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For immediate release

Media release: Christchurch audiology doctor up for international health leadership award

Christchurch audiologist Dr Jeanine Doherty is in the running for a global Special Olympics Golisano Health Leadership Award, for the Asia-Pacific region. This award would recognise her work with people with intellectual disabilities through Special Olympics New Zealand and internationally.

Dr Doherty is up for the award after being presented with the inaugural Special Olympics New Zealand Health Leadership Award on Saturday by Labour MP for Port Hills Hon Ruth Dyson. The New Zealand award recognises local health champions and their voluntary efforts towards fulfilling the goals, values and missions of the Golisano Foundation.

The Foundation was created by Philanthropist Tom Golisano and is based in the USA. It funds many health initiatives and has a relationship with Special Olympics International. Both organisations are committed to fostering inclusive health and wellbeing opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities, who typically have poorer health outcomes than the general population.

Special Olympics New Zealand Chief Executive Carolyn Young said the Award is a well-deserved acknowledgement of Dr Doherty's commitment and dedication to the health of Special Olympics athletes.

"It's an honour to be able to recognise Jeanine's contribution, and to put her forward for consideration at the international level," Carolyn says.

"Dr Doherty has been involved with the provision of "Healthy Hearing" audiology screening for Special Olympics athletes since the programme began in New Zealand in 2005. She trained as a Clinical Director at the Special Olympics World Summer Games in Shanghai in 2007 and became Asia Pacific's first Regional Clinical Advisor in 2012. She also became athlete health representative Board Trustee for Special Olympics New Zealand in 2015, so her contribution is significant."

In 2008 Jeanine sustained a head injury and believes that experience has made her a better clinician for the athletes, as she has experienced to a small, though temporary, degree the difficulties of sensory overload and some of the cognition challenges that can be common for people with intellectual disabilities. She now happily spends some of her annual leave volunteering at "Healthy Hearing" events overseas and also training new clinician volunteers in the Asia-Pacific region.

"There is a lot of work yet to do in education of the athletes, their families, carers, and organisations in the health and social sector about the health needs of Special Olympics athletes and others with intellectual disabilities," Jeanine says.

"Through my work I hope to encourage Audiology students and my peer clinicians to better consider the needs of their patients who live with an intellectual disability."

Special Olympics New Zealand

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Created by the Joseph P. Kennedy Jr. Foundation. Authorised and accredited by Special Olympics, Inc for the benefit of persons with intellectual disabilities.

The winner of the Golisano Health Leadership Award for the Asia-Pacific region and the six other world regions will be presented at Special Olympics' World Summer Games in Abu Dhabi in March 2019.

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About Special Olympics New Zealand

Special Olympics New Zealand is a year-round programme of sports training and competition for children and adults with intellectual disabilities. More than 7000 athletes throughout the country train and compete in 13 different Olympic-type summer and winter sports.

Special Olympics New Zealand offers athletes leadership development through its Athlete Leadership Programme, and encourages social inclusion through Unified Sports[®], where intellectually disabled athletes are combined in teams with unified partners (without intellectual disabilities).

Special Olympics New Zealand also offers health screening via the Healthy Athletes[®] programme. People with intellectual disabilities typically have poorer health status than the general public. Special Olympics New Zealand works to promote the health and wellbeing of Special Olympics athletes. There is a focus not just on detection of health issues but also on health promotion, health education, and the forming of partnerships that can provide our athletes with improved access to follow-up and healthcare.

Founded in 1968 by Eunice Kennedy Shriver, Special Olympics provides athletes continuing opportunities to develop fitness, demonstrate courage and experience joy as they participate in the sharing of gifts and friendship with other athletes, their families and the community.

Special Olympics New Zealand: www.specialolympics.org.nz

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