



The Hon Julia Gillard AC  
Royal Commissioner  
Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care  
GPO Box 11025  
Adelaide SA 5001

Dear Commissioner Gillard AC

### **Submission to the South Australian Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care**

The National Child and Family Hubs Network (the Network) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the South Australian Government's Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care. The Network's submission addresses the first area of inquiry, that is:

1. *The extent to which South Australian families are supported in the first 1000 days of a child's life, focused on opportunities to further leverage early childhood education and care to enable equitable and improved outcomes for South Australian children.*

### **Who we are - the National Child and Family Hubs Network**

The National Child and Family Hubs Network (the Network) is a multidisciplinary group established in 2021 that brings together Australian Universities, research centres, medical research institutes, non-government community-based organisations, Commonwealth and State government departments. The Network's members are actively involved in conducting research, training, communication, and advocacy related to innovative (and sustainable) integrated Child and Family Hubs, to support the health and wellbeing of children and families. In addition, the philanthropic sector is a key stakeholder in the early years space and a Network partner with a critical role to play shaping investment in child and family initiatives.

An integrated Child and Family Hub provides a 'one stop shop', where families can access a range of supports that improve child development as well as child and family health and wellbeing. Integrated Child and Family Hubs have two critical roles:

- improving access to a range of health, education, and social services using a family centred approach; and
- providing opportunities to build parental capacity and for families to create social connections.<sup>1,2</sup>

The social function of a hub means that there is a natural and safe place for families with young children to meet and connect with other parents and children in their community.<sup>2</sup>

The Network's vision is that across Australia:

*"families are able to walk through a Child and Family Hub's welcoming front door and receive the right care and support for the child and family at the right time, leading to improved and equitable health and development outcomes".<sup>1</sup>*

## Recommendations:

Investing in and expanding upon the forty-seven existing South Australian Children's Centres to become integrated Child and Family Hubs should be a priority for the South Australian government. Integrated Child and Family Hubs have the potential to significantly improve outcomes for children and families, particularly those experiencing disadvantage.

Recognising that there is a role for Federal government and State government to invest in and support integrated Child and Family Hubs, this submission, by the National Child and Family Hubs Network, recommends **the South Australian Government invest in:**

- 1. A systematic approach to implementing, funding and evaluating Child and Family Hubs (outside the services themselves) including:**
  - 1.1 Agreed core components and appropriate governance structures for Child and Family Hubs based on evidence.
  - 1.2 Support existing Hubs to improve integration via working with the Federal Government to fund the 'glue'. \* The 'glue' is a vital component of Hubs funding that supports the integration of services and supports to reduce fragmentation.
  - 1.3 Establish new hubs, targeted to areas of significant disadvantage, including establishment infrastructure, and work with Federal government for 'glue' funding to ensure success.
  - 1.4 Build in guidance and support for ongoing quality improvement and evaluation of Hubs through a harmonised set of process and impact measures.
- 2 Support the National Child and Family Hubs Network, as an existing national coordinating body, to build capacity, reduce fragmentation, and identify best practice by undertaking research, evaluation, and quality improvement to support and scale integrated Child and Family Hubs across South Australia and other jurisdictions.**

\* 'Glue' funding allows greater integration of services and supports across Hubs and can be broadly grouped into funding for business oversight, staff supports, community engagement and shared information and technology systems. **Attachment A** provides more information on 'glue'.

The Network recently developed a policy submission outlining the need for investment in integrated Child and Family Hubs to the Commonwealth Government as part of the National Early Years Strategy Consultation. The suite of recommendations to the South Australian Royal Commission are closely aligned with the recommendations the Network made to the Commonwealth Government, and supporting material to explain the rationale for these recommendations can be found in the April 2023 submission (**Attachment A**).

A recent paper developed by the Network '*Child and family hubs: an important 'front door' for equitable support for families across Australia*' outlines the value of integrated Child and Family Hubs and can be found at **Attachment B**.

The recent Social Ventures Australia publication 'Happy, healthy and thriving children: Enhancing the impact of Integrated Child and Family Centres in Australia' is relevant to the South Australian context and should inform efforts to establish and strengthen place based integrated service hubs / integrated Child and Family Hubs (**Attachment C**).

## Alignment with the Royal Commission's Interim Report

### Recommendation 11

That implementation of the three-year-old preschool program reflect and prioritise the role of early childhood education and care in layering supports for children and families as they need it.

That the State Government adopt a definition of three and four- year-old preschool that includes the following elements:

- Each individual child receiving their learning entitlement (including adjustments required), from an early childhood teacher operating with support from allied health professionals as appropriate.
- Early identification of a child's developmental needs on site (e.g., by child development checks) and organised pathways to interventions, including providing those on site as appropriate.
- Organised pathways to broader parental and community supports, including those provided on site as appropriate.

The Network notes that providing children and families with tiered supports and pathways to broader parental and community support is enabled when there is adequate investment in 'glue' for service coordination and integration within Children's Centres.

### Recommendation 18

That universal three-year-old preschool be delivered through the following mix of provision. Three-year-olds already in long day care or non-government preschool receive their preschool through that long day care or non-government preschool setting.

- Additional capacity in government preschools be offered on a priority basis to three-year-olds that are not already engaging in early childhood education care.
- In areas of high developmental vulnerability, there be place- based commissioning of integrated service hubs
- In other areas, unmet demand be met by managed market response, matching parent demand with cost efficient increases in supply. This should be facilitated by locally based implementation team working on behalf of State Government. Following the completion of the roll out, consideration could be given to making this function ongoing, to provide ongoing stewardship across the early childhood education and care sector.

The Network supports the principle of commissioning place-based integrated service hubs in areas of high developmental vulnerability. The recommendations in this submission provide guidance on how the South Australian Government can invest in Children's Centres.

## Evidence on integrated Child and Family Hubs in early years settings

In early years settings, the evidence demonstrates that integrated care and supports are associated with improved school readiness, parental knowledge, and confidence.<sup>3,4,5,6</sup> When comparing non-integrated models of care and support with co-located and integrated models of care in early years and primary school settings there is a trend toward improved child academic outcomes in the latter settings.<sup>7</sup> An evaluation of NSW Aboriginal Child and Family Centres demonstrated improvements in

health checks and immunisation rates among children as well as first time engagement with early childhood education and care services for 'hard to reach' families. <sup>8</sup> In addition, a three-year evaluation of South Australian Children's Centres for Early Childhood Development and Parenting found that:

- Children's Centres met the service needs of families with well-informed support and referrals, with opportunities to expand parental engagement,
- When compared with referral processes and pathways in the community, Children's Centres were found to
  - achieve earlier identification of vulnerable children and families
  - provide new knowledge or skills for team members
  - improve the capacity to reach more children and families
  - provide a clearer pathway for families to the supports and services
  - improve access to specialist services and preschool programs.
- Children using the universal services in Children's Centres tended to live in areas characterised as experiencing disadvantage, come from an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background, and live in remote areas. However, targeted supports were found to be more heavily utilised by families living in areas characterised as more socially and economically advantaged.
- Overall, parents using Children's Centre's reported experiencing high levels of wellbeing, social connectedness and positive parenting practices <sup>9</sup> (**Attachment D**).

These findings suggest that the following elements of integrated Child and Family Hubs could be strengthened in the South Australian context: co-design with families, access to services for families experiencing socio-economic disadvantage, broadening supports within Hubs to include social services, and support for staff to establish and maintain integrated services.

**Self-determination and cultural competency are critical for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.**

The Network recognises the unique position of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and supports the provision of integrated child and family services primarily through Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs). To further support this approach, the Network acknowledges the submission made by SNAICC – National Voice for Our Children to the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care and supports the submission in principle.

## Consultation

This submission has been informed by consultation with members of the National Child and Family Hubs Network (Network). Membership comprises:

- Centre for Community Child Health, at Murdoch Children's Research Institute
- University of New South Wales/ Population Child Health Research Group
- Children's Health Queensland
- ARC Centre of Excellence for Children and Families Across the Life Course and the Telethon Kids Institute
- Social Ventures Australia
- Karitane
- Our Place
- National Children's Commissioner, Human Rights Australia
- University of New South Wales/ Early Life Determinants of Health, Sydney Partnership for Health, Education, Research and Enterprise
- University of Sydney / Sydney Health Partners Child and Adolescent Clinical Academic Group
- University of Tasmania, Menzies Institute for Medical Research
- Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY)
- Thriving Queensland Kids Partnerships

The Network commends the work of the Royal Commission in working to improve outcomes for children and families experiencing disadvantage.

I would be pleased to provide additional information to support the recommendations made in this submission and can be contacted at [sharon.goldfeld@mcri.edu.au](mailto:sharon.goldfeld@mcri.edu.au).

Yours sincerely



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### *Attachments*

**Attachment A** – National Child and Family Hubs Network – Submission to the National Early Years Strategy consultation.

**Attachment B** – National Child and Family Hubs Network - Child and family hubs: an important ‘front door’ for equitable support for families across Australia

**Attachment C** – Social Ventures Australia - Happy, healthy and thriving: enhancing the impact on our integrated Child and Family Centres in Australia

**Attachment D** – Children’s Centre Evaluation, Evaluation Report: a report on the measurement of process and impacts

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- <sup>1</sup> Honisett S, Cahill R, Callard N, Eapen V, Eastwood J, Goodhue R, Graham C, Heery, Hiscock H, Hodgins M, Hollonds A, Jose K, Newcomb D, O’Loughlin G, Ostojic K, Sydenham E, Tayton S, Woolfenden S. and Goldfeld S. (2023). Child and family hubs: an important ‘front door’ for equitable support for families across Australia. National Child and Family Hubs Network. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.25374/MCRI.22031951>
  - <sup>2</sup> Moore TG. (2021b). Developing holistic integrated early learning services for young children and families experiencing socio-economic vulnerability [brief]. Prepared for Social Ventures Australia. Parkville, Victoria: Centre for Community Child Health, Murdoch Children’s Research Institute, The Royal Children’s Hospital.
  - <sup>3</sup> Cattan S, Conti G, Farquharson C, Ginja R, Pecher M. (2021). The Health Impacts of Sure Start. Available from: <https://ifs.org.uk/uploads/BN332-The-health-impacts-ofsure-start-1.pdf>
  - <sup>4</sup> Sammons P, Hall J, Smees R, Goff J, Sylva K, Smith T et al. (2015). The Impact of Children’s Centres: Studying the Effects of Children’s Centres in Promoting Better Outcomes for Young Children and Their Families, DFE-RR495. Available from: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/485346/DFERR495-Evaluation\\_of\\_children\\_s\\_centres\\_in\\_England\\_the\\_impact\\_of\\_children\\_s\\_centres.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/485346/DFERR495-Evaluation_of_children_s_centres_in_England_the_impact_of_children_s_centres.pdf)
  - <sup>5</sup> Moore TG. (2021). Developing holistic integrated early learning services for young children and families experiencing socio-economic vulnerability. Prepared for Social Ventures Australia. Parkville, Victoria: Centre for Community Child Health, Murdoch Children’s Research Institute, The Royal Children’s Hospital. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.25374/MCRI.14593890>
  - <sup>6</sup> Taylor C, Jose K, van de Lageweg WJ, Christensen D. (2017). Tasmania’s child and family centres: a place-based early childhood services model for families and children from pregnancy to age five. *Early Child Dev Care*. 2017; 187(10):1496-510.
  - <sup>7</sup> Newman S, McLoughlin J, Skouteris H, Blewitt C, Melhuish E, Bailey C. (2020). Does an integrated, wrap-around school and community service model in an early learning setting improve academic outcomes for children from low socioeconomic backgrounds? *Early Child Development and Care*. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2020.1803298>
  - <sup>8</sup> Social Ventures Australia (SVA) & Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH). (2023). Exploring the need and funding for integrated child and family centres. [unpublished]. 21 March 2023.
  - <sup>9</sup> Fraser Mustard Centre (2018). Children’s Centre Evaluation – Evaluation Report: a report on the measurement of process and impacts, South Australia. Available at: [www.education.sa.gov.au/docs/early-years/childrens-centre-evaluation-report.pdf](http://www.education.sa.gov.au/docs/early-years/childrens-centre-evaluation-report.pdf)