

# Identifying Family Factors that Impact on Child Health and Well-being: A National Study of the Parent Engagement Resource

## Overview of Study

The Murdoch Childrens Research Institute and the Royal Children's Hospital, Centre for Community Child Health has received funding from Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) to undertake a national randomised control trial of the Parent Engagement Resource in ten Communities for Children sites across Australia in 2013/14.

The Parent Engagement Resource (PER) is a tool which includes a training package and a questionnaire with 16 questions to assist professionals to elicit and respond to parental concerns about family (psycho-social) factors that may be adversely affecting their child's development and wellbeing.

A small feasibility study undertaken in 2010-11 answered a number of key questions about the PER. It found that it is acceptable to both parents and nurses within a Maternal Child Health setting. It also answered that it could be feasibly implemented by nurses as a practice tool with appropriate training, support and time to implement to resource. Less clear was how the service system could appropriately respond to the concerns parents had about the psychosocial issues affecting their children, if the PER could be applied to other settings and if the PER could increase detection of psycho-social concerns. The current and much larger scale study will enable further exploration of these unanswered but important questions.

The overarching aims of the study are to:

- Establish the utility of the Parent Engagement Resource as a systematic surveillance and professional practice tool for eliciting and responding to parent reported psycho-social concerns that impact on child development outcomes.
- To make recommendations about the further use of the Parent Engagement Resource across Australia.

To do this it is proposed that the ten Communities for Children sites participating in the Building Australia's Future Workforce (BAFW) trial will be recruited into the study and will be grouped into five intervention (PER trained) and five control (usual practice) sites. This will assist in answering the key research questions for the study, which will build on the previous feasibility study.

## What is the Parent Engagement Resource?

The Parent Engagement Resource (PER) is a set of tools that aim to support practitioners in their work with families. The tools provide practitioners with a systematic approach to 'asking the hard questions'.

A practitioner administered questionnaire forms the basis to applying the PER in practice. The questionnaire consists of two introductory questions, 12 concern based questions and 2 closing questions. The introductory questions focus on engaging the parent through a conversation about their baby/child and their family. The following 12 questions address psychosocial concerns that if not addressed are known to impact negatively on children's development and wellbeing. The two closing questions aim to complete the conversation in a positive light and support an ongoing parent/practitioner relationship. Prior to implementing the PER into practice, practitioners must complete the PER training program. The PER training program includes completion of pre-reading modules and attendance at a

two-day workshop. Participants will be provided with the PER Handbook and a User Guide that includes pathways (algorithms) to support practitioners in addressing any parent identified concern.

Although the PER provides a formulaic approach for practitioners, the capacity exists when using the questionnaire to be 'parent-led'. Through the conversation the parent may raise other concerns that present the practitioner with opportunities for anticipatory guidance, thereby adding to the value of the parent/practitioner relationship.

**It is also important to note that the PER is not:**

- a scientifically validated screening instrument, it is a tool to enhance professional practice in detecting emerging psycho-social issues
- a tool that requires complex, specialist administration, it is a tool designed for front-line practitioners working with families in common child and family settings such as maternal and child health.
- a tool that requires the practitioner to be proficient at treating or managing every problem themselves, it is a tool to identify emerging problems and where possible provide advice but in the main provide appropriate referrals to services and supports for families with these problems.
- a tool for the purpose of screening for risk factors or determining which children are "at risk", it is a tool to respond to parental concern about psychosocial issues

## Study details

This study aims to establish the utility of the PER as a surveillance and professional practice tool through a mixed methods trial. One of the methods is a 'cluster randomised trial'. Both the intervention group and the control group play a very important role in answering the primary research question: 'Compared to usual practice, does the PER increase the detection of psychosocial concerns held by families?'. Other research questions to be addressed in the study include:

1. Does the PER do no harm?
2. Is it acceptable to parents?
3. Does the PER help parents to have their needs identified?
4. Does the PER help parents to have their needs addressed?
5. What conditions are needed to implement the PER successfully?

The BAFW sites that will be invited to participate in the study include:

- Burnie (Tasmania)
- Hume and Shepparton (Victoria)
- Logan and Rockhampton (Queensland)
- Kwinana (Western Australia)
- Playford (South Australia) and
- Shellharbour, Wyong and Bankstown (New South Wales).

In total, 10 sites will be recruited into the study. The research team will work with the Facilitating Partner in each site to identify practitioners who would be able to participate in the project. These practitioners may come from a variety of professional backgrounds.

Facilitating Partners will invite these practitioners to attend a briefing session at their site. The research team will explain the project to practitioners and seek their consent to participate in the trial.'

Sites will then be randomly assigned to either the intervention or control group.

- **Intervention sites** (PER group) will be required to complete the PER training program. Practitioners will then be asked to implement PER during their visits with willing clients, complete a consultation record for each participating family and assist the research team to recruit families into the trial
- **Control sites** (usual practice group) will be asked to use practice as usual, complete a consultation record for willing families, and assist the research team to recruit families into the trial

Practitioners will notify the research team of families who are willing to hear more about the research trial. The research team will contact these families within one week of their appointment with the practitioner to explain the study in more detail, answer any questions the family may have, and consent the family into the study. Participating families will be asked to take part in two 20 minute phone interviews.

### Summary:

This mixed methods trial aims to establish evidence about the effectiveness of the tool for identifying psychosocial concerns, as well as ascertain the conditions under which the PER is best administered. Furthermore, the trial seeks to build on the findings of the feasibility study, and explore the acceptability of the tool to a wider range of service professionals and families. It is anticipated that the findings of the PER study will be used to develop recommendations about the further use of the PER resource across Australia.

### Further information:

For further details please contact the Research Co-ordinator for the study Claire Jennings: 03 8341 6481