



Australian Government
Productivity Commission

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Ms Shelley Wilkins
Executive Director
Citizens Commission on Human Rights

Dear Ms Wilkins

I write to correct misconceptions and factual errors that are evident in your article of 2 January 2020 titled “1.25 million Australian 0 to 3 year olds at risk of dangerous psychiatric drugs”.

As you would be aware, one in ten pre-school age children in Australia is exposed to multiple factors (including personal trauma, poor physical health and lack of access to services) that put at risk their social and emotional development and future wellbeing.

The draft report from the Productivity Commission’s Inquiry on Mental Health recommended that “State and Territory governments should use existing guidelines to expand early childhood health checks, such that they assess children’s social and emotional development before they enter preschool” (draft recommendation 17.2). Extension of the existing physical health checks available to Australian children to include a social and emotional development check is intended to enable access to early help for families to support their children’s development — just as the existing checks currently enable early help for children most at risk of physical development difficulties as they prepare for and start school.

This is not, as your article wrongly suggests, an attempt to screen for “mental illness”. The Productivity Commission does not recommend or suggest that the check should be linked to referring children to a mental health professional, providing children with a diagnosis or enabling increased use of psychiatric drugs.

Your article concludes with a reference to Professor Whiteford, the Associate Commissioner on the Inquiry. It is extremely disappointing that you should choose to make a number of statements about Professor Whiteford personally. Professor Whiteford was appointed to the Inquiry as Associate Commissioner based on his expertise in mental health. He has made the necessary disclosures arising from his current and previous work in mental health and the Commission is satisfied as to the independence of his contribution to the Inquiry.

In view of the clear communication by the Productivity Commission in terms of its position on a social and emotional check for children, we ask that you refrain from representing a position that is incorrect and misleading.

Yours sincerely

Professor Stephen King
Presiding Commissioner
Mental Health Inquiry