December 2013

The Nest: summary of survey findings

Introduction

The Nest survey sought the in-principle support of participants for The Nest action agenda. It also asked for feedback about the action agenda as a whole, and specific elements including the framing, the operational principles and the strategies.

There were 300 respondents to the survey and 245 provided details (name/organisation). The geographical profile of these respondents broadly reflected the national population profile with the majority of responses coming from New South Wales and Victoria, and the smallest number of responses from the Australian Capital Territory, Tasmania and the Northern Territory. Around three-quarters of respondents (73.3%) were ARACY members (based on 232 responses).

The vast majority (91.6%) of the 300 respondents provided their in-principle support for The Nest action agenda. Several respondents stated they were unable to provide their support without the endorsement/authority of higher management in their organisations.

Overall feedback

Respondents were asked to rate how well they believed the action agenda achieved its aim of detailing the actions required to ‘turn the curve’ on the wellbeing of children and youth in Australia. Of the 243 respondents who answered this question, the majority (77.4%) believed the agenda achieved its aim well (53.5%) or very well (23.9%). The average rating from respondents to this question was 3.84 (on a scale from 0-5).

Themes and comments below:
Positive feedback:

‘The agenda is clearly articulated and written in accessible language.’

‘I believe the summary reflects all of the input from the consultations and from the Summit that I attended.’

‘Covers key areas of children’s lives where we need to continue to focus attention and resources.’

‘Comprehensive overview of domains and objectives.’

‘This is a long overdue comprehensive, ready-made, whole-of-government agenda for improving child and youth wellbeing, and is ready now for political leadership.’

Suggestions for change:

Respondents suggested a range of suggestions for change, including some changes to the overall emphasis of the agenda, specific suggestions for amendments / new points for inclusion. Breastfeeding was identified as a gap by several respondents.

Comments about the challenges of implementation:

‘It reads very well, not sure how it will be possible to get it happening.’

‘It is a big agenda that will need to be well resourced.’

‘Given the importance of the strategy making strategies small and achievable may be more important than making larger, probably less achievable goals.’

Framing of the action agenda

The action agenda focuses on how Australia is faring, compared to other OECD countries, on indicators of child and youth wellbeing. It suggests we could be doing much better than we are and improvements are needed for children’s sake, but also to support Australia’s productivity.

Eighty-eight per cent of respondents thought the action agenda was framed well (58%) or very well (30%) (based on 243 responses); and the average rating for this question was 4.14.

Themes and comments below:
Support for the overall framing:

‘Focusing on how the health of children and young people is integral to the future wellbeing of the country is essential and this document covers this aspect well.’

‘I think it is essential that this is linked with Australia's future which is through our children as well as productivity.’

While there was recognition the productivity argument was likely to be influential, many respondents stressed making improvements for children’s sake was of critical importance:

‘I just want to make sure we have done our utmost in this country to ensure that every child is safe and well. I do understand that the economic argument is likely to be influential at the policy maker level, and so I understand why you given emphasis to this up front.’

‘Again the focus needs to be on child wellbeing and productivity and the economy is an outcome not the driving factor.’

‘The argument is well made with, perhaps just for my liking, a little too much emphasis on the productivity aspects. However, this is the argument that politicians and policy makers will listen to so I can see the reason for its central position.’

‘Rights plus productivity = maximum chance of long term bi partisan political support.’

Support for the use of OECD comparisons:

‘Outlining the GDP benefits and providing the comparisons with other OECD countries is an important step in gaining broader support for nation-wide change.’

‘It is important to set targets and comparison to other OECD countries is good as gives a broader context.’

However, respondents also noted there were some limitations to the use of OECD measures:

‘Tying the outcomes to OECD rankings is clear but limited as it only shows relative not absolute change.’

‘Some of the OECD indicators require unpacking for them to be fully contextualised. Australia's ranking on these indicators also needs unpacking.’

‘While I support measuring or framing against Australia's international rankings I would prioritise reducing inequities internally even if initially that meant a lack of progress against some other OECD indicators.’
The operational principles

There was a very high level of support for the operational principles. 92.6% of respondents agreed these would assist (34.6%) or greatly assist (58%) in collective efforts to improve child and youth wellbeing (based on 243 responses). The average rating for this question was 4.48.

Themes and comments below:
General support for the operational principles and endorsement of 'the child at the centre:

'These operational principles reflect evidence about what is needed while emphasising a strengths-based approach with close attention to the status and dignity of children as well as to their wellbeing.'

'There is an intuitive as well as clear research base behind these principles. This 'intuitive' sense cannot be the basis for action but it does have wide appeal and, if The Nest is about broad action, it will be attractive to many in the Australian community including business, politicians and bureaucrats.'

'The operational principles are all appropriate and complimentary - question whether principle four - a commitment to the child at the centre - should actually be principle one. It is the most important, over-arching principle, from which all else is drawn.'

The principles fit with existing practices and initiatives:

'These operational principles fit well with our current practice - long term, outcome-focussed, holistic case management for children and youth.'

'These match well with current Federal Government initiatives as an approach where all are moving in the same direction.'

Comments about the challenges of implementation – and the need for government involvement / collective action:

'These are great operating principles which have been advocated for decades with little success, especially that of collaboration and working smarter – hopefully ARACY can model them well so other organisations follow.’

'To enable the success of the operational principles there is a need for continued, ongoing, long-term commitment to funding NGOs (not short 12mth contracts/grants) and/or beefing up government agencies to deliver long-term programs so there is confidence that good practice continues and that communities (particularly in rural and remote regions) are strong.’

'Operationalising these principles will be a big job and should be the focus of the agenda's stakeholder engagement strategy.’

'Articulating underpinning principles is essential for collective action. These principles direct our attention towards what we seek to achieve and how we can mobilise to do this.’

Comments about defining evidence:

'What counts as evidence? We need to refer to both evidence based practice but also practice based evidence. Some excellent work does not have a university evaluation
attached to it - we should still be taking account of these initiatives where possible.’

The key strategies

Respondents were asked whether they thought the action agenda strategies would improve child and youth wellbeing. 85.6% said that they thought the strategies would improve wellbeing (58.7%) or greatly improve wellbeing (26.9%) (based on 242 responses). The average rating was 4.07.

Themes and comments:

General support for the strategies:

‘I think there's general agreement these strategies are sound and do-able.’

‘These are strong strategies, and are evidence based, and if implemented and funding available to do this will improve, or potentially greatly improve wellbeing.’

Some specific suggestions for changes in emphasis / content and greater clarity:

‘Suggested areas for greater emphasis / inclusion included: gender disparity; strategies for CALD communities (including refugees); the role of quality teaching and schools in improving educational outcomes; child and youth mental health; and the importance of spiritual wellbeing in child and youth wellbeing.’

Comments about the challenges of implementation:

‘These are of course broad ranging strategies that will go some way to dealing with the priorities. While I understand it is difficult in such a document to be specific, I do think that more detail is required if the strategies are to be evaluated for their effectiveness.’

‘The strategies reflect some good ideas and good thinking - and constitute quite an impressive plan. The key will obviously lie in the steps taken and mechanisms implemented to take the agenda forward. That is, the 'who and how'.

‘It is not clear who will take responsibility for implementing the strategies - arguably without a commitment from government to implement – the identification of strategies alone will not improve children's wellbeing.’

‘The key strategies will need political support and to be embraced across disciplines and services e.g. education, health, police etc.’