

**Policy Environment Scan
March 2009**

Source	Topic	Content
Research Findings, Reports and Policy papers, etc		
<p>Mental Health Council of Australia</p> <p>http://www.apo.org.au/linkboard/results.chtml?file_name_num=270777</p>	<p><i>Home truths: mental health, housing and homelessness</i></p> <p>March 2009</p>	<p>This report explores mental health and homelessness and suggests what needs to be done to improve housing outcomes for people with a mental illness in Australia. Ten 'home truths' are identified which include the importance of recognising the links between mental health and homelessness, practical strategies in the COAG National Action Plan on Mental Health that address housing for people with a mental illness, allocation of housing stock specifically for people with mental illness, zero tolerance for discharge into homelessness, and research and evaluation of homelessness and housing programs and services. The report suggests that to reduce homelessness in Australia, there must be fundamental reforms in mental health services.</p> <p>The following information is reported in relation to young people experiencing mental illness:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 31% of homeless people are between the ages of 12 and 24, with another 12% under the age of 12 • people aged between 15 and 19 had the highest rate of access to SAAP services for any age group • research estimates that between 20% and 25% of people aged between 12 and 17 have mental health disorders • 75% of people with an adult-type psychiatric disorder will experience its onset by the age of 24, and 55% of the disease burden in the 15 to 24 age group is because of mental illness • young people who are homeless are twice as likely as their peers who are in stable accommodation to have a psychiatric disorder in their lifetime, and • research in Melbourne found that 37% of homeless young people surveyed had attempted suicide, with 11% attempting suicide in the past three months; 36% had harmed themselves in the past three months; 26% reported a level of psychological distress indicative of a psychiatric disorder; 14% reported clinical levels of depression; 12% reported clinical levels of anxiety; and 12% had clinical levels of psychosis. These figures are much higher than are seen in the general young population.
<p>Australian Department of Health and Ageing</p> <p>http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/Publishing.nsf/Content/mental-pubs-n-pol08</p>	<p><i>National Mental Health Policy 2008</i></p> <p>Launched 5 March 2009</p>	<p>The Australian National Mental Policy is a whole-of-government approach to mental health and was endorsed by the Australian Health Ministers Conference. The aims of the policy are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promote the mental health and wellbeing of the Australian community and, where possible, prevent the development of mental health problems and mental illness • reduce the impact of mental health problems and mental illness, including the effects of stigma on individuals, families and the community • promote recovery from mental health problems and mental illness, and • assure the rights of people with mental health problems and mental illness, and enable them to participate meaningfully in society. <p>The policy provides a strategic framework to support improved mental health outcomes for people at risk of or experiencing mental health problems or mental illness. Specific policy directions are detailed in relation to the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the rights and responsibilities of people with mental health problems and mental illness • mental health promotion • preventing mental health problems and mental illness and reducing suicide risk • early intervention • access to the right care at the right time

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • participation and inclusion • carers • workforce • quality and outcomes, and • building and using the evidence base.
<p>Australian Institute of Family Studies, National Child Protection Clearinghouse</p> <p>http://www.aifs.gov.au/ncph/pubs/reports/promising-practices/booklets/menu.html</p>	<p>Series of booklets on promising practices to care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care.</p> <p>Higgins, J. and Butler, N. 2007</p>	<p>The Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, on behalf of the Australian Council of Children and Parenting, commissioned the National Child Protection Clearinghouse in collaboration with the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care to undertake a project profiling promising practices in the recruitment, assessment, training and support of carers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and the provision of services to Indigenous children in care. The findings of the project are discussed in the following booklets:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Characteristics of promising Indigenous out-of-home care programs and services.</i> 2. <i>Assessing, training and recruiting Indigenous carers.</i> 3. <i>Comprehensive support for Indigenous carers and young people.</i> 4. <i>Indigenous responses to child protection issues.</i> <p>The following conclusions are drawn from the booklets:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • common characteristics of the organisations profiled is that they take a ‘ground up’ rather than a ‘top down’ approach to service development and delivery. Their service provision is also driven by the ongoing needs of their communities, carers, children and young people • most programs profiled incorporated strategies to strengthen and empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities • successful organisations had similar management styles and strong leadership • successful assessment and training programs take a carer-centred approach by being responsive to the needs of carers and incorporating feedback from carers into programs • effective assessment and training programs focus on building a relationship with carers over the long term and offer comprehensive support • successful recruitment strategies are community-based and are conducted by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations • programs that offer practical and emotional support, as well as assistance in dealing with child protection departments, help carers feel more confident and empowered in their caring role • improved outcomes for children in care are likely to be achieved by services that maintain connections between children and young people and their families and communities, enhance their self-esteem and cultural identity and provide practical supports when transitioning to independent living, and • <i>Lakidjeka</i>, <i>RAATSICC</i> and <i>Safe Families</i> provide culturally relevant child protection support services. These services enhance the likelihood of children in care remaining connected with their families, communities and culture by working with existing frameworks of care within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kinship networks and communities, and taking a holistic approach to meeting the needs of children in care.
<p>Centre for Community Child Health</p> <p>http://www.apo.org.au/linkboard/results.chtml?filena_me_num=270400</p>	<p><i>Towards an early years learning framework for Australia</i></p> <p>Moore, T. August</p>	<p>This discussion paper is designed to provide direction to policy makers and practitioners about the issues involved in relation to the development of a national Early Years Learning Framework and associated consultation process with the early childhood sector.</p> <p>The paper suggests that an early years learning framework should be informed by an evidence-base of the following concepts:</p>

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	2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how children develop and learn • what conditions and experiences they need in order to develop and learn well, and • what the role of early childhood services should be. <p>The paper suggests that key features of a child's development and learning include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • children develop and learn through their relationships • children's early childhood experiences are crucial for their later development, and • children are active participants in their own development. <p>The paper identifies that early childhood services include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • children benefit from high quality early childhood services • childcare and education functions are integrated • universal rather than targeted core early childhood services • individualised and developmentally appropriate approach • early childhood staff build upon children's interests, previous learning experiences and strengths • staff observe and monitor children's performance to ensure the provision of challenging yet achievable experiences • balancing between a cognitive/academic focus and a social/emotional focus, and • having well-trained staff, ongoing staff development and support and staff continuity. <p>The third element of an early learning framework involves deciding the role of early childhood services and raises debate about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the varying views on the purposes of early childhood services • the age range of an early years framework, and • the scope and function of an early years framework and what should be included. <p>This research has the following implications for an early years learning framework:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a framework should contain overall aims and outcomes, principles, scope/content and broad standards • a framework which influences practice must be acceptable to and taken up by practitioners. This can occur with an extensive period of consultation and development, and • we need to understand how best to promote learning for young children.
<p>Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Vic)</p> <p>http://www.education.vic.gov.au/ecsmanagement/integratedservices/research/litreview.htm</p>	<p><i>Evaluation of Victorian children's centres</i></p> <p>Moore, T. 2008</p>	<p>This literature review was conducted by the Centre for Community Child Health in collaboration with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to identify best practice approaches to the establishment and operation of children's hubs. The review examined:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • best practice models both nationally and internationally related to the development of integrated children's hubs • examples of innovative centre governance arrangements that promote service integration and include parents in decision-making roles • the extent to which children's hubs contribute to improved access to early childhood education for children, provide support for families, promote community cohesion and reduce the impact of social isolation • barriers that impact on the establishment and operation of integrated services within children's hubs

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> enablers that promote integrated service delivery, and the extent to which children's hubs encourage communication between staff and families and collaborative practice between service providers. <p>The review identified a considerable amount of research and practice evidence about multi-agency collaboration and partnerships. It found mixed evidence that indicated building and maintaining true collaboration is not simple or easy.</p> <p>Because children's centres are a relatively recent innovation, there is limited evidence of the overall effectiveness of integrated children's hubs or of the features of best practice. Nevertheless, the researchers concluded that it is possible to extrapolate from the more general literature on collaboration and partnership a coherent set of best practices to guide the introduction and consolidation of children's centres in Victoria.</p>
<p>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</p> <p>http://www.apo.org.au/linkboard/results.chtml?file_name_num=270898</p>	<p><i>Child well-being and sole-parent family structure in the OECD: an analysis</i></p> <p>Chapple, S. March 2009</p>	<p>This paper addresses the causal impact of being raised in a sole-parent family on child well-being across the OECD. There are widely varying rates of sole parenthood across the OECD. Rates of sole parenthood have generally been rising in the past few decades. Inevitably, countries with higher rates of sole parenthood are more concerned about the potential well-being effects on children. The composition of sole parents varies widely across OECD countries. Views on the desirability of two-parent families for raising children are also divergent across the OECD.</p> <p>The paper suggests that overall the literature on the effects of sole parenthood on child well-being lacks a clear consensus on the existence of a causal effect. The paper also indicates there is enough in the literature to suggest policy makers should be concerned about the implications of family structure for child well-being. The paper proposes that policy makers monitor social trends in terms of changes in family structure, as well as on the developing research literature on the impact of family structure on child well-being. The paper concludes that there may not be enough in the literature yet to advocate radical policy change.</p>
Events/Seminars		
<p>Queensland Youth Housing Coalition</p> <p>http://www.capabiliti.com.au/Deewr/ClientView/Schedules/ScheduleDetail.aspx?ScheduleID=234&EventID=230</p>	<p><i>Youth Homelessness Matter Day - It's No Joke!</i></p> <p>Brisbane, 1 April 2009</p>	<p>This year Youth Homelessness Matters in Queensland is keen to hear directly from young people, services and community members about their thoughts and ideas on what youth homelessness means through short films. It is anticipated that young people throughout Queensland will provide a short 90 second film that they have created about their experience/opinions of youth homelessness.</p>
<p>Australian Infant Child Adolescent and Family Mental Health Association (AICAFMHA)</p> <p>http://sapmea.asn.au/conventions/camh/index.html</p>	<p><i>6th National Child & Adolescent Mental Health Conference and the inaugural World Children of Parents with a Mental Illness (COPMI)</i></p>	<p>The conference theme is 'Together' encouraging us all to look at the ways in which we work with and support children and families where mental health is an issue. These joint events provide an opportunity for professionals and consumers from the many fields associated with mental health to share ideas, develop networks and participate in knowledge enhancement. Representation from youth, consumers and carers will be a feature on both programs.</p>

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	<p><i>Conference</i></p> <p>Adelaide, October 2009</p>	
Media Releases/Speeches		
<p>Australian Institute of Family Studies, National Child Protection Clearinghouse (NCPC)</p> <p>http://www.aifs.gov.au/nch/</p>	<p><i>Ethical responses to vulnerable Children and young people</i></p> <p>Presentation by Dr Leah Bromfield, Manager, NCPC to the Adelaide offices of the Department for Families and Communities</p>	<p>This presentation includes recognition of the following elements in relation to providing ethical responses to vulnerable children and young people:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ethically responsive child and protection family services are evidence-informed, intervene early in the life of the problem and enable families to access the right service at the right time, and • ethically responsive child and family protection practitioners put children at the centre of assessments and engage families to meet their needs.