

Centre for Community Child Health Early Years Seminar  
*Equal life chances: How can early years services safeguard the health, development and wellbeing of all Australian children?*  
 The Royal Children's Hospital, 17<sup>th</sup> March 2014



## ACTING EARLY, CHANGING LIVES: HOW INTERVENTION AND EARLY ACTION SAVES MONEY AND IMPROVES WELLBEING

**Tim Moore**

Centre for Community Child Health  
 Murdoch Childrens Research Institute  
 The Royal Children's Hospital



*Evidence indicates worsening or unacceptably high levels of problems amongst Australia's children and young people.*

*These problems will not improve – and could get worse – unless we are able to effectively intervene to prevent these problems from occurring in the first place or addressing the problems early before they become entrenched.*

Tim Moore & Myfanwy McDonald (2013). *Acting Early, Changing Lives: How prevention and early action saves money and improves wellbeing.* Prepared for The Benevolent Society, Parkville, Victoria: Centre for Community Child Health, Murdoch Childrens Research Institute, The Royal Children's Hospital.



Centre for Community Child Health (2014)  
**Response to Productivity Commission's  
 Childcare and Early Childhood Learning  
 Issues Paper**



Sharon Goldfeld and Sue West (2014)  
**Inequalities in early childhood outcomes:  
 What lies beneath.**

Insight Issue 9. Melbourne, Victoria: Victorian  
 Council of Social Services

Sharon Goldfeld (2013)  
**The not so lucky country.... Why are so many  
 children missing out?**  
 Vera Scantlebury Brown Memorial Lecture 2013,  
 University of Melbourne

Centre for Community Child Health

## OUTLINE

- Impact of social change on children, families, communities and services
- What the evidence tells us
- What's been tried
- What we need to do



Centre for Community Child Health

## SOCIAL CHANGE AND ITS EFFECTS

- As a result of the dramatic economic and social changes that have occurred in developed nations over the past 50 years social and economic changes, the nature of the social problems facing society and governments have altered – they are now more likely to be 'wicked' or complex problems that are not able to be resolved through traditional service-driven approaches.
- These changes have significantly altered the conditions under which families are raising young children, and have had a significant impact on children, families, communities and services.



Centre for Community Child Health

## SOCIAL CHANGE AND ITS EFFECTS (cont)

- Many children and families have benefited greatly from these changes, but a significant minority have not: there is evidence of worsening or unacceptably high levels of problems in a minority of children across all aspects of development, health and well-being, including mental health, physical health, academic achievement, and social adjustment
- Significant numbers of children are arriving at school poorly equipped to benefit from the social and learning opportunities that schools offer, and schools struggle to make up the gap between those children and their peers.
- The problems we currently see amongst Australia's children and young people will not improve – and may get worse – unless we are able to effectively intervene to improve outcomes for them and their families.



Centre for Community Child Health

## SERVICES FOR YOUNG CHILDREN & FAMILIES

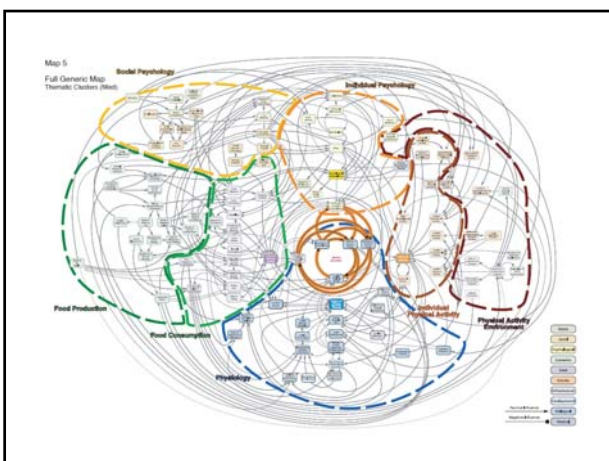
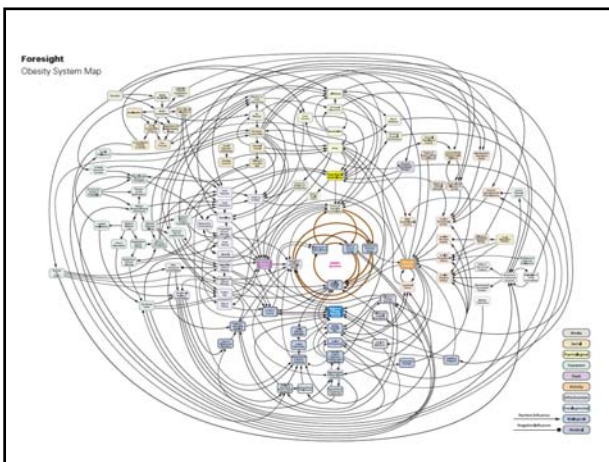


- The services and service systems that support children and their families have not changed significantly over the past 50 years, and are struggling to meet the needs of the most disadvantaged groups.
- As a result of the difficulties that the current system of services is experiencing, many children are not receiving the additional help they need - it is often those with the greatest need that are least likely to be able to access available services.
- The planning and delivery of services continues to be heavily segmented, with government departments and their funding streams operating autonomously as 'silos', making it difficult to conduct the joint planning needed to implement an ecological approach.

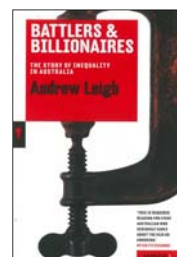
Centre for Community Child Health

## THE NATURE OF SOCIAL CLIMATE CHANGE (cont)

- Many of the most pressing policy challenges involve dealing with very complex or 'wicked' problems.
- These problems are 'wicked', not in the sense of them being evil in some way, but in the sense of them being complex and difficult to solve. They are contrasted with 'tame' problems where the problems are well understood and the solutions known.
- These problems share a range of characteristics:
  - they go beyond the capacity of any one organisation to understand and respond to
  - there is often disagreement about the causes of the problems and the best way to tackle them
  - the problem is not understood until after a solution has been formulated
  - the problem is never solved (completely).



## WIDENING INEQUALITIES

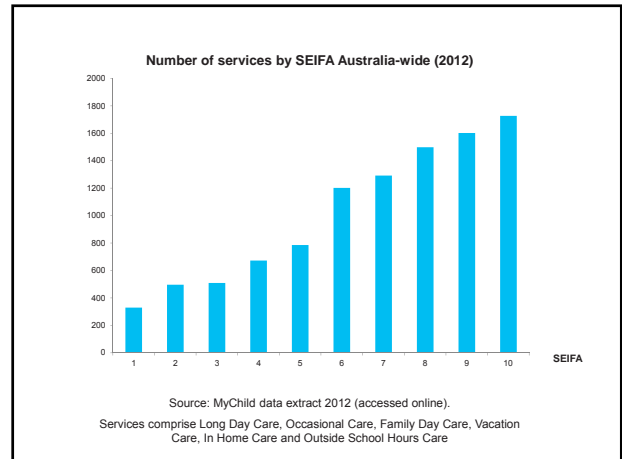
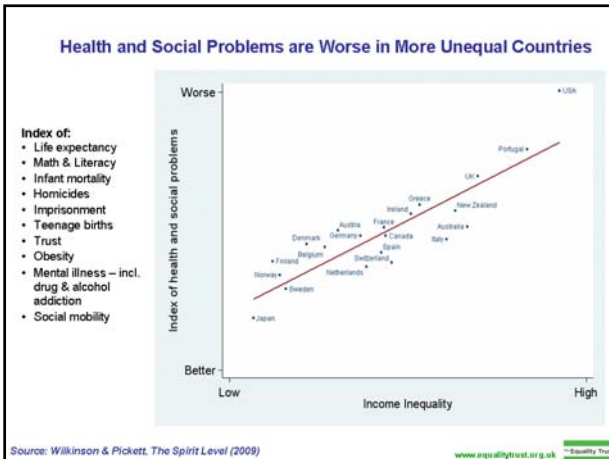


Since the 1980s, inequality in Australia has been growing.

While inequality can fuel growth, it also poses dangers to society. Too much inequality risks dividing us into two Australias, occupying fundamentally separate worlds, with little contact between the haves and the have-nots.

And the further apart the rungs on the ladder of opportunity, the harder it is for a kid born into poverty to enter the middle class.

Andrew Leigh (2013). **Battlers and Billionaires: The Story of Inequality in Australia**. Collingwood, Victoria: Redback.



## WHAT THE EVIDENCE TELLS US

Centre for Community Child Health

## NEW RESEARCH EVIDENCE

- Over the past few decades, there has been a growing acceptance among scholars, professionals and policy makers of the importance of the early years
- However, as we learn more about the way in which experiences in the early years shape health, development and well-being, and the extent of these influences over the life-course, the true importance of these years becomes more and more apparent.
- There are multiple related bodies of research that demonstrate the importance of the prenatal and early years for long-term health, development and well-being (Moore & McDonald, 2013).

Centre for Community Child Health

## RESEARCH EVIDENCE (cont)

- First, prenatal environments begin laying down biological patterns that can have lifelong effects on health and well-being
- Second, children's development is profoundly shaped by their early relational and learning environments – family environments having the greatest impact, but ECEC and community environments also play significant roles.
- Third, learning develops cumulatively – the skills acquired early form the basis for later skill development, while failure to develop basic skills impedes all subsequent learning
- Fourth, discrepancies between children from advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds emerge early and widen steadily
- Fifth, chronic stress and cumulative adverse experiences have powerful negative effects on children's neurological and biological development, with long-term effects upon health and well-being

Centre for Community Child Health

Sharon Goldfeld and Sue West (2014).  
**Inequalities in early childhood outcomes: What lies beneath.**  
*Insight Issue 9.* Melbourne, Victoria: Victorian Council of Social Services  
[http://apo.org.au/files/Research/VCOSSInsight\\_InequalitiesInEarlyChildhoodOutcomesWhatLiesBeneath\\_Jan\\_2014.pdf](http://apo.org.au/files/Research/VCOSSInsight_InequalitiesInEarlyChildhoodOutcomesWhatLiesBeneath_Jan_2014.pdf)

## VARIATIONS IN DEVELOPMENTAL VULNERABILITY



	Developmentally vulnerable on at least one AEDI domain (%)	Developmentally vulnerable on at least two AEDI domains (%)
All Australian children	23.55	11.84
Children from language background other than English	32.23	16.71
Children with additional health and developmental needs	57.73	37.38
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	47.44	29.58

Centre for Community Child Health

## VARIATIONS IN DEVELOPMENTAL VULNERABILITY (cont)



### SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS

	Developmentally vulnerable on at least one AEDI domain (%)	Developmentally vulnerable on at least two AEDI domains (%)
Most disadvantaged SES communities	32.33	17.81
Most advantaged SES communities	16.30	7.18

Centre for Community Child Health

## VARIATIONS IN DEVELOPMENTAL VULNERABILITY (cont)



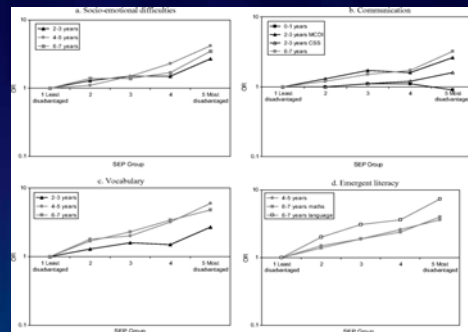
### GEOGRAPHY

	Developmentally vulnerable on at least one AEDI domain (%)	Developmentally vulnerable on at least two AEDI domains (%)
Very remote	47.13	30.54
Remote	29.49	15.98
Outer regional	26.84	14.07
Inner regional	23.64	12.11
Major cities	22.50	11.01

Centre for Community Child Health

## Socioeconomic inequality profiles in physical and developmental health from 0-7 years: Australian national study

(Nicholson, Lucas, Berthelsen & Wake, 2010)



Odds ratios by socioeconomic position quintile for socio-emotional difficulties, & poor communication, vocabulary & emergent literacy skills

## WHAT'S BEEN TRIED



## WHAT'S BEEN TRIED

In Australia, governments at all levels have developed policies and funded initiatives designed to address these problems, including:

- National Early Childhood Development Strategy (COAG, 2009)
- National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children (COAG, 2009)
- National Early Years Learning Framework (COAG, 2009)
- National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care (COAG, 2009)
- Increasing investment in early childhood education and care (DEEWR, 2010)
- Funding the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI)

Centre for Community Child Health

Centre for Community Child Health

### WHAT'S BEEN TRIED (cont)



These have a number of features in common:

- finding more effective ways of reaching vulnerable children and families,
- extending provision of early childhood education services
- ensuring that all children arrive at school ready to learn,
- reducing child protection rates,
- monitoring children's development and well-being more effectively,
- improving the quality of early childhood services, and
- increasing the use of evidence-based practices.

Centre for Community Child Health

### WHAT'S BEEN TRIED (cont)



- To date, governments have focused most effort on building better coordinated and more effective services and service systems, with less effort focused on building more supportive communities, and improving the interface between communities and services.
- Governments have tended to place more reliance upon 'killer' programs – preferably evidence-based – that address the presenting problems, rather than looking at the systemic (ecological) conditions that lead to the problems in the first place.

Centre for Community Child Health

### HOW EFFECTIVE HAVE WE BEEN?



So far, these various initiatives have not had a major impact on child and family outcomes. There are a number of reasons why this is the case, including

- they have not been sustained for long enough,
- *they are not comprehensive enough,*
- they are not sufficiently well integrated,
- *they have not involved families and communities in planning, service delivery and evaluation,*
- they have not been based on a clear understanding of why problems occur and how they can be remedied,
- *they have been unduly reliant upon services (particularly evidence based programs) as the major tool to achieve change, and*
- they have failed to address the underlying causes of the problems.

Centre for Community Child Health

### WHAT DO WE NEED TO DO



Centre for Community Child Health

### WHAT DO WE NEED TO DO?

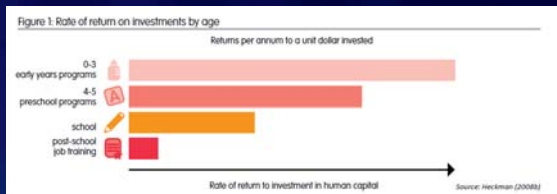


#### Economic arguments for investing in the early years

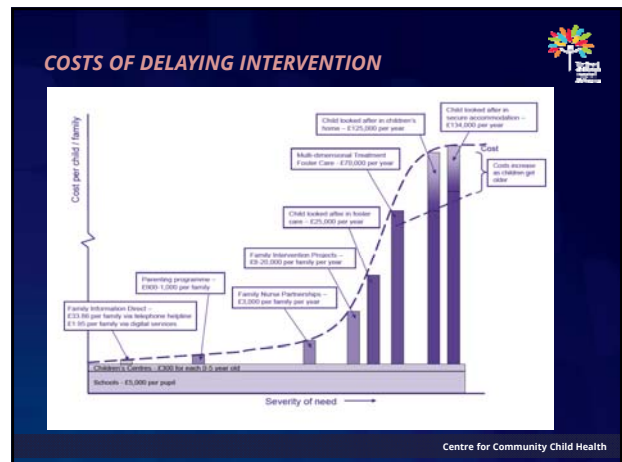
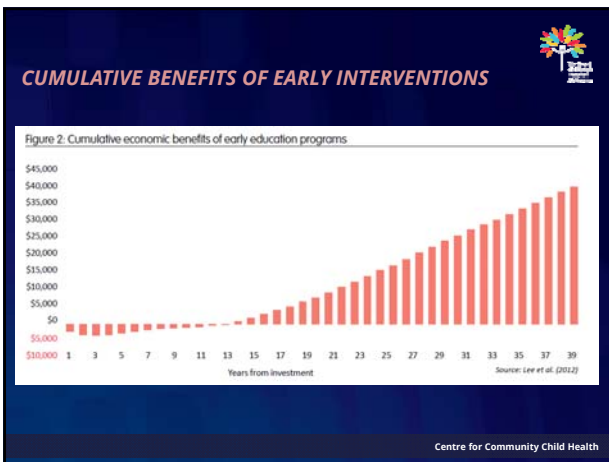
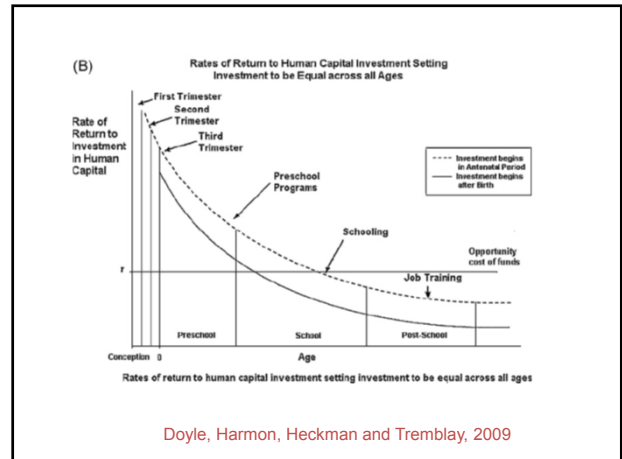
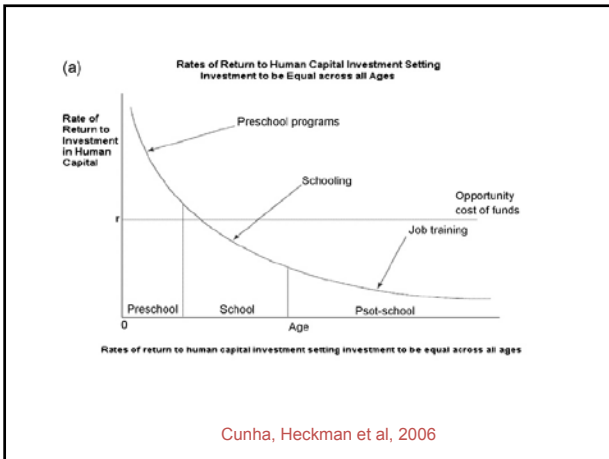
- Better return on early investments
- Cumulative benefits of early interventions
- Greater costs associated with later investments

Centre for Community Child Health

### INVESTING IN THE EARLY YEARS



Centre for Community Child Health

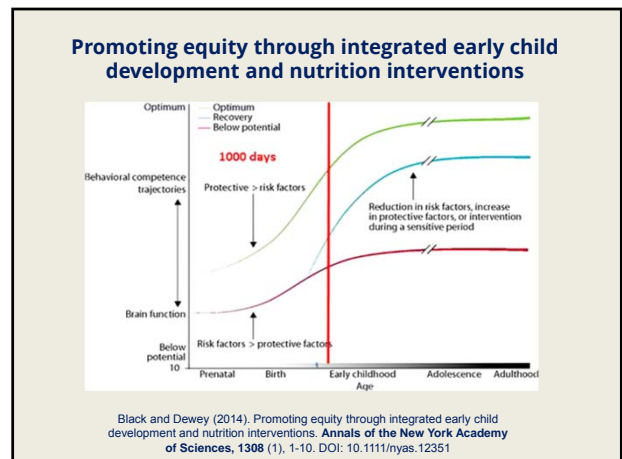


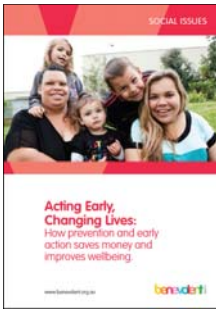
**GIVING KIDS A FAIR CHANCE**  
(A Strategy That Works)

James J. Heckman

*In short, to foster individual success, greater equality of opportunity, a more dynamic economy, and a healthier society, we need a major shift in social policy toward early intervention, with later interventions designed to reinforce those early efforts.*

James J. Heckman (2013). *Giving Kids a Fair Chance (A Strategy That Works)*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.





*In order to reduce the likelihood of poor long-term outcomes for children experiencing significant disadvantage, a multilevel, ecological approach to early intervention is required that involves programs, community and service system level changes as well interventions to address the structural (e.g. government policy) and wider social factors (e.g. societal attitudes and values) that impact either directly or indirectly on children and families.*

Moore, T.G. and McDonald, M. (2013). **Acting Early, Changing Lives: How prevention and early action saves money and improves wellbeing.** Prepared for The Benevolent Society, Parkville, Victoria: Centre for Community Child Health, Murdoch Childrens Research Institute, The Royal Children's Hospital.

## WHAT DO WE NEED TO DO?

To achieve better outcomes for children and families, we need to take action on three levels:

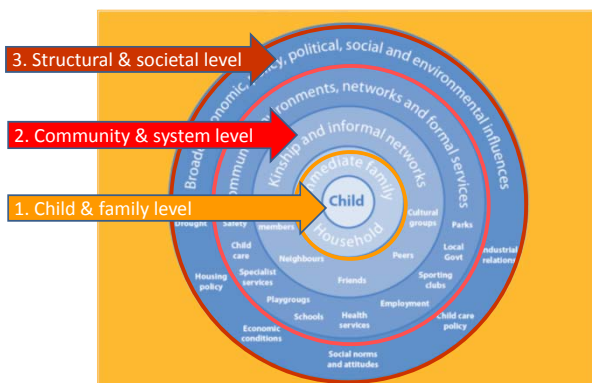
- ECEC and early intervention service level
- Community and system level interventions
- Societal and structural level interventions

Interventions targeted at one level only are unlikely to be successful at achieving significant and sustainable change amongst children and families experiencing significant disadvantage – we need to intervene at multiple levels simultaneously.

Moore & McDonald (2013)

Centre for Community Child Health

## Three levels of intervention



Reference: Bronfenbrenner (1979).

## ECEC AND ECI SERVICE LEVEL INTERVENTIONS

- **Provide high quality inclusive ECEC services for all children.** All children benefit from high quality services, but disadvantaged children do so the most (and are also most harmed by poor quality services.)
- **Blend early childhood care and education services.** These have traditionally been seen and run as separate forms of service, but should properly be recognised as a single form of service with a common curriculum.
- **Integrated child and family centres** – providing ECEC services, playgroups, facilitated playgroups, parenting programs, MCH and other health services, and evidence-based specialist intervention programs
- **Create family-friendly early childhood service environments where parents can stay.** The right mix of social support, mother-child programs, and parenting programs contribute much to improving parental abilities to support their children's learning.

Centre for Community Child Health

## ECEC AND ECI SERVICE LEVEL (cont)

- **Design and run services in partnership with those who use them.** When services do not address the most salient needs of families and when they are delivered in ways that are perceived to be unresponsive or disrespectful, families simply do not use them.
- To ensure that vulnerable families have access to and make better use of services, they should be engaged in the planning, design, implementation and evaluation of those services.
- **Provide evidence-based interventions for those with additional needs.** There is a range of evidence-based child and parenting programs that can be deployed to meet the needs of those experiencing particular problems.

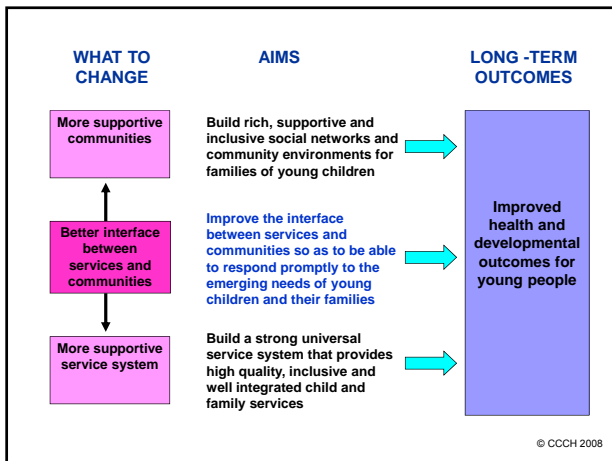
Centre for Community Child Health

## COMMUNITY & SYSTEM LEVEL INTERVENTIONS

Community and system level interventions can take four forms:

- neighbourhood and community-level interventions
- service system interventions
- place-based approaches
- whole-of-community or 'collective impact' initiatives

Centre for Community Child Health



### COMMUNITY & SYSTEM LEVEL (cont)

#### Neighbourhood and community-level interventions

- Building social capital in poor communities can be a more effective way of promoting children's welfare than focusing on formal child protection and family support services and efforts to increase parenting skills and responsibilities.
- There are a number of general strategies that could be implemented to build social capital and reduce social isolation amongst families with young children including:
  - providing multiple opportunities for families of young children to meet
  - ensuring that streets are safe and easily navigable
  - ensuring that there is an efficient and affordable local transport system that gives families ready access to services and to places where they meet other families

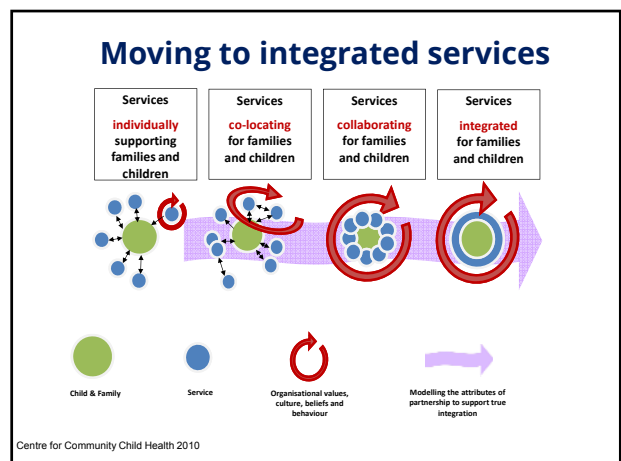
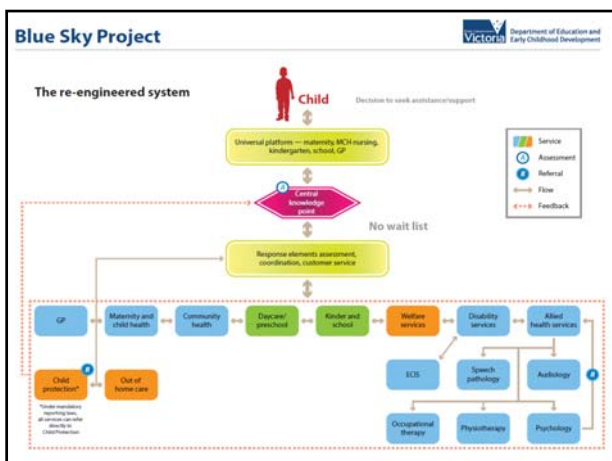
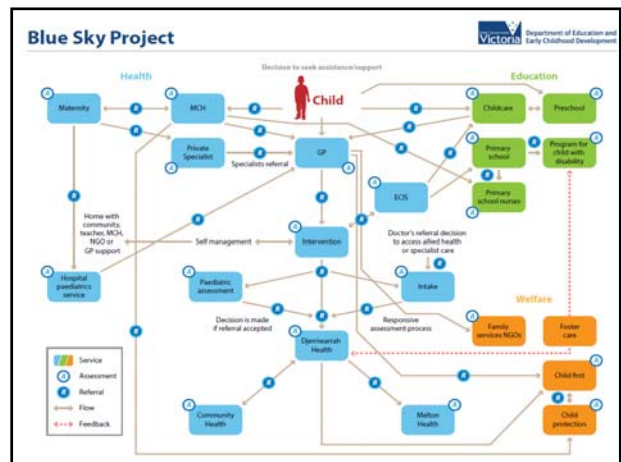
Centre for Community Child Health

### COMMUNITY & SYSTEM LEVEL (cont)

#### Service system interventions

- Build a tiered system of services based on universal provision – known as progressive or proportionate universalism
- Create a better co-ordinated and more effective service system by building stronger links with other child and family services
- Improve the interface between communities and services to ensure that the service system is better able to respond to emerging child and family needs
- Improve the detection of emerging child and family problems through more systematic use of surveillance and screening tools
- Engage families and communities in planning and implementing services to meet their local needs. Vulnerable parents make poorer use of available services than do more well-resourced families. One way to increase the use of services by such families is to engage them in the planning and delivery of services, a strategy that helps ensure that the services are located, designed, staffed and run in ways that vulnerable families are comfortable with

Centre for Community Child Health





## COMMUNITY & SYSTEM LEVEL (cont)



### Place-based approaches

- Place-based approaches occur in a socio-geographic area and involve a comprehensive multi-level effort to address all the factors that affect child, family and community functioning in that area simultaneously.
- Successful place-based interventions involve the engagement of communities in decisions of all kinds, the cultivation of community capacity, and the establishment of robust and collaborative governance arrangements.

### Whole-of-community or 'collective impact' initiatives

- Creating sustainable change in outcomes for vulnerable children and families requires the coordinated efforts of many different agencies at multiple levels.
- This has been called a *collective impact* approach, and involves the commitment of a group of actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem.

Centre for Community Child Health

## SOCIETAL & STRUCTURAL LEVEL INTERVENTIONS



There are three general forms of intervention at the 'macro' level:

- **Address the conditions under families are raising young children.** The current system of intervention and support services in developed countries such as Australia is predominantly geared towards responding to presenting problems rather than seeking to address the underlying causes that lead to families having problems in the first place.
- **Develop new ways of working in partnership with communities and services.** Rather than governments and services making all the decisions about what services are needed, what form they should take and where they should be located, these decisions need to be shared with the people who will use the services.
- **Raise public awareness regarding the nature and importance of the early years.** While many policy makers and professionals now appreciate the importance of the early years, the general public has yet to be persuaded that this is an area that we should be investing in.

Centre for Community Child Health

## CONCLUSIONS



Centre for Community Child Health



**One of the greatest problems facing the world today is the growing number of persons who are excluded from meaningful participation in the economic, social, political and cultural life of their communities.**

UNESCO (2001). **Overcoming Exclusion through Inclusive Approaches in Education: A Challenge and a Vision.** Paris, France: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation.

UNESCO (2000). **The Dakar Framework for Action: Education For All: Meeting Our Collective Commitments.** Text adopted by the World Education Forum, Dakar, Senegal, 26-28 April 2000. Paris, France: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation.

## Children of the Lucky Country?

How Australian society has turned its back on children and why children matter



FIONA STANLEY, SUE RICHARDSON and MARGOT PRIOR

**A society that is good to children is one with the smallest possible inequalities for children, with the vast majority of them having the same opportunities from birth for health, education, inclusion and participation.**

Stanley, F., Prior, M. and Richardson, S. (2005). **Children of the Lucky Country?** South Yarra, Victoria: Macmillan Australia

## Dr. Tim Moore

Senior Research Fellow



Centre for Community Child Health  
Murdoch Childrens Research Institute  
The Royal Children's Hospital  
50 Flemington Road, Parkville,  
Victoria, Australia 3052

Phone: +61-3-9345 5040  
Email: tim.moore@mcri.edu.au  
Website: www.rch.org.au/ccch

For details of papers and publications:  
[http://www.rch.org.au/uploadedFiles/Main/Content/ccch/TGM\\_Key\\_work\\_areas\\_and\\_publications\\_2000onwards.pdf](http://www.rch.org.au/uploadedFiles/Main/Content/ccch/TGM_Key_work_areas_and_publications_2000onwards.pdf)

Centre for Community Child Health