How well are we supporting parents in their parenting?

Strengthening families through parenting support

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About the PRC

Seek better outcomes for children by increasing effectiveness in how families are supported in parenting.

Work with governments and community organisations in the fields of health, education and welfare.

NGO supported by gov funding and fee-for--service (67 staff Melbourne, Sydney, Darwin and Perth)
PRC priority: articulate compelling case for parenting support in Australia

Developing and publishing the PRC’s position on parenting support

Searching current social policy for parenting support approaches nationally and internationally

Looking at parenting support policy options and opportunities

Examining the need for an overarching policy framework for parenting support
What do we mean by parenting support? Definitions

“Parenting support refers to a range of information, support, education, training, counselling and other measures or services that focus on **influencing how parents understand and carry out their parenting role**.

A common goal is to achieve better outcomes for children and young people (and in some instances families as a whole) by providing services that offer information, support and even retraining for parents.” Mary Daly
Definitions

**Parent-focused interventions** target individual-level factors that influence parents’ own circumstances and wellbeing (e.g., parent wellbeing programs; programs addressing family housing needs in order to alleviate parent stress)

By extension, these approaches have the capacity to support parents in their role as care-givers and enhance their ability to provide the optimal conditions for their child’s development.
...parents are the most powerful change agents in their children’s lives.
Centrality of parenting support?

...realizing children’s rights is in large measure dependent on the wellbeing and resources available to those with responsibility for their care. Recognizing these interdependencies is a sound starting point for planning assistance and services to parents, legal guardians and other caregivers.

Parenting matters more than anything else......

• Parents by far the most impt influence on their children - Profound impact on child wellbeing

• Parents have profound impact on the quality of life of their children as adults

• Important for social mobility and social cohesion

“studies on resilience show that the quality of parenting is a predominant factor contributing to positive development among children growing up in risky environments.”

SPRC 2010
Parents are made, not born.
Social policy

That area of public policy that aims to improve human welfare

Social policies affect individual and collective wellbeing
Family policy

Policies, programs, laws designed to support families in raising children
Within family policy sits parenting support policy
What is the policy problem we are trying to address?

Worldwide increase in governments looking at parenting support

Few have coherent, whole-of-gov philosophy or vision for parenting support

Usually piecemeal, embedded in other child and family policies and varying widely across levels of government

Looking for a coherent parenting support policy framework for Australia......
Tensions with parenting & family policy

Differing views on parenting practices (punishment, privacy)

Degrees of parenting supervision (free-range kids; risk averse parenting; see current media on supervising children’s internet use)

Parenting policy competing with other policy priorities – makes it contentious for policy makers

Universal v targeted approaches and who gets access to what

Ideological tensions of gov intervention into parenting and the private sphere
Types of support

Information
Advice
Education (Fr, Ger)
Programs to train parents (Eng standardised programs)
Intensive interventions
Peer to peer mentoring
Legal regulation of parenting
Parental responsibility contracts

Policy origins/orientation

Child poverty, child dev, antisocial behaviour (Eng)
Social cohesion, children’s education and wellbeing (Fr)
Family & child wellbeing, parenting responsibility, child educ/health (Ger)
Family & child wellbeing (Italy)

Mary Daly 2013
What is happening with parenting support policies in Australia?

- DSS nationally plays a key role in provision
- States have service & activities – lack policy framing of those programs (ex Vic)
- Some important efforts in program provision, particularly for sub-populations
- But...... No unifying policy framework, underpinning philosophy for parenting support
Shared responsibility for parenting policy states/territories and fed government

Until recently, mostly the states (child welfare, disability etc)

Family Support Program changing this landscape

Also COAG interest/initiatives attempting to harmonise policies (CP Framework and Early Years)

National Children’s Commissioner & state/territory Commissioners role?
PRC role

Not an advocacy body

Our form of influence is more about gathering evidence and offering advice based on the evidence.....

Product: policy position paper to inform policy decision makers about parenting support
Some key principles - parenting support policy development

- Children’s opportunities in life are entwined with their parents lives and experiences

- **Helping parents to raise their children impacts both generations and is a legitimate policy goal**

- Parenting practices have the strongest influence on a child, over and above family structure and social and economic context

- While early childhood experiences are important, so are those of the middle years and adolescence
Key messages cont....

• Support must go beyond the provision of education and information

• Systematic and rigorous research and evaluation are vital to ensure the parenting support offered works

• Policy and program implementation need to be evidence informed and scientifically applied
What’s next

• Developing a conceptual framework for parenting support
• Publishing the PRC’s policy position
• Encouraging governments to articulate their vision for parenting
• Then work towards a framework for parenting support (an agenda setting piece)
Australian parenting support framework

1. A vision for parenting support in Australia
2. A philosophy and core principles underpinning government commitment
3. Focus on children’s rights and development outcomes
4. Accurate info on the science and evidence
5. Clarity on how evidence should inform policy
6. Elements of a holistic parenting support system
References


Thank you and more info
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Acknowledgements
PRC staff:
Kate Spalding
Kate Naish