

Submission - Productivity Commission inquiry into Mental Health – 22 January 20 20

Dear Commissioners

I am writing to express concern at the proposal to introduce health checks for social and emotional development in 0-3 year olds. It is being proposed by an inquiry into mental health; logically the ultimate purpose of such tests must be to introduce children of sufficient 'need' into the mental health (psychiatric) system

Everything about this idea bothers me – it seems so unnecessary and so unproductive – any good it could do is already being done. So it seems a poor use of taxpayer funds, it seems based on turning normal childhood characteristics into alleged symptoms of lack of social development or illness – again this is already catered for in our medical systems. Lastly it seems like an unwarranted intrusion into the lives of families.

I am a grandfather with a grandchild in this age group. He is actually getting some good developmental assistance in the current system – I am horrified at the idea of him or any child so young potentially receiving psychiatric treatment – likely to be psychotropic drugs – based on no objective clinical tests to validate such treatment.

My specific concerns regarding health checks that cover psychosocial development of 0-3 year olds are:

- It will be subjective in nature and likely occurring too early in the child's development to be useful or valid.
- It introduces a broad checking process that seems unneeded. We have a good health system, there are doctors, mental health nurses and baby health clinics already looking after babies, toddlers and children and very much aware of social and emotional issues and providing the very care you seem to envisage ie this is just adding more unneeded bureaucracy, cost and paperwork.
- It effectively reintroduces the controversial earlier "Healthy Kids Check" that was expanded in 2012 to include checking for psychosocial and development issues and this was then ceased in 2015 due to public and professional concerns.
- It may take away from first looking for a physical universe reason or condition causing social and emotional issues – after all children are generally responding to issues they have with their bodies and their environments.
- Will inevitably raise issues based on the criteria likely to be used, worried parents will be seeking the best help they can get for their child - ie the subjective checking process could easily become a way of unnecessarily feeding children into the psychiatric system - regardless of what the PC intends to occur.
- ANY subsequent assessment of a mental condition is NOT verified by any objective (medical) tests – hence this health check will at best lead to a subjective estimate of why a child is demonstrating certain behaviours.
- the proposed health check will likely use criteria like: Irregular feeding, difficulty sleeping, whining, crying, temper tantrums, shyness, sleeping with the light on and hyperactivity.

THESE ARE SUSPECT INDICATORS OF DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS

As a parent I find these are all part of normal childhood experiences as children grapple with, their bodies (medical), their world and the struggle to become themselves – often with parents who continually overwhelm the child's self-determinism!

- Because the health check questions are subjective, any child could be labelled as deficient and ultimately recommended for psychiatric drugs – thousands already have been so treated!

More general concerns

- The draft report states, "Despite the rising expenditure on healthcare, there has been no clear indication that the mental health of the population has improved."
- When I was young mental illness was almost unheard of – now we spend billions on it and we are continually told more money is needed – what is going on?
- The draft report seeks yet more funding and expanded programs – but if psychiatric treatments were working there should be a reduction in the problem - as happens in the field of medicine when workable therapies emerge!
- I would like the Commission to consider why this is and to propose a path forward that does NOT spend more money on what appears to be a failing approach.
 - Helping the mentally ill may involve finding ways to help them improve and cope with the situation they find themselves in.
- Where is Australia now? We have one of the highest rates of antidepressant use in the world with nearly 1 in 10 Australians taking them.
 - I have taken antidepressants – they didn't work!
 - I only felt drugged and wooden
 - Once I realised they didn't work I couldn't wait to get off them
 - I found getting well required ME to change and help myself
 - I did this by getting counselling and reframing my life
- Conflicts of interest between psychiatrists, mental health support groups and pharmaceutical companies have not been examined for their potential role in the rising costs of mental health.
- The Draft Report does not seem to have investigated:
 - the side effects of psychiatric drugs and deaths linked to antidepressants and antipsychotics
 - the use of restraints or other invasive procedures,
- Use of electroshock – which can cause brain damage, permanent memory loss, cardiovascular complications, and death

Summary

I am dissatisfied with the Draft Report because of:

- The proposed reintroduction of 0-3yo health check process
- The lack of an effective examination as to why the current system is failing
- The apparent solution to lack of progress on mental health issues being
 - More and expanded use of the same approach
 - More taxpayer funding
- If the Draft Report is implemented in current form then I fully expect that
 - In 5-10 years we will have another review

- That review will find “Despite the rising expenditure on healthcare, there has been no clear indication that the mental health of the population has improved.”
- The review will propose:
 - More funding
 - An expanding of current programs
 - More intrusion into people’s lives and likely more impact on their human rights

Thank you for considering the issues I have raised and I hope they can be addressed in your current review in a manner that will make your enquiry of greater value to all Australians

Yours Sincerely,

Paul Raftery JP