



Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth
Working together to enhance the wellbeing and life chances of children and young people.

ARACY submission to the Australian Government's Australia 2020 Summit

National health strategy must start with children

THE PROBLEM

While Australia is an increasingly wealthy country, the gap between wealthy and poor is expanding, leading to social exclusion and increasing problems of mental health, alcohol and drug abuse and general disengagement.

While many of the key indicators of child health and wellbeing are improving, there are rising rates of childhood mental health and socio-behavioral issues, chronic complex diseases such as diabetes is on the increase, and childhood obesity and physical inactivity are increasing. There is no improvement in the rates of prematurity and low birth weight. Many experts now predict that this generation could have a lower life expectancy than their parents.

THE CAUSES

Biological, social, family, community, and economic influences during childhood impact on children's physical and brain development and therefore have a profound impact on children's capacity to become healthy and productive contributors to society. While the pathways to social exclusion and chronic health issues begin in childhood, most resources are focused at the crisis end, with less concern for preventative or early intervention strategies.

THE SOLUTION

Many of the key factors affecting the population's health outcomes are outside the health sector. Tackling the root causes of many of the most prevalent health issues requires new ways of working.

The Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) is advancing collaboration and evidence-based action to improve the wellbeing of children and young people (www.aracy.org.au). These innovative collaborations often involve researchers, policymakers and practitioners across jurisdictions, enabling best evidence to be applied in areas such as health, education, workforce planning, environment and planning for the creation of child friendly communities that enhance child health and wellbeing.

This bio-psycho-social model, which acknowledges multiple interacting influences on the growing child, supports a multi-systems approach to:

- ensuring healthy young families, by improving care during pregnancy and the postnatal period, promotion of health behaviours, early recognition of children at risk, and effective early intervention;
- securing early learning and care, by increasing access to quality early learning and care services, successful transitions to school and early identification and intervention of children at risk;
- supporting families and parents, by improving access to family support services, such as parenting education programs; assistance to achieve a better work/family balance; improved access to quality parenting information; development of neighbourhood/social supports; and
- creating child-friendly communities, by fostering flexible and responsive services at the local level, creating better links and coordination among community services, reducing levels of family violence, community provision of children's activity, play and learning opportunities.

TAKING ACTION

ARACY urges delegates to:

- call for children and youth wellbeing to be top of the national agenda
- ensure that prevention strategies commence at the earliest age, where maximum gains are possible
- consider the impact of their recommendations on children and young people
- call for the Government to monitor how outcomes from the 2020 Summit affect children and young people
- support the work of ARACY by calling on Government to fund new action collaborations aimed at tackling the big issues of child poverty, child abuse and neglect and child health.

Canberra, April 2008

Available online:

http://www.aracy.org.au/AM/Common/pdf/ARACY_Health_2020.pdf