with everything they do. All these projects and ideas and stuff. Being part of the NPEC allows me to get a glimpse behind-the-scenes of how all this research is done, and it feels very good to be a part of research providing data to help kids all over Canada.

What is your favourite movie, and why?

Oppenheimer, because it's all about engineering, physics and science. In my future career, I will be mainly focusing on those 3 aspects. So it's very inspirational for me. The movie demonstrates how people are able to think critically in certain situations. It follows the life story of a pretty well-known man, Robert Oppenheimer, who created the nuclear bomb, and I just find this whole story pretty interesting.

Describe a hobby of yours.

I like drawing and baking. Drawing is really cleansing, in the sense of just taking an idea from my chaotic brain or my messy thought process and putting it onto a blank piece of paper.

I love baking and making food in general, especially desserts. I'm always either making pancakes for breakfast or cakes for dessert. I've made quite a few chocolate cakes and the occasional lemon cake.

One of Max's drawings

What do you think is the biggest challenge for youth today?

Social injustice, mental health, and how most of the world is online as opposed to doing things in person.

Pikelets (a Dutch pancake) made by Max

If you could have any superpower, what would it be?

I would love to have the ability to make anything come true. I would use this power to solve problems around the world, such as hunger or providing safe living spaces in hostile environments.

What is your favourite way to spend a weekend?

Watching movies and spending time with friends, through video games and in person.

What's a fun fact about you that not many people know?

I love horror stories, and I'm currently brainstorming for a horror novel that I will be writing in the future.

RESEARCH UPDATES

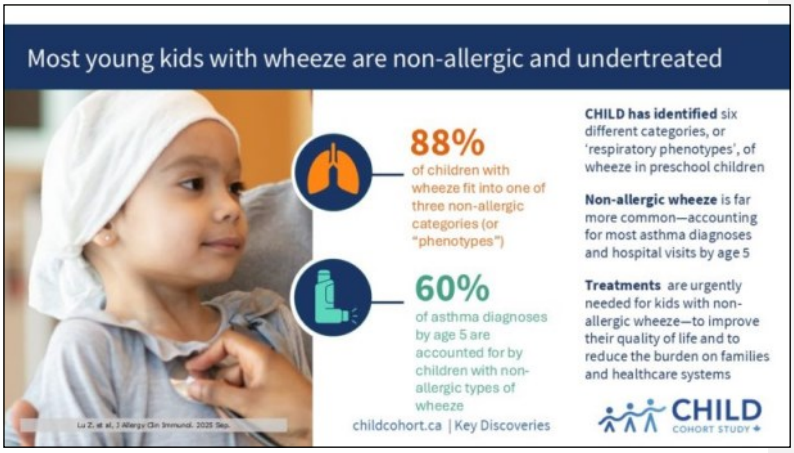
from CHILD COHORT STUDY

Advocating better care for kids with non-allergic asthma

CHILD research has identified six different categories of wheeze in preschool children. This will help doctors predict which kids are most likely to develop asthma and the type of asthma they will develop—insights critical to providing them with better care, sooner.

Children were grouped based on patterns: the age wheezing began, whether it persisted, and whether wheeze was linked to allergies. It was found that children with non-allergic wheeze made up the majority of asthma diagnoses and hospital visits by age five.

However, doctors are often most alert to wheeze with allergic symptoms and standard treatments are designed for those children. This research shows we urgently need treatments tailored to the needs of non-allergic wheezers —to improve their lives and to reduce the burden on families and our healthcare system.



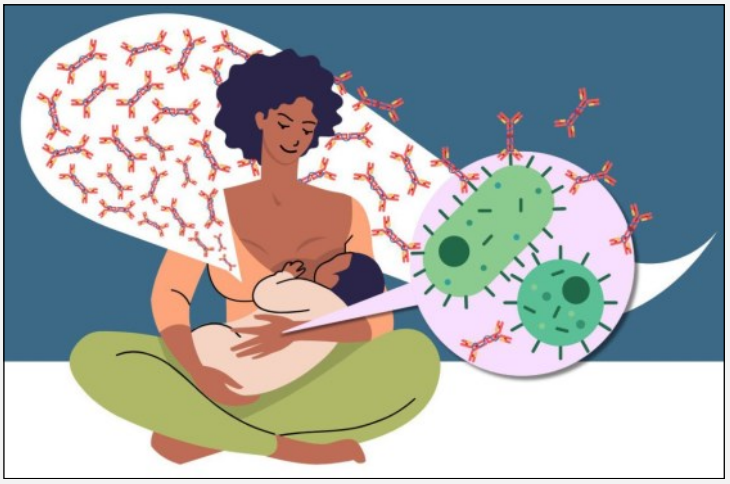
Read more about this research (click on the image).

Breastmilk helps immune development, brain growth

Two new CHILD findings reveal more about the powers of the "miracle food" that is human milk:

First, CHILD researchers found that a common antibody in breastmilk effectively targets an allergy-related bacterium in the infant gut. The antibody prevents this bacterium from becoming too prominent—and this helps ensure the baby's immune system develops in a healthy way.

Babies who get this antibody through their mom's milk—almost the only place they get it from—are less likely to develop allergies or asthma.



Read more about this research (click on the image).

Second, CHILD researchers identified components of breastmilk associated with a child's early neurodevelopment and brain growth. The research found the levels in breastmilk of select fatty acids and sugars to be related to a breastfed infant's cognitive, language and motor development at one year.

But these relationships are complex: They also found that mom's genetic make-up effects how her breastmilk sugars influence her baby's development. These findings take us a step forward in understanding the mechanisms behind breastmilk's influence on early neurodevelopment.

Read more about this research (click on the image).

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Meet the people behind the Study

Harmoni

CHILD Parent
Winnipeg

Why did you choose to enroll your child in this study?

When first pregnant with Lily I was working as a research scientist in the field of molecular biology. The idea of joining CHILD intrigued me both personally and professionally.

What hobby or activity are you passionate about?

Reading. I have always loved reading; it opens your mind to new words, worlds and ideas. I grew up with my nana who would read to me each night before bed until I could finally read the words back to her.

Snuggle puppies

If you had a time machine, which period would you visit and why?

I would visit the future. I am a huge science fiction lover, both books and movies/tv. The opportunity to witness the culmination of the human condition mixed with technology has always intrigued me.

What's your favourite way to unwind?

Having some snuggle time with my puppies, then heading out to watch Lily play basketball.

What is something about you that not many people know?

I am a huge comic nerd. I love all superheros & have attended many comic cons .

Harmoni with her daughter Lily

CHEF'S CORNER

Healthy eating with CHILD

Welcome to Chef's Corner, where we make eating healthy *easy, fun, affordable*, and *something the whole family can do together*!

In every newsletter, we'll share a simple and tasty recipe to help you build healthy habits. Whether you're packing lunches, prepping after-school snacks, or cooking dinner together, time in the kitchen is a great way to build skills, boost confidence, and make lasting memories.

Ingredients (2 servings):

- 3/4 cup rolled oats
- 1.5 cups water
- 1/4 cup milk or plant-based beverage
- 1/2 teaspoon pumpkin pie spice (or a combo of cinnamon, nutmeg, ginger, and ground cloves)
- 1/8 teaspoon ground allspice
- 1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1.5 teaspoons blackstrap molasses (or maple syrup or honey)
- 1 tablespoon nut butter (or sunflower seed butter or Greek yoghurt)
- 1/4 cup pecans (roughly chopped)

Gingerbread Oatmeal

Contributed by **Maurya**, CHILD Research Student

Directions:

- Add the oats and water to a small pot. Bring to a gentle boil over medium heat and cook for 4 to 5 minutes.
- Add the milk, pumpkin pie spice, allspice, vanilla, and molasses and stir. Cook for an additional 2 to 3 minutes, until cooked through.
- Add the oats to a bowl, top with nut butter and pecans.
- Enjoy!

Whether you're a seasoned chef or just learning the basics, cooking together builds confidence and sets the stage for healthy choices. Look out for more recipes in the next newsletter!

Want to be featured in Chef's Corner?
Send us a healthy recipe your family loves!

child@mcmaster.ca

It's Not Too Late!

You can still join the CHILD Youth Advisory Council!

The CHILD Youth Advisory Council brings together teens from across the Study to share their ideas, help shape future research, and make sure youth voices are heard loud and clear.

If you're a CHILD youth participant, **we'd love for you to join us.** No experience needed — just your thoughts, ideas, and curiosity!

Joining the Youth Advisory Council is a great way to:

- Share your ideas
- Learn more about research
- Develop valuable skills
- Meet other youth from the study

Join the Youth Advisory Council

Click the link or scan the QR code to sign up:

Sign up

Learn more about the Youth Advisory Council here: https://childstudy.ca/youth-council/

We hope to see you at our next meeting!

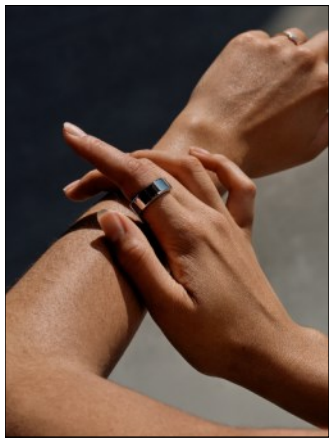
16-Year Visits Starting Soon

Oura rings

There's something new we're introducing into the 16-year CHILD visits: an Oura smart ring.

It's like a Fitbit that you wear on your finger.

If you agree to wear one for four weeks as part of your 16-year participation in CHILD, it will give us insight into your sleep and physical activity patterns, your stress levels and the environments you spend time in.



Beloved by celebrities and health experts, the ring has shaken up the world of fitness and health devices, according to *Vogue* magazine.

This is your chance to give this hot new tech a try!

Our nation-wide Town Hall is coming soon!

CONNECT with our team, **HEAR** what's new, & **LEARN** how your participation continues to shape the future of child & youth health research.

At the first Town Hall, we'll be:

- Introducing the upcoming 16-Year Visit
- Sharing study updates and progress
- Answering your questions in a live Q&A

Stay tuned! You'll receive an email with the date, time, and instructions on how to join.

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Meet the people behind the Study

Artist's visualization: Joyce's dream life

Joyce

CHILD Staff
Edmonton

What is your role on the CHILD team ?

I'm the Edmonton site Coordinator.

What do you enjoy most about your job?

I love seeing our participants grow up! A few people I have known since their 3-month visit. It is exciting to see how our participants are helping us to learn more about Canadian children's health.

What hobbies or activities do you enjoy outside of work?

I love to walk my dog (1.5 yrs) in the extensive river valley trails here in Edmonton.

What is your favourite way to unwind?

Walking my dog in nature. Everyday! Even when it is -30C (15 minutes is all I can stand).

Joyce's dog, Nova

If you could travel anywhere in the world, where would you go and why?

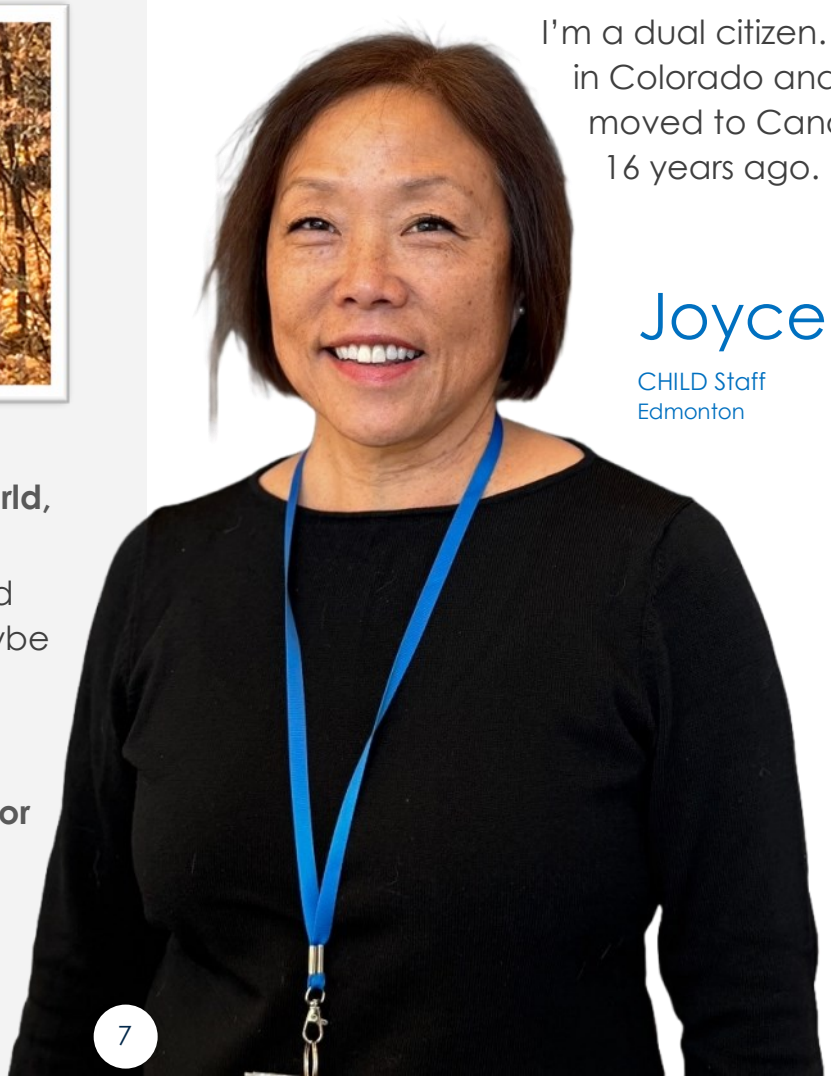
New Zealand. Lord of the Rings. Milford Trail. But it is a long way to go. Or maybe a less populated Greek island to go swimming in the blue sea.

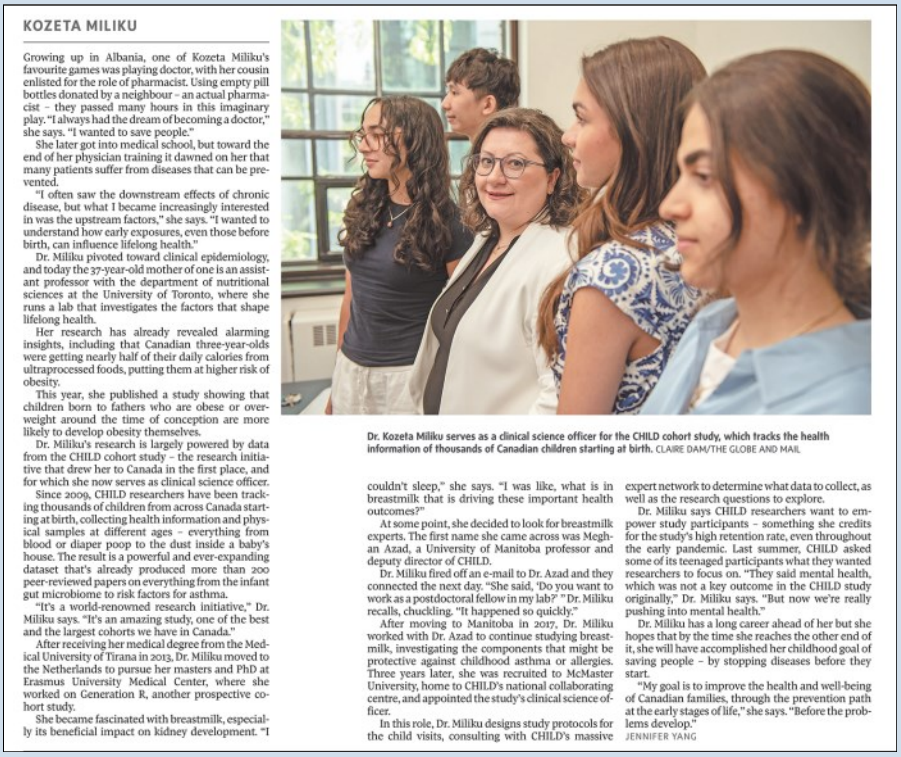
If you could swap lives with anybody for a day, who would it be and why?

Anthony Bourdain in his early days before Instagram, discovering new foods and travelling. I love food!

What is something about you that not many people know?

I'm a dual citizen. Born in Colorado and moved to Canada 16 years ago.





KOZETA MILIKU

Growing up in Albania, one of Kozeta Miliku's favourite games was playing doctor, with her cousin enlisted for the role of pharmacist. Using empty pill bottles donated by a neighbour – an actual pharmacist – they passed many hours in this imaginary play. "I always had the dream of becoming a doctor," she says. "I wanted to save people."

She later got into medical school, but toward the end of her physician training it dawned on her that many patients suffer from diseases that can be prevented.

"I often saw the downstream effects of chronic disease, but what I became increasingly interested in was the upstream factors," she says. "I wanted to understand how early exposures, even those before birth, can influence lifelong health."

Dr. Miliku pivoted toward clinical epidemiology, and today the 37-year-old mother of one is an assistant professor with the department of nutritional sciences at the University of Toronto, where she runs a lab that investigates the factors that shape lifelong health.

Her research has already revealed alarming insights, including that Canadian three-year-olds were getting nearly half of their daily calories from ultraprocessed foods, putting them at higher risk of obesity.

This year, she published a study showing that children born to fathers who are obese or overweight around the time of conception are more likely to develop obesity themselves.

Dr. Miliku's research is largely powered by data from the CHILD cohort study – the research initiative that drew her to Canada in the first place, and for which she now serves as clinical science officer.

Since 2009, CHILD researchers have been tracking thousands of children from across Canada starting at birth, collecting health information and physical samples at different ages – everything from blood or diaper poop to the dust inside a baby's house. The result is a powerful and ever-expanding dataset that's already produced more than 200 peer-reviewed papers on everything from the infant gut microbiome to risk factors for asthma.

"It's a world-renowned research initiative," Dr. Miliku says. "It's an amazing study, one of the best and the largest cohorts we have in Canada."

After receiving her medical degree from the Medical University of Tirana in 2013, Dr. Miliku moved to the Netherlands to pursue her masters and PhD at Erasmus University Medical Center, where she worked on Generation R, another prospective cohort study.

She became fascinated with breastmilk, especially its beneficial impact on kidney development. "I couldn't sleep," she says. "I was like, what is in breastmilk that is driving these important health outcomes?"

At some point, she decided to look for breastmilk experts. The first name she came across was Meghan Azad, a University of Manitoba professor and deputy director of CHILD.

Dr. Miliku fired off an e-mail to Dr. Azad and they connected the next day. "She said, 'Do you want to work as a postdoctoral fellow in my lab?' " Dr. Miliku recalls, chuckling. "It happened so quickly."

After moving to Manitoba in 2017, Dr. Miliku worked with Dr. Azad to continue studying breastmilk, investigating the components that might be protective against childhood asthma or allergies. Three years later, she was recruited to McMaster University, home to CHILD's national collaborating centre, and appointed the study's clinical science officer.

In this role, Dr. Miliku designs study protocols for the child visits, consulting with CHILD's massive expert network to determine what data to collect, as well as the research questions to explore.

Dr. Miliku says CHILD researchers want to empower study participants – something she credits for the study's high retention rate, even throughout the early pandemic. Last summer, CHILD asked some of its teenaged participants what they wanted researchers to focus on. "They said mental health, which was not a key outcome in the CHILD study originally," Dr. Miliku says. "But now we're really pushing into mental health."

Dr. Miliku has a long career ahead of her but she hopes that by the time she reaches the other end of it, she will have accomplished her childhood goal of saving people – by stopping diseases before they start.

"My goal is to improve the health and well-being of Canadian families, through the prevention path at the early stages of life," she says. "Before the problems develop."

JENNIFER YANG

Dr. Kozeta Miliku serves as a clinical science officer for the CHILD cohort study, which tracks the health information of thousands of Canadian children starting at birth. CLAIRE DAM/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Read more (click on the image).

OUTSTANDING

CHILD researcher celebrated in national newspaper

CHILD researcher and Clinical Science Officer Dr. **Kozeta Miliku** was profiled by *The Globe and Mail* on 30 June 2025 as one of five outstanding Canadian early-career researchers who are "making mighty advances in health, science and medicine."

CHILD features prominently in the profile, thanks to Dr. Miliku's appreciation of it as a "world-renowned research initiative… an amazing study, one of the best and the largest cohorts we have in Canada."

Questions?

If you – as a CHILD youth or parent – have anything more you'd like to know about the Study, its researchers or the science involved, please send us your questions.

We will take your questions to CHILD researchers and include their answers in future newsletters.

Ask away!

child@mcmaster.ca

Subject line: "Ask CHILD"