

Submission to the Productivity Commission

Enquiry into Mental Health

Regarding Section 17.1 - Mental health and wellbeing in the first three years of life

First, a bit about me.

My name is Mitchell Wright, I have a 4 year old daughter, with plans of a second on the way.

I have worked in a family business recycling bricks in Canberra, to be reused in heritage renovations, bars, cafes, etc.

I studied and worked as a counsellor in my local church, and the US, for 4 years.

I strongly believe mental, emotional and social wellbeing and health is a VITAL aspect of a society and/or culture, and it is great to see the acceptance and openness with which the government, other organisations, and people at large are approaching these topics now. The old days of “suck it up buttercup”, being a “man” and just “trucking on” had their place in a time where the environment would kill us if we sat around trying to understand the nature of our feelings, instead of building a wall and roof, farming our food no matter the weather. We, as a civilised nation have conquered the world in which we live, and must begin to understand ourselves, and others more.

My hope in making this Submission is that the language, terms, and final implementation of Section 17.1 is made MUCH more specific and clear as to it’s actual purpose, and final goal.

In reading through some of this section, I understand by incorporating “social and emotional wellbeing checks”, you will be looking for risk factors, indications of ill-informed parenting, and collecting data to better implement education to parents and carers. The hope being to reduce children developing “mental illness” later in life.

My main worry comes from the “Start Later” section where it states “Monitor and report on progress toward universal screening”. By Screening infants for mental illness, you would be suggesting that you are looking for “mental health disorders” - a developing subject which is scarcely understood, and much debated, especially in the area of infants and children. There are already examples of organisations attempting to use psychotropic medications to “fix” infants, infants who have barely had the chance to discuss, come to terms with, and reconcile any feelings they may have in regards to their social and emotional wellbeing. Artificially interfering with the mind at such an early age has been proven to be harmful and very risky.

I understand that this Enquiry does not directly state that these Social and emotional checks are suggesting this is done; but by leaving the language vague enough as to allow these checks to possibly evolve into screening and potential diagnosis of “mental disorders” in infants(which many would say do not exist), psychotropic drugging of infants by uninformed parents and/or under-trained professionals is much more possible, and that is not a mistake we can allow to happen. The term “social and emotional wellbeing/health” is being used in modern studies to mean “mental health”, so the chosen wording does lend itself very easily to becoming a “mental illness check” for 0-3 year olds. This wording should be reconsidered if this is not the goal; and I hope it is not.

My request is to have this section removed, and any attempt into understanding Infant social and emotional wellbeing be a part of it's own proposal, in order to focus much more specifically on EXACTLY how this will be carried out, and will have to be monitored extremely closely as to ensure no potentially risky treatment could be used on our children.

Thankyou for reading my submission. This has been my first submission of this kind, and my first formal letter written in quite a number of years, so I apologise for any poor formatting. I hope to get much better as I follow this Enquiry, and any others like it as the "growing industry" of mental health, and the overuse of chemical treatments is something I am very passionate about. Any program that may bring the chemical side of this industry to children and infants in general is something I will fight to ensure it is scrutinised to ensure no mistreatment or injustice could occur.

Counselling is the only way to really resolve any "mental disorders", and when this is given as much attention and funding from governments/private organisations my cynicism regarding mental health treatments will subside.

Regards,

Mitchell Wright
Canberra