

# The Centre for Community Child Health

About us and our recent work



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Frank Oberklaid is the Foundation Director of the Centre for Community Child Health at The Royal Children's Hospital and a Professor within the University of Melbourne Department of Paediatrics.

# Director's introduction

In recent decades there have been dramatic shifts in patterns of children's health. Developmental, behavioural and psychosocial problems now comprise the majority of the workload of Australia's paediatricians. Many of these difficulties lie outside the boundaries of traditional medical care, and the vast majority are assessed and managed in community and outpatient settings. The numbers across Australia are staggering; recent data indicate that:

- up to 500,000 children and young people have a diagnosable mental health condition
- 300,000 are obese or seriously obese
- there were over 350,000 child abuse notifications in 2009
- almost 60,000 children started school vulnerable in one or more areas of development.

In addition, there have been large documented increases in other conditions such as autism spectrum disorders, school problems and ADHD.

These figures pose great challenges for policymakers and service providers in our communities. These challenges are compounded by research suggesting that difficulty and dysfunction in children can have long-term consequences, including the precursors of adult conditions such as obesity, heart problems, mental health problems, criminality, family violence, substance abuse and social exclusion.

There are major implications of these findings for the training of paediatricians and other professionals, for the way services are organised and delivered in community settings, and for the evolving role of The Royal Children's Hospital, which has a long and proud

tradition of being at the leading edge of new developments in maintaining children's health and treating illness.

The Centre for Community Child Health was established in order to provide leadership to this increasingly important area of paediatrics.

I am proud to have led such an inspirational and innovative team that, in 1994, consisted of four people and has now grown to over 170 multidisciplinary staff.

The Centre's work – clinical, research and community programs – has had a major influence on policy development and service delivery at state and national levels. And, there is increasing interest from other countries. Our clinical approaches to common childhood conditions are now standard, while our long-established training programs in community child health have become models for paediatric training nationally.

I am pleased that the Centre has been able to attract and retain an outstanding group of people. Individually and collectively, they form an incredibly valuable resource for the hospital, the state and the country. The quality and commitment of our staff, together with our ability to draw on the expertise of and collaboration with individuals and departments within The Royal Children's Hospital and Murdoch Childrens Research Institute, constitutes a powerful platform for the Centre's efforts to make a difference to children and their families.

## **Frank Oberklaid**

Director, Centre for Community Child Health  
The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne

# About us

The Royal Children's Hospital (RCH) Centre for Community Child Health is committed to supporting communities to improve the health, development and wellbeing of all children.

Established in 1994, we work in collaboration with our campus partners – the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute (MCRI) and the University of Melbourne – to integrate clinical care, research and education in community child health.

We provide leadership in early childhood and community health at community, state, national and international levels, and are widely recognised for our clinical, teaching, research and advocacy programs.

We have close links with individual primary and secondary care practitioners and with their relevant professional organisations, including the Royal Australasian College of General Practitioners, Divisions

of General Practice, the National Child Care Accreditation Council, National Community Child Health Council, Australian Early Childhood Association and relevant Government Departments in health, education and family services.

# Background

The Centre was established at the hospital in 1994, building on the previous Department of Ambulatory Paediatrics, to provide an academic focus for community child health, and developmental and behavioural paediatrics. We also wanted to:

- increase the focus of community child health in paediatric training
- develop a research program incorporating both clinical and population health approaches to prevention and early intervention
- influence public policy and service delivery.



## Underpinning the Centre's work, we believe that:

The early years of children's lives have a significant impact on their physical, behavioural, educational and social development later in life.

Many conditions and common problems in children are preventable or can result in better outcomes if they are recognised and managed early.

The best results are achieved when professionals work in close partnership with parents who are supported and empowered to make the best choices for their children.

Supporting and strengthening community-based professionals and organisations ensures the best chance of good outcomes for children and their families.

Academic institutions can and should play a major role in contributing to public policy, as well as facilitating integration and continuity between preventive and curative health care, and between hospitals and community-based services.

Up-to-date research and evidence of what has shown to be effective and appropriate should inform policy formulation for children and families, the organisation and delivery of clinical services, professional practice, and parenting.

We have a responsibility to determine, using the most rigorous research designs, what prevention and early detection/intervention approaches work for children and families, and to document their benefits and costs.





# Structure

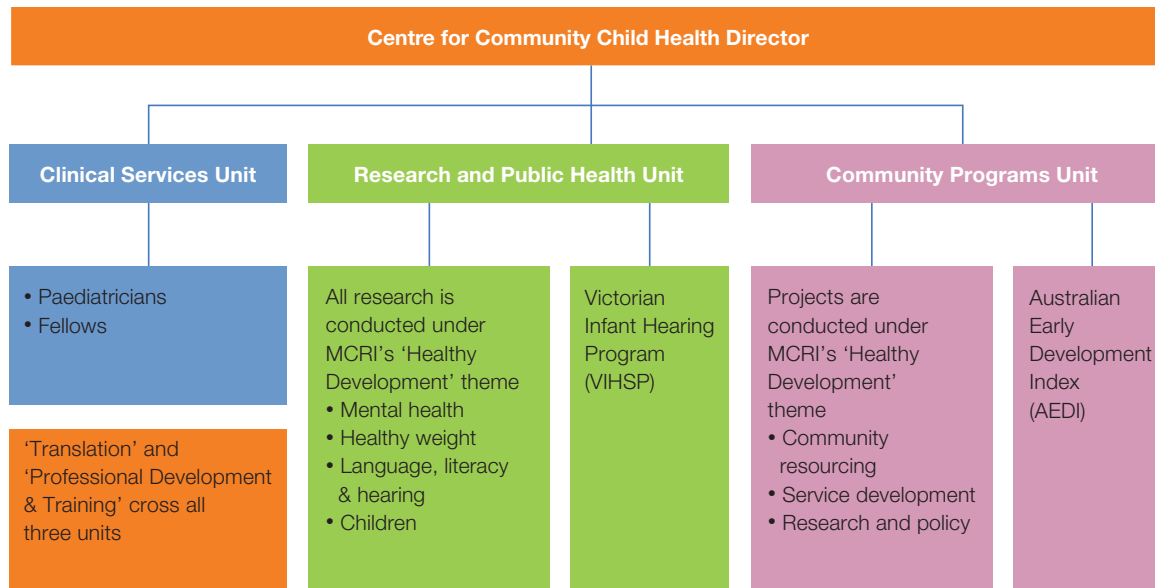
We are a 'vertically integrated' Centre – our research informs our clinical, translation and professional development work. We are made up of three closely linked operational units.

- Clinical Services
- Research and Public Health
- Community Programs

The research and community projects conducted through the Centre are a collaboration with Murdoch Childrens Research Institute (MCRI) – the Centre's research partner.

The translation and professional development work of the Centre crosses all three units.

Additionally, the Centre has developed, implemented, and manages two major programs: the statewide Victorian Infant Hearing Screening Program (VIHSP) and the national Australian Early Development Index (AEDI).





## Clinical services

Our Clinical Services Unit provides specialist clinics and specialist consultancy for children with a range of developmental and behavioural problems.

Weekly clinics include assessment and management of attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), learning difficulties and school problems, preschool developmental problems, communication disorders, unsettled babies, sleep problems, and enuresis and encopresis.

In 2010 there were eight advanced paediatric trainees in the Centre's training program in community child health.

Associate Professor Jill Sewell is the Director of Clinical Services and leads 16 paediatricians and the Centre's nationally recognised paediatric training program in community child health.



# Research and public health

A portrait of Professor Melissa Wake, a woman with short, curly brown hair, wearing glasses, a blue top, and a brown cardigan. She is smiling and looking towards the camera.

**Professor Melissa Wake is the Director of the Centre's Research and Public Health unit, leading around 40 researchers in both local and national projects, many of which started over a decade ago.**

We conduct research into conditions and common problems faced by children, particularly those that are either preventable or that can be improved if recognised and managed early.

The Centre's research projects are conducted under the 'Healthy Development' theme of MCRI. The Research and Public Health Unit is organised around four major themes, which also correspond with areas of research; these are:

- development, behaviour and mental health
- hearing
- language, learning and literacy
- obesity.

Our research agenda – focused on public health strategies, health promotion, prevention, early intervention, screening and early detection – is driven by emerging research evidence about the importance of the early years in setting a child's developmental trajectory and subsequent life course. We aim to gain a better understanding of the causal pathways and trends leading to development and behavioural problems in children in order to develop effective management strategies that can be employed in community settings.

## The Victorian Infant Hearing Screening Program (VIHSP)

There are over 100 Centre staff in the VIHSP team, working across Victoria. VIHSP is directed by Drs Zeffie Poulakis and Melinda Barker and expanded in 2010 to now screen the hearing of over 90% of Victorian newborns.



# Community programs

Mary Sayers is the Director of the Community Programs Unit, and leads a multidisciplinary team of over 40 professional staff working across across five areas: Community Resourcing, Service Development, Translation, Research and Policy and the Australian Early Development Index.

We are strongly committed to supporting and strengthening community-based professionals and organisations in their work with families. The Community Programs unit works closely with communities to help them bring about the best outcomes for children.





## Community resourcing

Community-based services are under increasing pressure to demonstrate the effectiveness of the programs they provide to improve child and family outcomes. Our community resourcing team evaluates programs, services and systems to help determine what works and what doesn't, and to assist in planning the future of early childhood programs.

## Service development

There is growing evidence that today's services need to be reconfigured if we are to achieve better outcomes for young children. Our service development team facilitates community partnership groups to develop tailored strategies that help local services work together to optimise the outcomes for children and their families.

## Australian Early Development Index

The AEDI, led by National Director Dr Sharon Goldfeld, aims to provide communities and policy makers with community level information about the developmental profiles of children at school entry; communities can use their data to develop and re-orient services and systems to improve the health, wellbeing and early learning of young children.

## Research and Policy

Led by Dr Tim Moore, Senior Research Fellow, the focus of the research and policy work is to search for, synthesise, and help translate the research evidence to enable governments, service systems and individual services to adopt policies that are based upon best evidence, best practice and program logic.



# Translation



Central to our mission to improve the health and wellbeing of children is our commitment to translating and disseminating research in order to:

- influence early childhood policy
- support parents in their important role
- assist professionals to support parents
- empower communities to strengthen and refocus services for young children and their families.

The Translation team works to translate the work of the Centre into practice via the Centre's three national peer-reviewed publications, the Centre-run websites, and by assisting the Centre's various teams with their translation activities and communications strategies.

# Professional development and training

We provide a variety of professional development opportunities as well as training for professionals who work with children across all three of our units.

## Research and Public Health Unit

- Let's Read training for family and child health nurses
- LEAP and HopSCOTCH training in managing children's obesity for general practitioners
- Infant Sleep training for family and child health nurses.

## Clinical Services Unit

The Victorian Training Program in Community Child Health provides a 12 month fellowship in community child health with funding from the Victorian Department of Health and the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing Specialist Training Program. All paediatric training positions are accredited by the Royal Australian College of Physicians for advanced training in community child health.

- Professional Development Program, an annual two-day workshop format for practising paediatricians
- The Centre's clinical staff are involved in regularly contributing to a variety of community and hospital lectures, seminars and professional development programs.

## Community Programs Unit

The Programs Unit conducts a range of courses and seminars aimed particularly at early childhood educators and carers and family and child health nurses, as well as professionals working with children, and local government. The Centre also offers an elective unit in child health as a component of Melbourne University's Masters in Public Health.

- Parents' Evaluation of Developmental Status
- Family Partnership training
- The R.E. Ross Trust Early Years seminars
- Integrated Service Development training and seminars
- Best Start Platforms training.



# Our recent work 2009–2010

The Centre for Community Child Health is part of more projects than we have room for on these pages. Please visit [www.rch.org.au/COCH](http://www.rch.org.au/COCH) for more information on our current and completed projects.



## Australian Early Development Index (AEDI)

The AEDI project set out to collect population data on children's development in their early years. Following a very successful pilot which commenced in 2004, the Australian Government provided \$24.5 million to collect AEDI data nationwide. In 2009 the AEDI was completed for 261,203 Australian children (98% of the eligible population) in their first year of full-time school.

Now for the very first time Australia has information about early childhood development in individual communities.

Data about five key areas of child development – such as physical development, language skills and communication skills – can be found as maps and reports on the AEDI website. Australia is the only country in the world to have national data of this type available to communities. The AEDI has been endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments as a national progress measure of children's development.

The Australian Government and State and Territory Governments work in partnership with our Centre and the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, Perth, to deliver the AEDI.

[www.aedi.org.au](http://www.aedi.org.au)





## APRN

Launched in 2007, the Australian Paediatric Research Network is a network of almost 400 practising paediatricians who are keen to contribute to new research that is relevant to both public and private practice. The network focuses on common paediatric problems and is committed to generating new knowledge, promoting better clinical practice and informing child health care policy and guidelines.

[www.aprn.org.au](http://www.aprn.org.au)



## Centre publications

The Centre produces three national publications: *Community Paediatric Review* (for family and child health nurses), *Childcare and Children's Health* (for early childhood educators) and *Policy Briefs* (for policy makers at local, state and national levels). The publications have a combined Advisory Board to provide input and direction, and then each publication has an Editorial Board to oversee the content of each issue and provide peer review. The publications are distributed as hard copies and are also available online.

[www.rch.org.au/ccch/resources.cfm](http://www.rch.org.au/ccch/resources.cfm)



## Baby Business

Infant sleep and crying problems are the most common reason parents present to health professionals in the first few months of life; these problems also double the risk of postnatal depression. Baby Business is a randomised controlled trial of a universal parenting program that is designed to prevent infant sleep and cry problems and associated maternal postnatal depression, in the first six months of life. The program aims to teach parents about normal infant sleep and cry patterns, sleep and settling strategies, and medical causes of prolonged crying. Baby Business is a joint project between the Centre and the Parenting Research Centre (Victoria).



## The Children with Hearing Impairment in Victoria Outcome Study (CHIVOS)

Internationally, CHIVOS is the longest population study of congenital hearing loss. Since it started in 1997, CHIVOS has assessed 88 children at 7–8 and 12–13 years. We are now determining what early factors most affect quality of life, language, academic skills, physical and mental health and life views at 17–18 years. CHIVOS has important implications for deaf children who are born today.

## Families in Mind

Families in Mind aims to help prevent externalising behaviour problems in the preschool child, such as oppositional defiance, hyperactivity and aggression. Families in Mind is a randomised trial that examines whether combining two programs – a brief group parenting program and a targeted one-on-one family support program (delivered by clinical psychologists and other trained health professionals) – is more effective than one program alone.

## Get up and Grow

In 2008–2009, we partnered with The Royal Children's Hospital's Nutrition Department and Early Childhood Australia to develop the Healthy Eating and Physical Activity Guidelines for Early Childhood for the Department of Health and Ageing. Get up and Grow aims to promote and support healthy eating and physical activity in young children in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services, and is part of the government's plan to tackle obesity. Get up and Grow consists of a suite of evidence-based resources to support ECEC staff; these include books written specifically for setting directors, staff and caregivers, cooks and parents, as well as parent brochures, posters and inserts for newsletters.



## Integrated Service Development

The Integrated Service Development project aims to meet the service needs of all Victorian children and families by developing sustainable integrated service models to individual children's centres. The project is based on the best international evidence and is also consistent with the Victorian Government's priorities outlined in the Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood development. To establish the Integrated Service Centres, we partner with community-based organisations, schools, local government and the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to work directly with service providers and early childhood practitioner services. This work is now attracting considerable national and international attention.



## HopSCOTCH

HopSCOTCH is a randomised controlled trial for a 'shared care' approach to weight management in children from age 3 to 10 years. The shared care approach involves GPs working with the RCH specialist obesity team. The trial aims to evaluate whether this approach to weight management is feasible in terms of both outcomes and costs.

## LEAP

The aim of the Live, Eat and Play (LEAP2) project is to trial a new strategy to reduce the weight of overweight Victorian primary children. It involved training GPs in healthy family lifestyle counselling and offering families in the 'intervention' group consultations to discuss lifestyle changes and supporting resources. The trial started in 2005 and the three year follow-up data collection was completed in 2010.



## Let's Learn Language

The early years constitute an important window of opportunity for effective promotion of language in children at risk of language delay. Of the many children who are slow to start talking, around a third will have language delay at age four years, often with lifelong consequences. The Let's Learn Language trial offers a community-wide program to parents of toddlers who are slow to speak. It aims to determine whether such a program can improve early language production, in the hope that this will reduce later language delay.

## Language 4 Learning

Our understanding of how language develops has changed considerably over the last three years. Researchers used to think that most preschoolers with language delay were late talkers as toddlers, however we now know that many of these children actually start talking at the usual age. Finding the children with language delays and offering help could provide them with a better start to school. The aim of Language 4 Learning is to trial a population approach to improve language and related outcomes in four-year olds with language delay. Language for Learning is a randomised controlled trial.



## Let's Read

Let's Read is a national initiative to promote reading with young children from birth to five years. Delivered in partnership with The Smith Family, Let's Read has a presence in 93 communities across Australia and has supported literacy development in over 100,000 families since its inception. In 2009–10 Let's Read developed a more sustainable approach to training community professionals, expanded its community presence, developed a discussion paper on engagement with Indigenous communities and completed several community evaluation reports.





## Linking Schools and Early Years

Our Linking Schools and Early Years project works with schools and communities to develop new models of working collaboratively to ensure that all children enter the formal education system ready to engage with their new learning environment. In 2009–10, the project welcomed investment from the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to build on the philanthropic support from The R.E. Ross Trust and the Foundation for Young Australians.

## Raising Children Network

The Centre is one of a three-member consortium that conceived, developed and manages the award-winning parent information website Raising Children Network (RCN), funded by the Commonwealth Government. The website has a growing repository of over 800 science-based and peer-reviewed articles on child health, mental health, behaviour and development. It also has additional information for parents of children with a disability and those with autism spectrum disorders. Its content caters to families from a wide range of backgrounds and abilities with graphic-rich and audio-visual materials such as *Parenting in Pictures* and videos. We have recently partnered with The Royal Children's Hospital's Centre for Adolescent Health to expand the website to include information on adolescence.

[www.raisingchildren.net.au](http://www.raisingchildren.net.au)



## State-wide Comparison of Outcomes (SCOUT)

The SCOUT study examines the costs, benefits and cost-effectiveness of detecting hearing loss early, either by universal newborn screening or by risk factor screening. It targets all children born with hearing loss in NSW and VIC between 2003 and 2005. SCOUT is a major collaborative research project funded by Australia's National Health and Medical Research Council and partners with a senior population child health economist from Deakin University.

## Sleep Well – Be Well

Australian studies have shown that sleep problems adversely affect a child's learning, behaviour and academic performance. However, the impact on these outcomes of improving sleep is unknown. The Sleep Well – Be Well trial is the world's first randomised controlled trial to address sleep problems in a child's first year of school. Commencing in 2008 in 22 Melbourne schools, a brief intervention – providing parents with simple behavioural sleep strategies and information about normal child sleep requirements – reduced child sleep problems and improved child emotional and social wellbeing and mental health symptoms.



## Tasmanian links

The Centre prides itself on its Australia-wide reputation. In 2009 we entered into a partnership with the Tasmanian Early Years Foundation and the Tasmanian Government to take the lead on the design and implementation of a Learning and Development Strategy to support the roll-out of up to 30 integrated Child and Family Centres across Tasmania. We also successfully tendered for the facilitation of a two-year Action Project for the Child and Family Centres project. Both the Learning and Development Strategy and the Action Research projects are funded by the Tasmanian Early Years Foundation. We now have a small team of staff working in Tasmania.

## VIHSP

The Victorian Infant Hearing Screening Program (VIHSP) screens the hearing of newborn babies with the aim to detect hearing loss early. The screen is performed by trained hearing screeners using standard technology and is most often done at the baby's bedside in the days after birth. Having established the service in all metropolitan public hospitals in 2008, 57% of Victorian babies (21,956) were able to be screened. In 2010 the program expanded to provide all maternity hospitals with hearing screening, allowing over 90% of Victorian infants to access VIHSP as of December 2010.

[www.rch.org.au/vihsp](http://www.rch.org.au/vihsp)



# Ongoing projects

For details of the following ongoing projects of the Centre, as well as our completed projects, please visit [www.rch.org.au/ccch](http://www.rch.org.au/ccch)

AEDI Process Evaluation

Australian Paediatric Research Network

Baby Business

Baptcare Learn, Play, Talk program

Best Start and local government evaluation projects

Best Start Evaluation Projects

Blue Sky research project

Children Protection Society evaluation of child and family program

Communities for Children evaluation and research support

Doveton Connect

Early Childhood Connections

Families in Mind study

Good Beginnings Australia Evaluation Redevelopment

Healthy eating

Infant Sleep Study

Let's Learn Language Study

Let's Read

Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (Growing Up in Australia)

Maternal Child Health – Key Ages and Stages evaluation

Moreland Healthy Children Project

Parent Education and Support (PEAS)

Platforms Service Redevelopment Framework

RCN Evaluation

Sleeping Sound with ADHD

START evaluation

Tasmania Child and Family Centre action research project

Toddlers Without Tears

Victorian Children Centres – Support for Integration



# Publications

Conducting comprehensive literature reviews is a key component of many of our research, policy and translation projects.

Regardless of the topic at hand, a detailed review and documentation of available literature and research evidence is often the first and most critical step in a successful project.

In the 12 months to December 2010, we published a total of 10 editions of the Centre's three publications: Policy Briefs, Community Paediatric Review and Childcare and Children's Health. The topics covered ranged from television and early childhood development, to cannabis use by parents, to grandparents and child care.

Staff at the Centre also publish extensively in a range of journals, reports and publications including Journal of Adolescent Health, Pediatrics, American Pediatrics, Early Education and Development and Paediatrics and Child Health.

[www.rch.org.au/ccch/resources.cfm](http://www.rch.org.au/ccch/resources.cfm)

## Congratulations

The Centre is proud of all of its staff and their achievements. In the past 18 months, our staff have been awarded numerous prestigious prizes, grants, tenders and fellowships that recognise the work the Centre carries out to improve children's health and wellbeing.

We have also been appointed to a number of esteemed positions on a variety of boards, trusts and councils, including government panels.

[www.rch.org.au/ccch](http://www.rch.org.au/ccch)

# Our partner organisations



We would like to thank our many partners and collaborators for their ongoing support of our work to improve children's health and wellbeing.

## Government

Australian Bureau of Statistics  
Department of Education (Tasmania)  
Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria), which includes maternal and child health and other early childhood services  
Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (Commonwealth)  
Department of Health (Victoria)  
Department of Health and Ageing (Commonwealth)  
Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (Commonwealth)  
Department of Premier and Cabinet – Children's Services (Victoria)  
Municipal Association of Victoria  
National Acoustic Laboratories  
Tasmanian Early Years Foundation

## Non government organisations

Children's Protection Society  
Community Child Care Victoria  
Foundation for Children  
Parenting Research Centre  
The R.E. Ross Trust  
The Smith Family  
Tasmanian Early Years Foundation

## Professional organisations

Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP)  
Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP)

## Corporate

Coles Baby Club  
Johnson and Johnson  
Orica  
Shell Australia

## Education Institutes

Australian Institute of Family Studies  
Education Institute, at The Royal  
Children's Hospital Melbourne  
Deakin University  
LaTrobe University  
Monash University  
Newcastle University (UK)  
RMIT University  
University of Adelaide  
University of British Columbia  
(Vancouver, Canada)  
University of California, Los Angeles –  
UCLA (US)  
University of Melbourne  
University of Otago (New Zealand)  
University of Pittsburgh (US)  
University of Toronto (Canada)

## Research Institutes

Telethon Institute for Child  
Health Research  
Menzies School of Health  
Research



## **The Centre for Community Child Health**

The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne

6th Floor, South-East Building

50 Flemington Road

Parkville, Victoria 3052

Telephone +61 3 9345 6150

Facsimile +61 3 9345 5900

Email [enquiries.ccch@rch.org.au](mailto:enquiries.ccch@rch.org.au)

[www.rch.org.au/ccch](http://www.rch.org.au/ccch)