Building Better Futures: Advancing Child Mental Health in Primary Care

Emerging Minds.

National Workforce Centre for Child Mental Health

Acknowledgement of Country

We recognise the land on which we meet today and pay respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, their ancestors, the elders past, present and future from the different First Nations across this Country.

We acknowledge the importance of connection to land, culture, spirituality, ancestry, family and community for the wellbeing of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families.

Speakers

Dr Michael Fasher

Clinical Director, Western Sydney PHN

Ania Mazurkiewicz

Senior Child Mental Health Advisor, Emerging Minds

About Emerging Minds

- Leads the National Workforce Centre for Child Mental Health
- Funded by the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing
- Supports workforces to have knowledge, skills and resources to support children (0-12) and families
- Assists organisations to implement activities that strengthen support for child mental health
- Provide advice to government on workforce responses

PHN Leadership Series

- Assist PHNs to consider actions/ activities to strengthen child mental health outcomes and share examples of best practice

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Forum overview

This interview-style session will explore:

- The vital importance of early intervention in child mental health
- How PHNs can proactively support child wellbeing through commissioning and strategic partnerships
- The innovative initiatives led by Western Sydney PHN
- How recent policies and guidelines can support actionable improvements to support children and families

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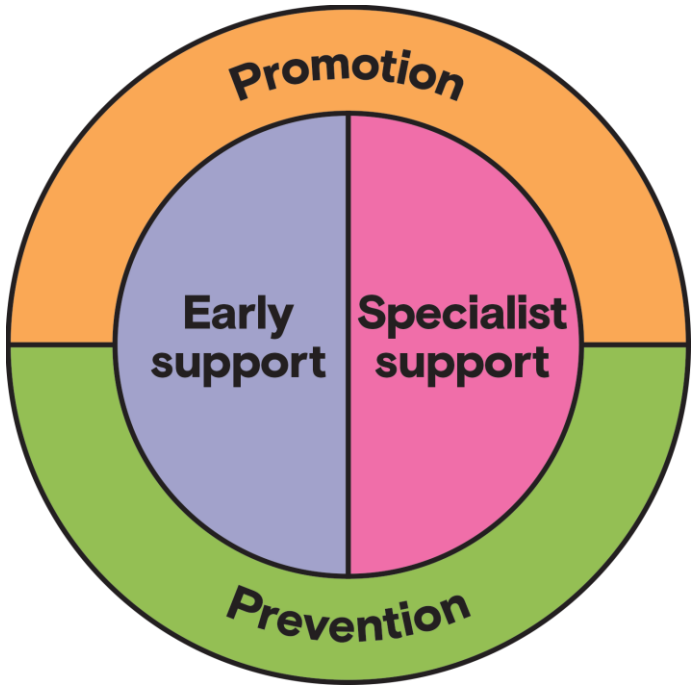
A Comprehensive Infant and Child Mental Health System

A framework for actioning change



Overarching Goal

- Create a system of care for infants and children in which families have access to quality information and are offered preventative, early intervention and specialist support that meets their needs
- Delivered by practitioners who feel confident, knowledgeable and skilled to support families across the continuum of mental health
- Working within organisations who provide an authorising environment for such work and are committed to supporting best outcomes for infants and children

An effective approach requires a comprehensive and coordinated effort among all of the systems and sectors that impact children and their environments

What does a positive child mental health look like?

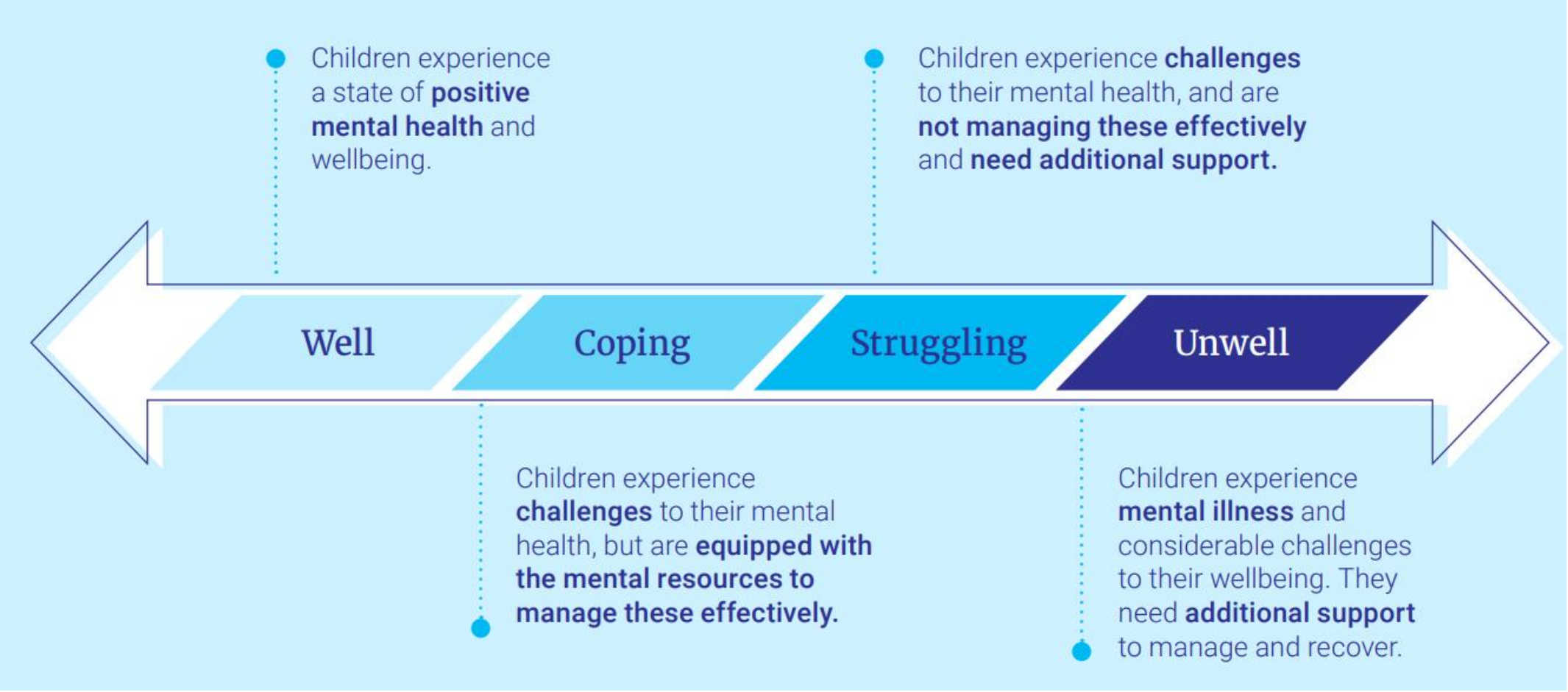
An infant or child who:

- **Plays** and **engages with the world** around them
- Can learn to **express their feelings and needs**
- Who **achieves milestones**
- Is **curious**
- Who **can make meaning of his or her world**
- Who has **emotions large or small**

Supporting mental health in early childhood means supporting outcomes across the lifespan

Continuum of child mental health

The optimal system does not wait until a child is experiencing a mental illness before providing supports, but is prevention focused, promoting the wellbeing of all children from birth



Correlation between early childhood challenges and outcomes across the lifespan

- Dissatisfaction with adult life
- 14+ days of work/activity disturbed because of mental health issues
- Anxiety in adult life
- Mental health treatment
- Hopelessness in adult life
- Separation/Divorce
- Cardiovascular disease
- Cancer
- Central adiposity

Magnitude of the solution

ACE reduction reliably predicts simultaneous decrease in all of these conditions.

Population attributable risk

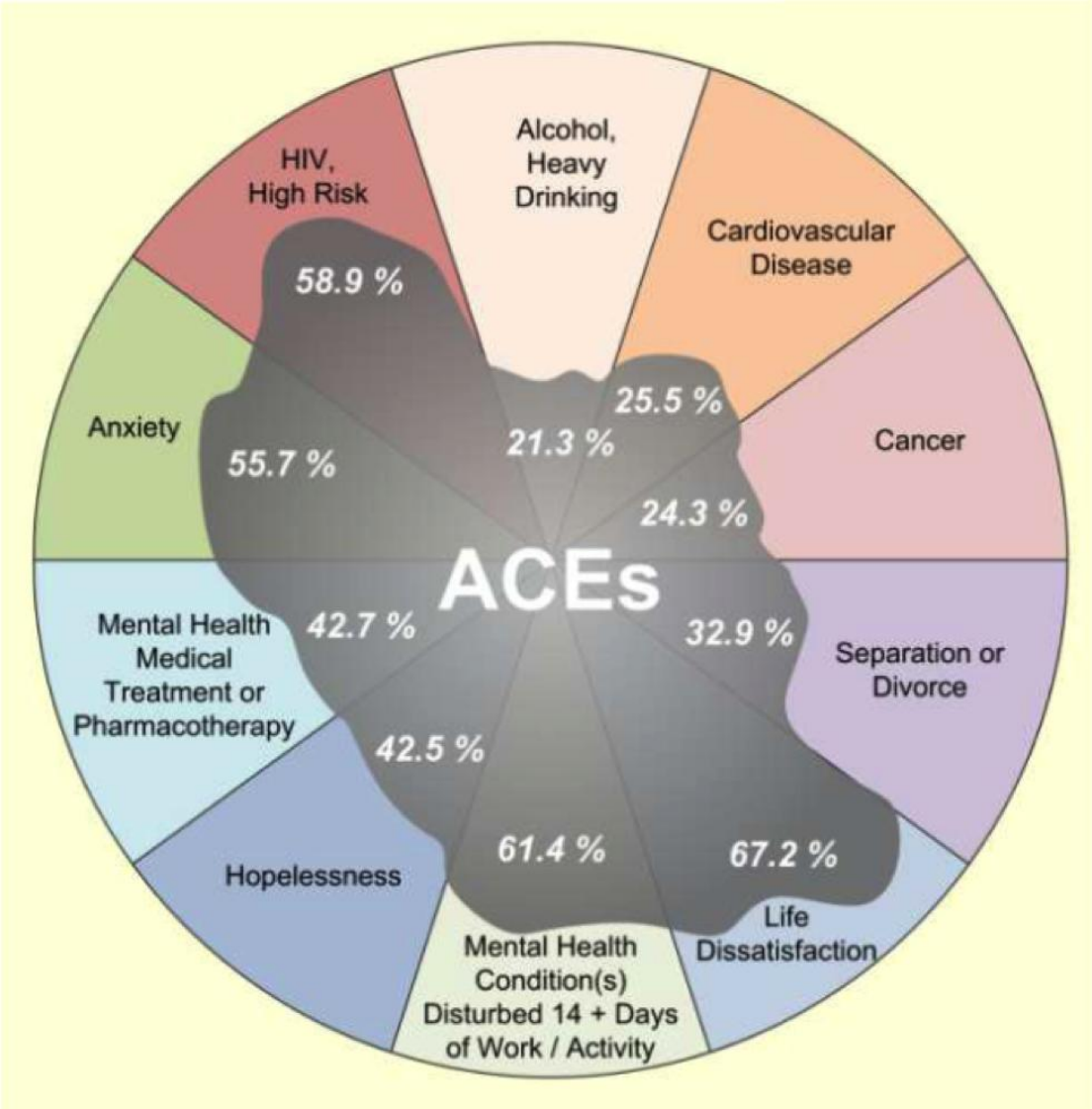
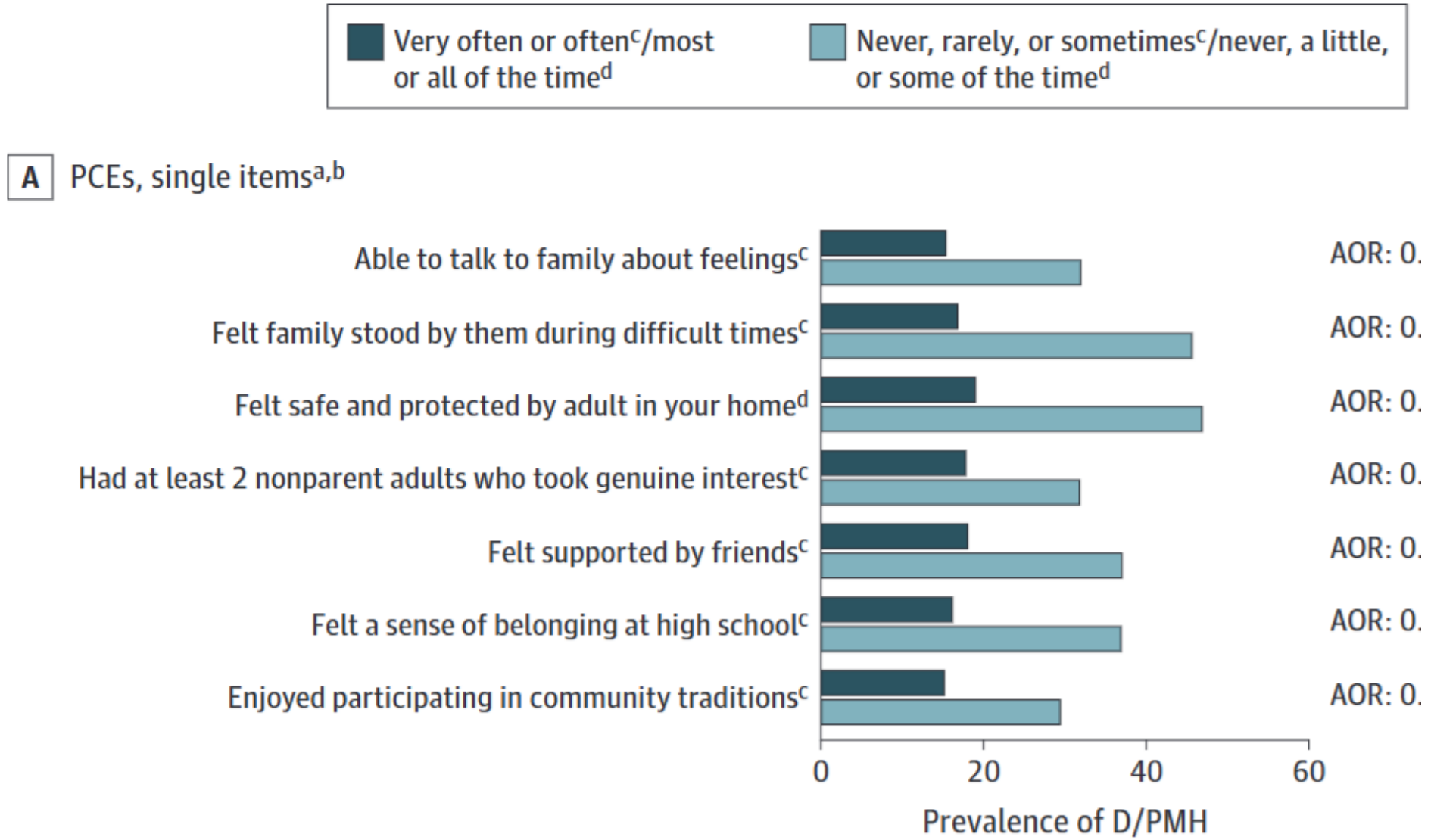


Figure 1. Prevalence of Depression and/or Poor Mental Health Among Adults by Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs) Single Items and Cumulative Scores



Bethell, C., Jones, J., Gombojav, N., Linkenbach, J., & Sege, R. (2019). Positive childhood experiences and adult mental and relational health in a statewide sample: Associations across adverse childhood experiences levels. JAMA pediatrics, 173(11)

GP in comparison with other providers

Provider	0-1 yo%	2-3 yo%	4-5 yo%	6-7yo%	8-9 yo%	14-15 yo%
MCH phone	55.8	----	15.7	----	----	----
MCHN	65.8	31.7	12	-----	----	----
Paediatrician	37.2	12.5	8.1	8.4	8	6.1
ED	21.5	29	19.3	14.8	15.1	16.9
OPD	9.7	10.7	6.4	7	5.9	8
GP	80.5	86	75.8	74.6	65.8	64.1

Family Story

Family Background

- Single Mother caring for 7 children
- Originally from Sudan, arriving in Australia in early 2000s, with a background of traumatic experiences. Mum has minimal command of English.
- Separated from partner following a DV altercation and was hospitalised for psychosis in 2021.
- Mum has schizophrenia and bipolar affective disorder – on medication but only sees GP
- Children were in the care of the father due to Mum's mental health needs.

- **Referrer-WSLHD Integrated and community health – Paediatrican**
- Concerns / needs =
- Mum is 4 months pregnant
- Navigating NDIS for 2 children
- Childcare for youngest
- Mental health support
- **Referrer No 2 = DCJ caseworker**
- Concerns:
- Paediatric assessment for children
- Enrolment in school & daycare
- Parenting support for Dad
- Stable housing for family
- Linking in with community.

Family Story

Goals developed with family

- Child assessment & review
- Seek Educational options
- NDIS access request
- Service collaboration
- Increase family supports

Over the 2 years the family circumstance changed dramatically. KEYS has been able to stay with family so they did not have to tell their story multiple times. With the background support of KEYS, Mum's overall capacity has increased and she has and built trust in systems in Australia.

Outcomes

- Mum engaging with services (Centrelink, Homes)
- Enrolled in English lessons
- Connected with community (Catholic Church)
- Navigated cultural fears and youth gang concerns
- Advocated for children's education and support classes
- Coordinated allied health supports for 2 children
- Accessed food support via Flourish
- Stabilized mental health with regular medication
- Attending medical appointments for herself and children
- Built trust in Australian systems with KEYS support

Changing environment

National Policy & Guidelines

- Early Years Strategy 2024–2034
- National Guidelines for Mental Health in Early Childhood Health Checks
- Strengthening Primary Health Care Response to Sexual Violence

National Programs

- Solid Foundations
- Thriving Kids
- MyMedicare

Some of the things we heard from PHNs from the last forum

What are some activities your PHN can undertake to strengthen CMH?

- *Capacity building for commissioned services*
- *Support providers who can provide additional supports*
- *Working with PHN GP practice support teams*
- *Communities of Practice/Interest*
- *Embed family and practitioner resources into mental health service directories*
- *Internal education and awareness raising*
- *Develop child & family policy to counter the current focus on adults & reach families rural/remote locations*

How we can work with you in 2026

- Regional **child mental health literacy campaigns**
- Service **mapping** and **quality improvement tools**
- Collaborate to **strengthen the capacity of the primary health care workforce to support child mental health**
- Working together to **support/ strengthen the capacity of commissioned service providers**

Supporting commissioned services

Partner with interested PHNs to support commissioned services to:

- meaningfully engage with workforce development activities
- increase the capacity and confidence of commissioned services to play and active role in supporting child mental health

What we can offer:

- A customized strategy that will help the services to engage with relevant resources
- Support around planning organizational support activities to help commissioned services and the workforce to implement change

What we seeking:

- Your input around the strategy and the content
- Collaboration on implementation of the strategy

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The optimal primary care system does not wait until a child is experiencing a mental illness before providing supports, but is prevention focused, promoting the wellbeing of all children from birth.

National Children’s Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy

Thank you

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