

October 2024

The National Child and Family Hubs Network welcomes the [Productivity Commission’s roadmap to universal Early Childhood Education and Care \(ECEC\)](#), in particular the Commission’s acknowledgement that for many communities, ECEC provides important connections to the many services children and families need.

The Productivity Commission’s report calls for consideration of new ECEC services to be established as integrated services, allowing families to access the diverse supports they need in the one place.

“ECEC is often the ‘front door’ to important services such as allied health, maternal and child health, financial counselling, parenting support programs and social connections, that many children and families need to thrive.” Says Dr Suzy Honisett, Manager of the National Child and Family Hubs Network. “However, we know from research and consultation with our Network members, that ECEC needs support to ensure families experience coordinated care as part of a more integrated approach. This support includes building workforce capabilities and funding the ‘glue’”

The ‘glue’ supports integration of services and supports within an ECEC service to reduce fragmentation and equitably address the needs of children and their families. Glue funding includes business oversight, staff supports, community engagement, local governance, the collection and use of data for ongoing evaluation, and improvements and shared information and technology systems. Without ‘glue’ funding Hubs are more likely to experience undue administrative complexity, fragmentation, and an unsustainable trajectory. The Commission acknowledges ‘glue’ as critical to providing integration between services.

The Network cautions the Commission’s recommendation to trial a system navigator role, noting that 1) there is little evidence of effect for navigators, 2) this workforce does not exist, and 3) this may limit opportunities for alternate approaches, such as digital navigation approaches. Notwithstanding, navigators are one component of building an integrated approach and ‘glue’ is a more comprehensive solution to address fragmentation and access.

The Network is a national, multidisciplinary group dedicated to strengthening integrated Child and Family Hubs across Australia and has identified research is needed to define, prototype and cost ‘the glue’ and comprehensively map ECEC deserts and understand community readiness for integrated service provision for children and their families.

Prof Sharon Goldfeld, Chair of the National Child and Family Hubs Network Advisory Committee, notes that *“investing in a truly national approach to implementing, funding and evaluating integrated child and family services provides the opportunity to leverage the Commission’s recommendations and deliver a system that can more holistically meet the needs of children and their families.”*

The Federal Government is now presented with this important opportunity to shift the dial on children’s outcomes by not only ensuring ECEC is inclusive and of high-quality but build on the extensive platform of ECEC integrated services and ensure children and families can access an integrated child health, development and education system, appropriately funded with the glue.

About the National Child and Family Hubs Network

The [National Child and Family Hubs Network](#) (the Network) is a national, multidisciplinary group dedicated to strengthening Child and Family Hubs across Australia. The Network unites service providers, community-based organisations, advocates, researchers and policymakers to build the capacity of Hubs and enable more children and families to access the care they need to thrive. The [Centre for Community Child Health](#) at the Murdoch Children’s Research Institute is a key member of the Network’s Steering Committee.

The Network:

- supports meaningful connections between Hubs across Australia and creates opportunities for shared learning and capacity building
- builds the evidence to enable a common and best practice approach to developing and evaluating Child and Family Hubs
- advocates for sustainable funding models to ensure Hubs have the resources required to meet the diverse needs of children and families.
- makes evidence and resources accessible to help drive improvements in Hubs, children’s development and family health and wellbeing.