

23 January 2020

Dear Productivity Commission,

I am writing a final submission to override my previous submissions (some corrections were made), since reading the new information on your website. I am a health professional and have studied the Health Sciences in Public Health at QUT. I was an elite athlete and I have been working in Health, wellness, exercise and nutrition all my life. I am also a professional fitness instructor and have been a child school sports teacher as well as a trained counsellor for the last 25 years and I have to say this is the most alarming and deeply concerning Bill I have ever read. I completely disagree and object to the Government allowing the screening or checking of babies 0-3 year olds in Australia for "Emotional / Social Development" which really means "Mental Health". The "words" mean the same thing. Case in point, are the sections I have copied from the draft bill which is talking about checking / screening for Social and Emotional development in 0-3 year olds. Which is just different terms for mental health. As quoted by Professor Oberklaid on his website "Emerging Minds," states, "Child mental Health can also be referred to as the child's social and emotional wellbeing." which promotes mental health for infants and children and receives federal government funding - <https://emergingminds.com.au/our-work/what-is-child-mental-health/>

"Professor Oberklaid also stressed the need to get messages about children's emotional and social wellbeing right, and to find the right language in which to talk about these issues, rather than resorting to use of mental illness / mental health terminology." From the Dept of Health & Aging.

So when they say screening for emotional and social wellbeing has nothing to do with Mental Health / Mental Illness is not telling the truth and is misleading the Australian public, which is reprehensible. Once this screening takes place more often than not leads to referrals to a Psychiatrist or GP who then potentially prescribes psychotropic drugs (and often do). I have met numerous young children who have been affected adversely by these dangerous mind altering drugs and their parents have noted very damaging permanent side effects such as heart palpitations, stunted growth, speech impediments, delayed development, even stroke and death. I also have an aunty who is a highly respected long standing and practicing GP for the last 45 years in Tasmania who is in total disagreement of screening and or medicating babies and children.

Here quoted directly From the Draft Bill page 649 section 17:

“17 Interventions in early childhood and school education

but children and young people are far less likely to access treatment and support.

- Addressing risk factors and symptoms early is a cost-effective approach to improving children’s life-long outcomes.

- Educational institutions are already investing significant efforts in students’ wellbeing — and can achieve much more with improved leadership, training and resourcing.

- Many mental illnesses emerge in childhood and adolescence,

Interventions

in early childhood and school education matter because ...

Successful intervention requires ...

As a priority:

- Expanded social and emotional wellbeing aspects of routine health checks in pregnancy and early childhood. ”

Then again on page 650 of the draft bill is stated:

“Although they come in frequent contact with the health and education systems, children are less likely to receive a formal diagnosis and treatment within the mental healthcare system (Hiscock et al. 2019).

Most infants aged 0–3 years attend regular physical development checks offered by community health services. These checks often include some screening for mental health concerns of the primary care giver (usually the mother). But additional screening and support tools can be valuable in prevention of mental illness or early intervention where it is required.”

So right here in the bill they are talking about Mental illnesses (and I quote as above in red from the bill page 649 & 650 “many mental illnesses emerge in childhood and adolescence”) and the bill goes on to state early intervention is required in early childhood. Then you state that to do this you will screen for social and emotional wellbeing in early childhood. So you are screening for mental illnesses you clearly state this on page 649 as above in the Mental Health

Bill. Section 17. Using different semantics does not deflect from the fact that the screening is for mental health. I am a Health Professional (studied Health Science in Public Health At QUT) and have worked in the Health industry for the last 25 years. It is absurd to suggest a baby has mental health issues particularly when the brain hasn't even begun to develop and is not fully developed until the age of 25. Also to suggest that normal baby and toddler behaviours such as throwing tantrums, excessive crying, sleeping or feeding issues or losing their toy for goodness sake is so unprofessional I am appalled at the lack of scientific evidence or tests to back up any of this made up thrown together list of normal undeveloped (because they are a baby not an adult) behaviours.

EVERY baby and child would then be classified as having some "emotional / social wellbeing issues" as you "call it" but really mean mental Health / illness. My baby for example who now has been called by the School principle at Montessori Banksia in Perth, as a very gifted, intelligent child who is excelling in all respects, would have totally fallen into every one of these subjective classifications listed. For the first 2 years of her life she suffered from Colic and reflux and many other food intolerances / allergies and deficiencies we were not aware of at the time, from 0-2 years old. She exhibited every one of these traits including the separation anxiety. EVERY BABY /CHILD goes through all of these traits / attributes. It is called normal baby behaviour and is also part of development of the brain which hasn't even developed hardly at all between the ages of 0-3. How can they expect a baby to know everything and act like a rational adult is beyond ridiculous. Separation anxiety for example is a normal part of the babies development process, look in every baby / child resource book. Speak to any traditional long term paediatric nurse. So now they are saying a baby has no developmental milestones to reach and they just have to act like a perfect wind up doll and just be like clockwork and act like a robot. This is so crazy it is beyond belief that this is even being presented as something to be even considered. Also Diet plays a huge roll in a baby and Childs behaviour. We found out at the age of 2 our daughter actually had gluten intolerance and a dairy intolerance and other allergies to food. She was in pain most of her 0-2 years which no one can sleep or feed well when in some sort of pain. Babies cry and don't sleep or feed well for a physical reason... not because they have some mental disorder. Sometimes they also need lots of stimulation so reading/ singing to them, playing with them, taking them out for walks and space and engaging with them. More services should be provided and geared towards helping a mother care for all aspects of their baby / Childs needs. Not labelling and saying that she has post natal depression. There has been a large break down in the family unit in these modern times with families

living in other states or countries to their families so not as many get the help our predecessors did with grandparents to pass on their knowledge and help. This is what is lacking and this is what I personally encountered as a mother. Both my daughter and I have come through the challenging baby years but healthily and are both thriving without the use of labels and screening and drugs. Let mothers be mothers, let babies be babies or we are going to have a future generation full of dysfunctional people who always think that something is wrong with them. This is not healthy or rational at all. Kids need to exercise a lot, get outdoors, get fresh air and eat healthy without preservatives, food colouring and especially sugar and processed food.

From the Overview of the Draft bill on page 11 states "Early identification of risks in families and children"

Early identification of risks in children offers the greatest potential for improving health, social and economic outcomes. Young Australians with mental ill-health miss opportunities to develop the skills they need for long-term academic outcomes (figure 2) and post-school opportunities.

The existing physical development checks of Australia's 1.25 million 0 to 3 year olds in community health services can be expanded to incorporate social and emotional wellbeing

#### OVERVIEW 11 DRAFT REPORT

aspects of development, so that any necessary assistance can be provided to both the child and parents/carers.

Again I rest my case. Above again mentioned Emotional / Social development is stated here that it is all geared towards the screening of Mental Health. Anyone reading it can easily see that you are stating the same thing, they mean the same thing Emotional / Social = Mental Health. It is clearly stated in all the above quoted sections.

It is very disturbing and concerning to say the least and this section of the bill (checking /screening of 0-3 year olds for Emotional / Social Development) needs to be removed and abolished like it was back in 2014 with the Healthy Kids Check. It is even more concerning that the Government would even consider such unscientific and subjective proposals on screening babies / toddlers for mental health and didn't just throw this out and protect all

Australian babies and children (our Future). This will benefit no one and will cost us the tax payers, billions of dollars. Like it has already been stated in this draft bill, billions of dollars have already been wasted to no good statistical outcomes, no improvement only worsening statistics. Isn't that evidence enough, that the Mental Health Department do not have the answers or practical solutions if more people are being medicated and more are committing suicide and homicide on these drugs (hence the black box warnings worldwide) The Government needs to stop this from passing to protect the innocent babies and toddlers who would be permanently damaged by such proposals especially when there are actually to date still no scientific evidence or tests or any physical / medical test (X-ray, blood test, etc) that can even prove someone (adult or child) has a mental illness or disorder, let alone a baby! Please for the sake of every baby and young toddler in Australia it is safer to err on the side of caution especially when you are dealing in areas that can permanently damage their brain and therefore their entire future.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours Sincerely,

Rebecca Sferco

Perth Australia