

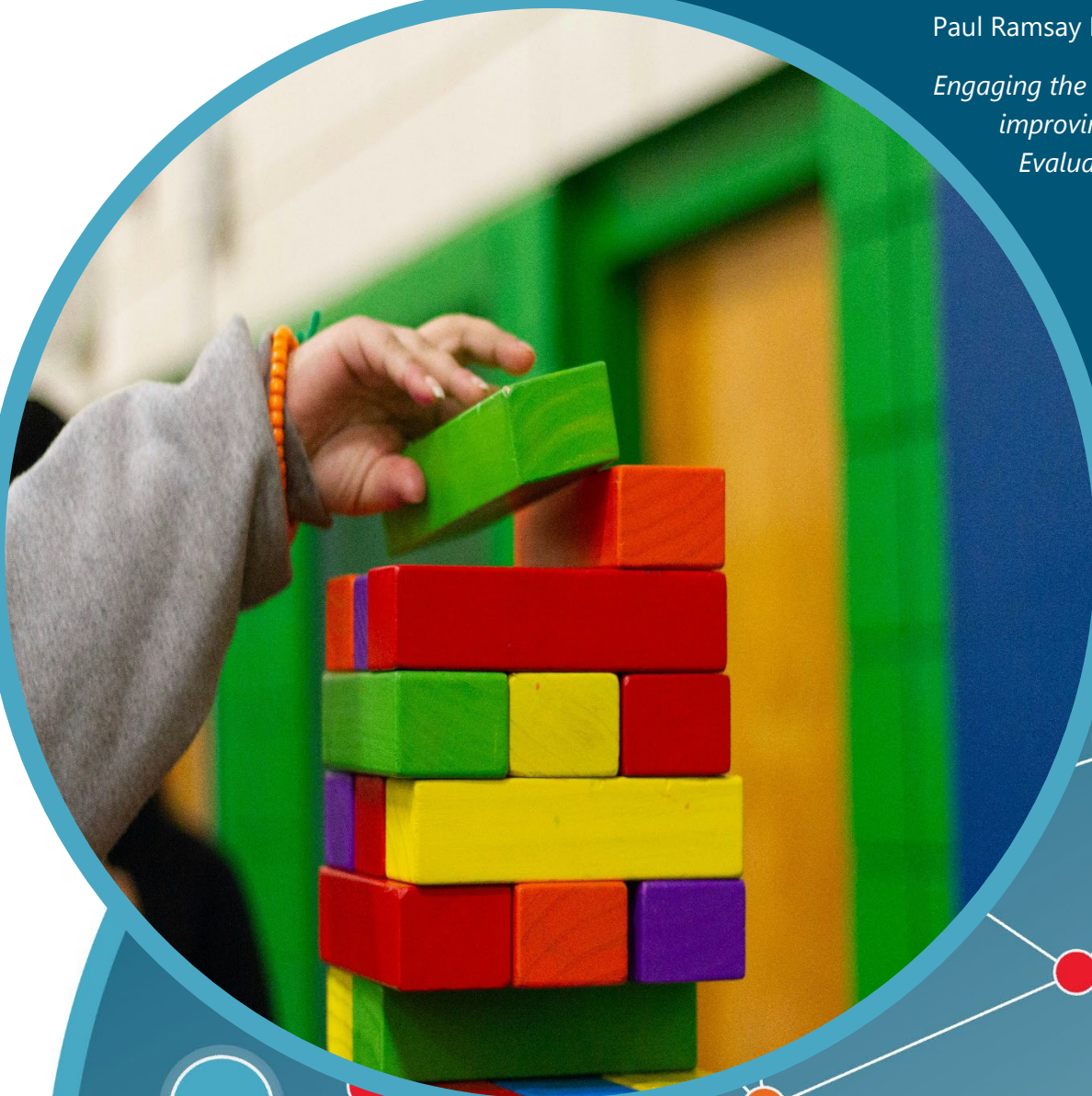


Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership Evaluation

Paul Ramsay Foundation

*Engaging the system and
improving evidence
Evaluation Report*

June 2024



Acknowledgements

This work was completed with the assistance of Kamila Davidson and Rowena Cann in the strategy and learning section of the Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership backbone team.

We would like to thank the many key informants from the Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership backbone team, and from across the system. We thank them for their time and insights and trust that their views are adequately represented in this report.

ARTD consultancy team

Kate Sunners

Imogen Williams

Dr. Emily Yorkston

Andrew Hawkins

Professor Tim Reddel (Institute for Social Science Research)

Dr. Miriam Yates (Institute for Social Science Research)

Simon Alaba



We recognise the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across this country and acknowledge their sovereignty was never ceded.

We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and acknowledge their continued custodianship and care for the many lands and waterways that support life.

We acknowledge the untold histories and the injustices of the past and the present. We respect the value and ongoing contribution that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples make to our communities and to wider Australia.

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Abbreviations, acronyms and common terms

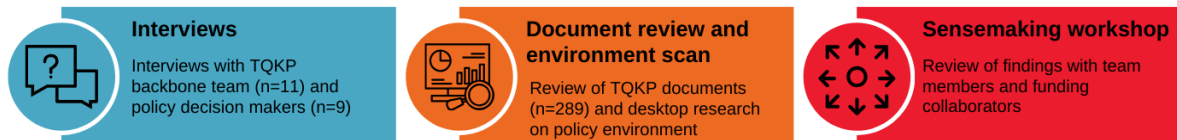
Acronym	Name
ARACY	Australian Research Alliance for Children and Young People
CoP	Community of practice
ECD	Early Childhood Development
GCSI	Griffith Centre for Systems Innovation
HWQld	Health and Wellbeing Queensland
ISSR	Institute for Social Science Research
PRF	Paul Ramsay Foundation
PQKF	Putting Queensland Kids First plan
QATSICPP	Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak
UQ's QBI	The University of Queensland's Queensland Brain Institute
QCYCN	Queensland Child and Youth Clinical Network
QFCC	Queensland Family and Child Commission
TPTK	Thriving Places, Thriving Kids Network
TKISSC	Thriving Kids Integrated Service Systems Collaborative
TQKP	Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership

Summary



Snapshot

What we did



What we found



What we recommend -----

Recommendation 1

Longer-term funding cycles are ideal to allow long-term planning, and to create greater confidence for partner organisations that investing in the work is worthwhile. The literature suggests 7-10 years.

Recommendation 2

TQKP should continue to develop and document its strategy around engagement with the Queensland Government and public, and key objectives for doing so.

Recommendation 3

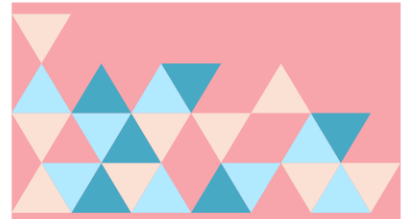
TQKP should update its strategy for how it plans to improve data and evidence in the system at a whole of TQKP level, and how it will measure success.

Recommendation 4

Grow resourcing for communications - including through co-delivery with partners, and continue to improve clarity and action-focus of communications.

Recommendation 5

Continue to consider lessons about influence on explicit, relational and transformative conditions for systems change in future planning.



Executive summary

The Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership

The Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership (TQKP) is an intermediary and coalition of leaders, organisations, practitioners and academics from across Queensland who work with the shared purpose of improving the conditions for children and young people to thrive.

TQKP was established in 2020, auspiced by the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Young People (ARACY). TQKP is currently focussed on 10 key initiatives and related projects, led and facilitated by a small backbone team. This work is funded by a group of philanthropies, and also receives funding from Queensland collaborators.

TQKP exists to drive systems change, and to address key systemic barriers – political, structural, cultural and operational – to improving child wellbeing. These key barriers were identified in the Joint Project on Systems Leadership and Wellbeing: Stage 1 Synthesis Report, and the Enabling children to thrive in Queensland and beyond: catalysing systems to change the odds, Paul Ramsay Foundation Fellowship Final Report.¹

TQKP's work is oriented around 6 'systems levers' and 8 'threads', used as key frameworks to orient planning and co-design of TQKP's Initiatives and actions. Each Initiative is designed to 'pull' one or more of the levers, and to use the threads to 'weave' systems together². These are complemented by other key frameworks and models, including ARACY's Nest Framework³ (Figure 2), Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University's 'ECD Principles 2.0'⁴, the Palix/AFWI's 'Resilience Scale'⁵, and the Centre for Child Community Health's 'Restacking the Odds'⁶.

¹ Hogan, M., Hatfield-Dodds, L., Barnes, L and Struthers, K (2021). Joint Project on Systems Leadership for Child and Youth Wellbeing: Stage 1 Synthesis Report. Every Child and Australia and New Zealand School of Government (ANZSOG), Australia. www.everychild.co

² Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership (2024) Queensland Place Based Rivermap. Available at: <https://www.aracy.org.au/documents/item/837>

³ <https://www.aracy.org.au/documents/item/700>

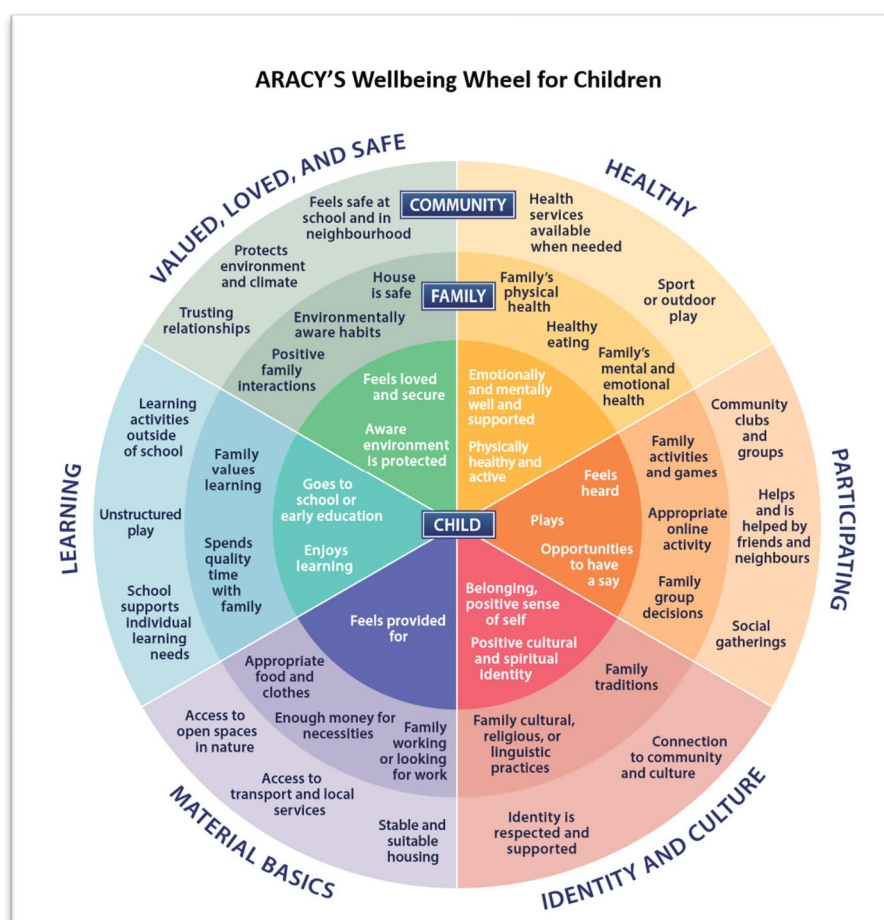
⁴ <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/guide/introducing-eed-2-0/>

⁵ <https://www.albertafamilywellness.org/what-we-know/resilience-scale/>

⁶ <https://www.rsto.org.au/>

Figure 1: TQKP Systems Levers and threads

Source: TQKP Queensland Place-based Rivermap

Figure 2: ARACY's The Nest Framework domains and wellbeing wheel

Source: ARACY (2021) *What's in the Nest?* <https://www.aracy.org.au/documents/item/700>

The evaluation

ARTD was commissioned by the Paul Ramsay Foundation (PRF) to evaluate TQKP between July 2022 and June 2025. This report covers July 2022 to May 2024. There are 4 key evaluation questions, of which, this report answers questions 2 and 3 bolded, below.

Table 1: Key evaluation questions by reporting period

Key evaluation question	Report
1. Overall, what evidence is emerging that organisations and parts of the system will be enabled to make sustainable changes for children, youth and families?	Evaluation report 2: Progressing systems change - October 2025
2. What methods are working best for engaging multi-sector (government, academic, not-for-profit) organisations as partners in TQKP?	Engaging the system and improving evidence (this report) – June 2024
a. What approaches are used by TQKP to catalyse the network, and which should be replicated in future endeavours?	Engaging the system and improving evidence – June 2024
b. What approaches are used by TQKP to align the values of various organisations worked well? What should be used in the future?	Engaging the system and improving evidence – June 2024
c. How effective are TQKP's communication methods at building knowledge and awareness and a pathway to action?	Engaging the system and improving evidence – June 2024
d. Which activities led to demonstrable improvement in the connectivity and capabilities of network members?	Evaluation report 2: Progressing systems change - October 2025
3. How should TQKP improve the use of data and evidence in the system?	Engaging the system and improving evidence – June 2024

a. What approaches worked (or are working) best for synchronising partners' measurements of outputs and outcomes?	Engaging the system and improving evidence – June 2024
b. What learnings can be obtained for collective measures that may inform a) future work of TQKP and b) future systems change work?	Engaging the system and improving evidence – June 2024
4. Do the agreed-upon measures of outputs and outcomes for TQKP (see Appendix 1) best capture the progress of TQKP?	Evaluation report 2: Progressing systems change - October 2025
a. How well is the Innovation and Development program of work for TQKP working to facilitate change within parts of the system?	Evaluation report 2: Progressing systems change - October 2025
b. What are the barriers and facilitators for TQKP's program of work to achieving large scale systems change?	Evaluation report 2: Progressing systems change - October 2025

This evaluation is being done independently of, but in parallel with an internal evaluation of the TQKP, which is being led by the TQKP backbone team (specifically the Lead of the Learning and Places team). The TQKP internal evaluation is focussed on monitoring change at various levels (systems change; portfolio; partnership; shared system measures), and while there are some areas of overlap, this evaluation is focussed on:

- whether (and how) TQKP is able to influence the policy or advocacy systems to produce wider systemic change
- what PRF can learn (and share) so that it can influence the policy or advocacy systems to produce wider systemic change.

This evaluation draws on some of the work done by the internal evaluators.

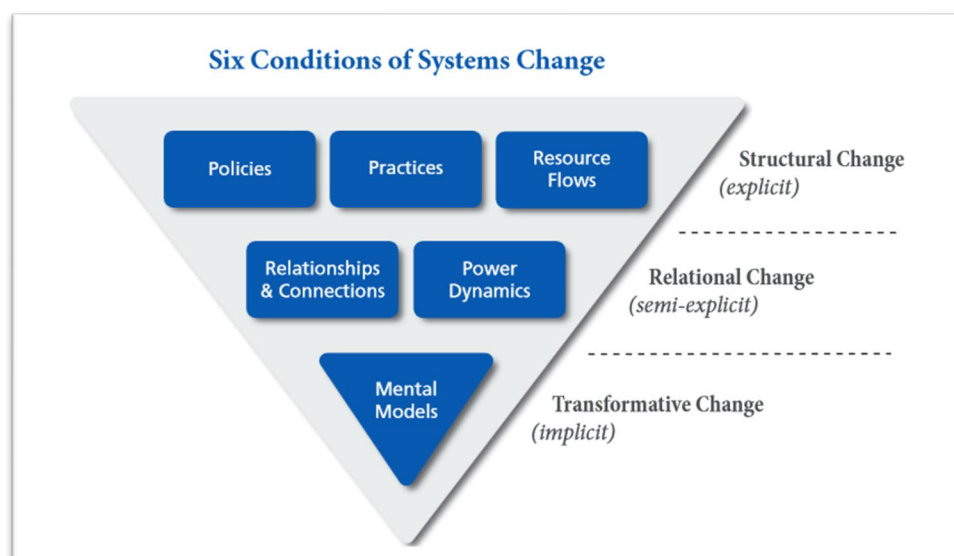
The focus of this evaluation report is to answer the 2 evaluation questions, and to do so concisely. TQKP's work is broad, at a systems-level and involves both formal Initiatives and informal relationship building and information sharing. The purpose of this evaluation is not to capture it all, but to showcase examples that highlight primary areas where engagement,

catalysis and improvements to data and evidence are being made. They are in no way an exhaustive list of where these achievements are happening throughout the portfolio – there are many more examples and datapoints we identified through review of the data which are not included for the sake of brevity.

Given TQKP is a systems-change initiative, there is a great deal of complexity and external forces which impact on the work and outcomes. We have tried to account for this context in our synthesis and framing of the findings.

Evaluation of systems change must consider different levels of systems change – the explicit conditions of systems change, the semi-explicit conditions of relational change, and the implicit conditions for transformative change as described in the 'Waters of System Change'⁷.

Figure 3: Shifting the conditions that hold the problem in place - six conditions of systems change



Source: Kania et al, 2018.

- **At the level of the explicit**, the questions are often about the appropriateness, efficiency and effectiveness of what was funded or done⁸ **(which is the focus of the 2 evaluation questions answered by this report).**
- **At the level of the semi-explicit** conditions of relational change, questions are often about how the quality of relationships between system actors have changed amongst those in the system, and how the system has grown over time **(which is the focus of**

⁷Kania, J., Kramer, M., Senge, P (2018) The Water of Systems Change, FSG.
https://www.fsg.org/resource/water_of_systems_change/

⁸ Hawkins, A (2024) How I ate an elephant – evaluating system change in bite size chunks, *Propositional Evaluation*. Available at: https://www.propositionalevaluation.org/post/how-i-ate-an-elephant-evaluating-system-change-in-bite-size-chunks#_ftn1

Chapter 2 of this report, and must be understood in order to answer questions at the level of the explicit).

- **At the deepest level of the implicit** conditions for transformative change, evaluation might seek to answer questions about how mental models or deeply held beliefs, values and assumptions are changing (**changing mental models were considered in analysis of data for this report, however data is limited at this stage of TQKP's maturity and consideration of this level will be more relevant in answering the question of the second evaluation report, scheduled for delivery in October 2025**).

Key findings

Table 2: Answers to key evaluation questions

#	KEQ	Answer
2	What methods are working best for engaging multi-sector (government, academic, not-for-profit) organisations as partners in TQKP?	Stronger engagement with TQKP is enabled by: • tailoring their approach to align with different interests and ways of working to overcome potential barriers to engaging in cooperative or collaborative efforts. Examples are working on collaborative programmes of research, translation, teaching and evaluation with universities and researchers, and pivoting to less formalised collaboration approaches with government • having key Initiative leads embedded within other organisations so as to be able to draw on their sector profile and networks • creating a collaborative environment of trusting relationships through co-design and collaboration on Initiatives and other activities. This is influenced by TQKP being seen as a neutral actor due to their philanthropic funding. It is also due to TQKP showing the knowledge and expertise of systems actors is valued by reflecting it back in summaries and outputs, which then allow another opportunity for input through review. A factor inhibiting stronger engagement is the limited resourcing and platforms for digital communications.
2a	What approaches are used by TQKP to catalyse the network, and which should be replicated in future endeavours?	• Having partners lead and co-facilitate Initiatives has created greater reach and opportunities. • TQKP is both strategic as well as responsive and opportunistic to what's capturing the interest of the system or sub-systems, which allows TQKP to capitalise on areas where energy and focus lies, and 'plug-in' to existing networks and resources. • TQKP is responsive to opportunities that help to increase their reach:

#	KEQ	Answer
		○ TQKP takes the approach of being open to all while also strategically targeting key systems issues and actors ○ being flexible about when things are delivered and responsive to the system. ● TQKP's learning and development activities are helping to build awareness, knowledge and pathway to action. The Thriving Kids Framing Initiative (the Framing Initiative) and Brain Building/Development Modules both stand out as having a measurable effect on knowledge and confidence, and in shifting mindsets and practices.
2b	What approaches are used by TQKP to align the values of various organisations worked well? What should be used in the future?	The key approaches and frameworks used by TQKP which are working well to align thinking and goals of system actors are: ● systems levers – which help people understand how systems work and how to think about systems and apply it to their own context ● The Nest Framework – which provides a shared language around wellbeing domains for children and is increasingly used by systems actors to help shape practice and outcomes frameworks ● co-production processes – which provide a container for trusting relationships to be built, for people to hear each other's views and to come to a consensus.
2c	How effective are TQKP's communication methods at building knowledge and awareness and a pathway to action?	● See answer to KEQ 2a and 2b (engagement methods and communication methods cannot meaningfully be disentangled either to differentiate one from the other or in terms of their impact) ● Communications is an area TQKP can work on strengthening, and needs additional resourcing for. ● There are examples of communications efforts being undertaken collaboratively with partners – who are effectively acting as an additional communications resource on specific pieces of work.
3	How should TQKP improve the use of data and evidence in the system?	There are two ways TQKP works to influence and improve how data and evidence are used in the system: ● through activities with a focus on building better data (both qualitative and quantitative, including lived experience) and

#	KEQ	Answer
		evidence– these are focussed on ‘pockets’ of the system such as Hubs and other place-based initiatives through an approach to all Initiatives which builds in training and capacity building in data and evidence, and opportunities to learn from each other. Rather than working to create and get uptake of shared measures across the ‘system’, TQKP should continue work facilitating adoption and embedding of shared outcomes frameworks (e.g. The Nest) as well as building better data and evidence systems within sub-systems. By continuing to build capacity and capability to use existing evidence, TQKP is also building the foundational knowledge needed for system actors and organisations to engage in the activities focussed on building better data and evidence systems. TQKP should continue to build on this two-pronged approach, which is well suited to the maturity of the system, and the diversity and scale of the ‘system’ TQKP works to influence.
3a	What approaches worked (or are working) best for synchronising partners’ measurements of outputs and outcomes?	- TQKP’s works across the Initiatives, learning and development and other activities to familiarise people with The Nest Framework and the systems levers, and support them to apply these in their context. This is TQKP’s strongest approach to synchronising the measurement of outcomes by system actors, because they provide shared concepts and structures, without limiting the application of local context, and do not require the overhaul of existing data practices and indicators. The collaborative design of Initiatives, strategies and actions provides a place to practice their use. - From an initial focus on data infrastructure at the systems level through the Thriving Kids Data Roadmap, TQKP has pivoted to working to improve capability and identify better strategies for measurement and sensemaking in ‘pockets’ of the system as well as influencing the ‘whole of system’ level. This dual approach is more likely to see results and provide measurement approaches that are relevant for decision making because these sub-systems: - are smaller in scale and therefore more feasible to influence within current resourcing - are ones in which TQKP has strong relationships and traction through its portfolio of work - have shared characteristics and goals, making it simpler to identify overlaps and opportunities for

#	KEQ	Answer
		improvements to and synchronisation of outcomes measurement ○ provide a less complex environment in which to test different data collection and outcomes measurement approaches, and be able to assess their effectiveness.
3b	What learnings can be obtained for collective measures that may inform a) future work of TQKP and b) future systems change work?	• Clarity on 'the system' that is the focus for intervention, including the actors and institutions, boundaries and agreed purpose of the system by these actors, is fundamental to defining measures of success. TQKP works to influence all service systems, organisations, individuals and communities which impact on any of the domains of child wellbeing defined in The Nest. It also explicitly takes an 'open arms' approach, which means that the boundaries of the 'system' which TQKP works to influence are to a large extent defined by the sectors and actors in the system who are willing to work with them. This means that the boundaries of the system are likely to continuously grow and shift as actors move in and out of engagement with TQKP, or in and out of roles which permit them to collaborate with TQKP. For these reasons, shared or collective measures are not well suited at the level of the 'system' TQKP is working to influence. • At a system of this scale and complexity, the development and use of shared indicators/measures faces many challenges. It is more feasible that TQKP (and other similar interventions) can influence the commitment of actors to improve their use of contemporary data and evidence in decision making, and use shared dimensions (i.e. The Nest Framework) in monitoring and evaluation activities. To measure this influence will require a strategy with goals and targets, and a monitoring and evaluation plan that can capture changes in organisations' use of The Nest Framework⁹ in framing their data collection, analysis and decision making, as well as changes in decision-making processes and practices in relation to data and evidence use. • There may still be value to having shared indicators alongside a continuous learning approach at a smaller scale – within 'pockets' of the system which have shared characteristics, goals and operating environments (as is the case with Hubs and place-

⁹ Ibid

#	KEQ	Answer
		based initiatives). This is possible to the extent that there is buy-in from the actors in these subsystems. • There is a long period of building the shared language and capabilities of systems actors needed before being able to converse in the same language about collective measures.

Implications and recommendations

The data and evidence of this report is suggestive of several actions that can be taken in relation to TQKP over the next year to improve its chances of influencing changes in the system.

The evaluation shows TQKP’s efforts in relationship building and co-designing led to a significant amount of action from committed partners at the end of 2023. To sustain this and provide certainty to partners who are investing time and resources into the work, **longer-term funding cycles are ideal.**

If the ‘system’ for intervention is defined as extensively as ‘Queensland’, **a revised and documented strategy for how to engage with Queensland Government** and public servants, key objectives for doing so, and plans for achieving objectives is likely to provide clear direction for the backbone team. It may also help better identify what is working in engaging this cohort and why, and deliver stronger engagement outcomes.

A strategy (across all Initiatives and activities) for how TQKP intends to improve data and evidence in the system will help to provide clarity for the backbone team, funders and collaborators on what will be done, by whom and when, to achieve what outcomes for whom.

Greater resourcing for communications is necessary now and as the Initiatives continue to grow their reach and mature, and the number of organisations involved in TQKP increases. It is a particularly important function during key policy windows, and greater resourcing will allow for responsiveness to these opportunities, without losing momentum on other projects.

TQKP has impacts at different levels of the system (as identified in Figure 3). These levels interact in non-linear ways generating outcomes that are not generally predictable, meaning it is not usually possible to draw causal links between one level of the system and the others.

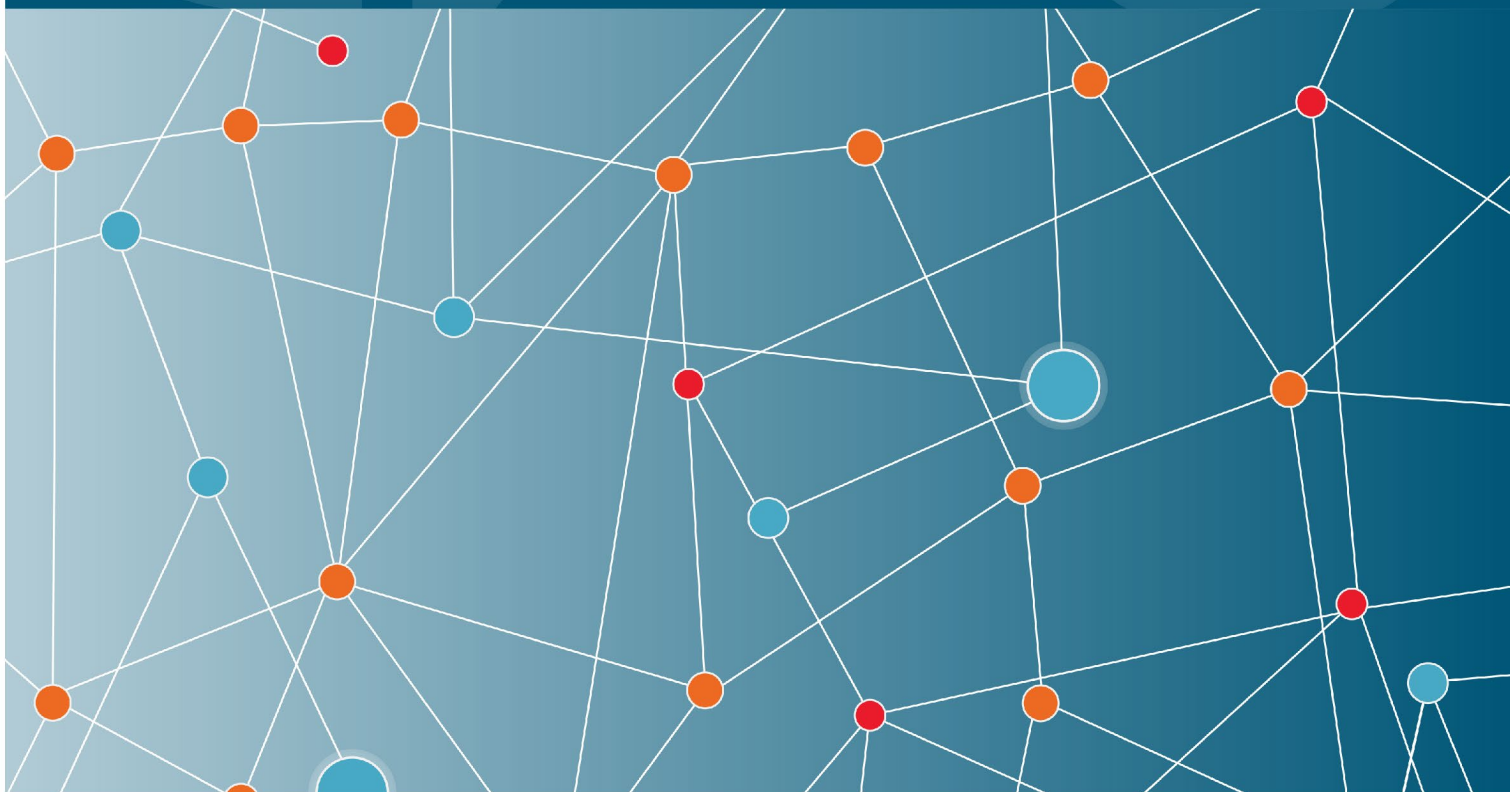
It also means actions may appear unconnected in a simple sense, but logical from a systems perspective, and using this lens **TQKP could focus on 3 levels of systems change.**

- **At the level of the explicit conditions of systems change:** The goal for work with the 'pockets' or sub-systems TQKP engages with (or are in TQKP's sphere of influence) should be to:
 - generate successful outcomes (such as in the use of data for decision making), which can be used as case studies for larger change efforts
 - create advocates or 'ambassadors' of TQKP's work
 - result in an expansion into TQKP's larger sphere of interest.
- **At the level of the relational conditions of systems change:** TQKP should aim to maximise the number of new people entering their networks who report that they are engaging more and better with other people aligned to their common interests.
- **At the level of the transformative conditions of systems change:** TQKP should continue to work to shift the understandings and priorities of systems leaders and key actors across the government, non-government, tertiary, corporate and philanthropic sectors; and challenge deeply held beliefs, values or assumptions that are limiting outcomes for children.

At the level of the whole system actions should generally focus on *the most fundamental level of systems change* (Figure 3) *where there is an opportunity for feasible action that may have consequences.* Given that TQKP's system boundaries are defined by The Nest, but the opportunities for intervention are determined in large part by those willing to work with TQKP, the opportunities are constantly shifting. This requires a degree of responsiveness from TQKP alongside the planned activities. Identifying these opportunities and the level at which actions are best targeted is reliant on the practice knowledge, experience and expertise of those involved in TQKP combined with systems thinking. This is a strength of how TQKP operates.

It is also critical to continue to learn and adapt from what has been most successful to expand the sphere of influence and drive further change.

Report



1. Introduction

1.1. Background

There is consistent evidence across disciplines including neuroscience, developmental psychology, education and economics showing social and economic disadvantage in childhood has an impact on longer term health and wellbeing outcomes.¹⁰

The ways in which early experiences affect a child's later mental and physical development, predisposition to health conditions and life outcomes are now more clearly understood.¹¹ Critically, it is recognised that the impacts of adverse childhood experiences in early childhood create cumulative negative impacts, so this is the most effective window in which to change outcomes for the better.¹²

Parents' capacity to invest in their children also impacts on development. Engaging parents through integrated services and family supports enable the learning to be strengthened at home, reinforcing language development, social skills and cognitive and non-cognitive functioning.¹³

Early childhood is a crucial window of opportunity for intervening to improve life outcomes, given the plasticity of children's brains from birth to 3 years old. Policymakers and service sector efforts are increasingly underpinned by an understanding of the efficacy of intervening early in a child's life, with a range of initiatives being trialled and scaled across Australia.¹⁴ Despite these efforts, the numbers of children involved in the child protection system — an obvious indicator of disadvantage in childhood — continues to increase, with overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.¹⁵ Children continue to

¹⁰ Moore, T (2006) Early Childhood and long-term development: The importance of the early years, ARACY.

¹¹ Moore, T.G., Arefadib, N., Deery, A., Keyes, M. & West, S (2017) *The First Thousand Days: An Evidence Paper – Summary*. Centre for Community Child Health, Murdoch Children's Research Institute

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Jeong J, Franchett EE, Ramos de Oliveira CV, Rehmani K, Yousafzai AK (2021) Parenting interventions to promote early child development in the first three years of life: A global systematic review and meta-analysis. *PLoS Med*. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8109838/>

¹⁴ For example, the NSW Government's Future Directions Early Childhood Education Services, place-based programs, community-led collective impact programs such as Logan Together and Connected Beginnings, national awareness raising strategies [led by DSS](#), parent support and education resources such as the Raising Children website, and programs delivered in schools and other institutions such as Our Place.

¹⁵ Department of Social Services (2021) *Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031*, Commonwealth of Australia Available at: https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/12_2021/dess5016-national-framework-protecting-childrenaccessible.pdf

'fall through the cracks', i.e. the gaps between and within systems, between lived experiences and expertise and policies and practices, and the lag between 'science to service'.

TQKP is a collective impact and systems approach that aims to address these and other gaps and achieve better outcomes for Queensland's children and young people (0-24 years), their families and communities by acting as a connector, catalysing and amplifying existing and new initiatives.

The Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership

TQKP is an intermediary and coalition of leaders, organisations, practitioners and academics from across Queensland who work with the shared purpose of improving the conditions for children and young people to thrive. It was established in 2020 by the ARACY and Michael Hogan, former Director-General of the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services. Funded by a group of philanthropies, the TQKP has been implemented in 2 phases.

- **Phase 1 (2020 to 2022):** Key partners were engaged in co-designing and developing a plan for TKQP, resulting in funding for Phase 2.¹⁶
- **Phase 2 (July 2022 to mid 2025):** Activities designed to influence policy and advocacy systems to produce wider systems change.

The key objectives for Phase 2 are:

- improving the connectivity and capabilities of leaders and change agents to steward systems and facilitate learning and adaptation
- improving the connectivity and capabilities of workforces and organisations to contribute to child and adolescent development, especially neuro-capability
- improving capabilities and capacities of caregivers and communities to contribute to healthy child and adolescent development
- improving systems strategies that contribute to child and adolescent development
- TQKP is sufficiently mature to accelerate and augment efforts to impact population level outcomes from 2025 onwards.

TQKP's work and approach are broadly aligned with key strategies of the Queensland and Australian Governments around child and family health and wellbeing, including the Queensland Government's Putting Queensland Kids First Plan¹⁷, the National Children's

¹⁶ Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership (2022) TQKP 2021-2022 End Phase 1 Report.

¹⁷ Department of Premier and Cabinet (2024) Putting Queensland Kids First, Queensland Government. Available at: https://www.qld.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0030/486039/putting-qld-kids-first.pdf

Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy¹⁸, and the national Early Years Strategy¹⁹. Its work has also had direct influence on some of these strategies.

TQKP's work is oriented around 6 'systems levers' and 'threads' which are used as key frameworks to orient planning and co-design of Initiatives and actions (Figure 1).

There were 10 Initiatives identified at the beginning of Phase 2 of TQKP (Figure 4). The Thriving Kids Data Roadmap has since evolved into other work on data and evidence under other Initiatives and activities.

Figure 4: Phase 2 Initiatives



Source: TQKP. 2024. 'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Future: Partnering for childhood building.' Presentation: Early Years Conference, May 2024.

1.2. This evaluation

PRF contracted ARTD to evaluate TQKP. The evaluation has 2 overarching purposes.

- Purpose A: Whether (and how) the partnership was able to influence the policy or advocacy systems to produce wider systemic change
- Purpose B: What PRF can learn (and share) so that it can influence the policy or advocacy systems to produce wider systemic change.

¹⁸ <https://www.mentalhealthcommission.gov.au/projects/childrens-strategy>

¹⁹ <https://www.dss.gov.au/families-and-children-programs-services/early-years-strategy>

These were operationalised as specific key evaluation questions (see Table 1).

This evaluation is being done independently of, but in parallel with an internal evaluation of the TQKP, which is being led by the TQKP backbone team (specifically the Lead of the Learning and Places team). This evaluation draws on some of the work done by the internal evaluators.

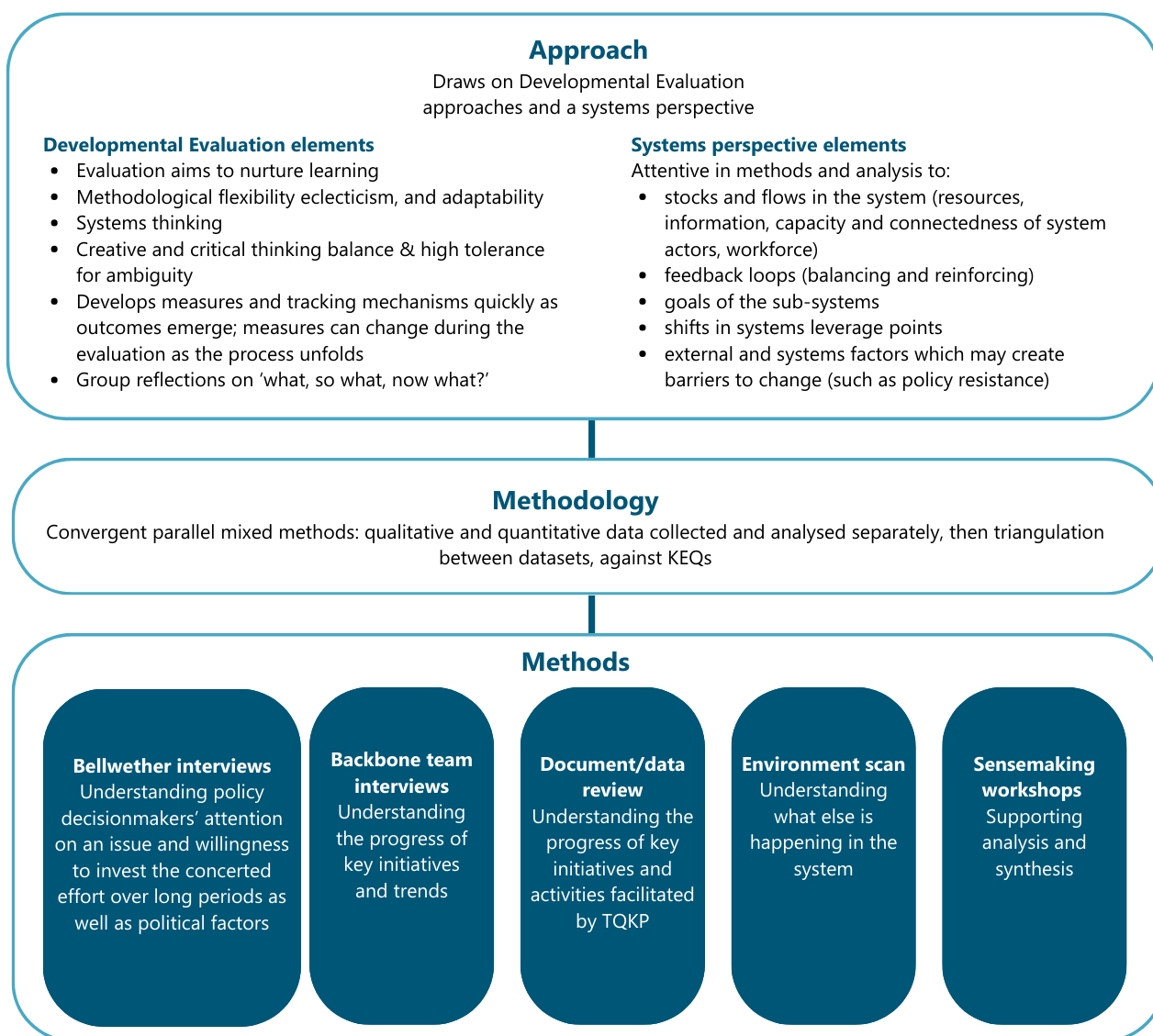
This report

In order to capture and share learnings in a timely way to inform the next period of TQKP's evolving practice and programs, this report focusses on answering KEQ 2a-c and KEQ 3 (see Table 1). The report focuses on the period between July 2022 and May 2024.

A future report (October 2025) will focus on answering KEQ 1, 2d and 4.

Methodology

The evaluation takes a mixed methods approach drawing on elements of developmental evaluation approaches and a systems perspective to answer the key evaluation questions.

Figure 5: Evaluation approach, methodology and methods

We analysed each dataset (Table 3) and reviewed findings across datasets, triangulating between data sources to pull out key findings. Key findings were discussed in a sense-making meeting with the TQKP backbone team to identify gaps, contextualise findings, and ensure findings are accurate.

Table 3: Analysis method by data source

Data source	Analysis method
Documents and datasets (n=289) including: Initiative, activity, event and meeting reports and artefacts; event survey feedback; Funding reports;	• Review of documents against dimensions of a rubric designed to help us answer key evaluation questions.

Data source	Analysis method
Publications; Policy submissions; Research outputs; Notes from project meetings with ARTD, Institute for Social Science Research (ISSR) and TQKP team members	- Review of survey responses in Excel for patterns and themes, and organisations and sectors involved in Initiatives. - Review of patterns and themes against other datasets.
De-identified partnership survey data collected by TQKP in 2023 as part of their monitoring, evaluation and learning processes	Descriptive statistics and analysis of data by various characteristics to assess for patterns. - Responses about what engagement with TQKP has led to by number of Initiatives engaged in. - Number of Initiatives engaged in by organisation type. - Number of Initiatives engaged in by sector. - Review of qualitative responses for themes. - Review of qualitative and quantitative data against other datasets.
Targeted and limited environment scan	Desktop research and review of Queensland Government policy documents, TQKP and Initiative participants/partners' LinkedIn posts, other Queensland collective impact initiatives and lessons from these. These were searched for and used as supplementary evidence or corroborating evidence to support analysis.²⁰
Interviews with TQKP backbone team staff (n=11) of 45-minutes	2 rounds of thematic coding – deductive (using codes relating to dimensions of the rubric) coding of each interview, review of commonalities and differences. - Review of themes against other datasets.
Interviews of up to an hour with individuals (n=9) in decision or policy	Thematic coding of each interview, review of commonalities and differences between participants.

²⁰See Appendix 3 for list of documents reviewed

Data source	Analysis method
making roles, using a Bellwether methodology ²¹	Review of themes against other datasets.
Sensemaking workshop with TQKP backbone team and stakeholders from Hand Heart Pocket (philanthropic funder)	Review of findings with team members and funding collaborators, adding deeper understanding of context and richness from group insights.

1.3. Limitations

Given TQKP is a systems-change initiative, there is a great deal of complexity and external forces which impact on the work and outcomes. We have tried to account for this context in our synthesis and framing of the findings.

The focus of this evaluation report is to answer the evaluation questions, and to do so concisely. TQKP's work is broad, at a systems-level and involves both formal Initiatives and informal relationship building and information sharing. The purpose of this evaluation is not to capture it all, but to showcase examples that highlight primary areas where engagement, catalysis and improvements to data and evidence are being made. They are in no way an exhaustive list of where these achievements are happening throughout the portfolio – there are many more examples and datapoints we identified through review of the data which are not included for the sake of brevity.

There are also more organisations involved in TQKP Initiatives and activities than are numbered in this report, however we have kept the focus to those who are highly engaged (i.e. through working groups, in co-design or similar), and have drawn primarily on data from document review to identify these (which means some of the data is not current).

Challenges for this evaluation are that TQKP is an emerging and novel entity as an intermediary, and that during the period of this evaluation TQKP was recruiting to fill its team while also co-designing Initiatives. The evaluation was designed before it was clear what data TQKP would be collecting and in what formats. This has made it difficult to understand what data might be available for this evaluation, necessitating some adaptation of methods throughout.

Additionally, TQKP has run its own evaluation alongside this one – with a different focus but the same stakeholders as were intended to be participants of the ARTD evaluation – and it was not always possible to synchronise periods of data collection or combine our collection

²¹ <https://archive.globalfrp.org/evaluation/the-evaluation-exchange/issue-archive/advocacy-and-policy-change/evaluating-an-issue-s-position-on-the-policy-agenda-the-bellwether-methodology>

tools. Decisions were taken not to overburden TQKP's stakeholders with requests to participate in 2 sets of surveys and interviews, and instead to rely on the data provided by TQKP's 2023 Partnership Survey. This survey did not measure the strength of or change in levels of collaboration between specific organisations as was the intention of the ARTD survey.

All of these factors have meant the data available for this evaluation was more limited than expected, however is still sufficient to answer the key evaluation questions. The one exception is that we do not have sufficient data to answer sub-question 2C about the 'efficacy of communication methods in building knowledge, awareness and a pathway to action' if 'communication methods' is taken to mean communications through TQKP's digital platforms (e-newsletters, social media, campaigns with partners etc). However, there is an overlap between what could be understood as engagement and what as communication, and the answers to Questions 2A and 2B do provide sufficient insights about what is working in terms of engagement methods (collaborative efforts, events, relationship building efforts etc) to build knowledge, awareness and a pathway to action.

2. State of engagement and the system

To answer key evaluation question 2 about what methods are working best for engagement, we first need to understand the state of engagement, and model how engagement occurs with TQKP. These are explored in this section.

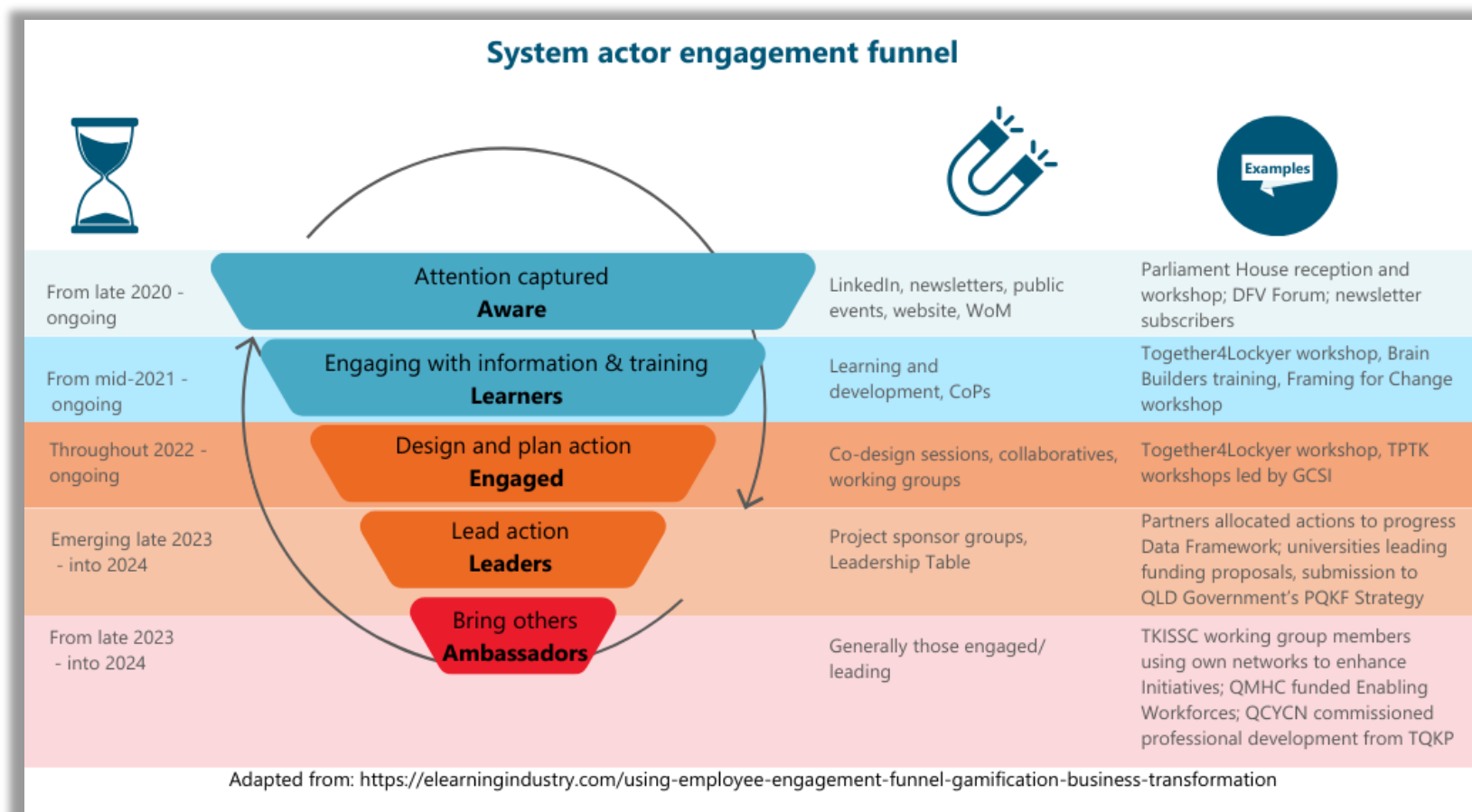
2.1. TQKP has deepening engagement from system actors

"I spent my early time really getting that stakeholder mix right and getting them around the table. The next part of what we did was to create relationships and trust that we could then use to inform creating a shared agenda, so that's obviously taken time to be able to do well. We've convened a range of meetings now, collaborative meetings, all these deep dive events. I have a strategic leadership committee that oversees [Initiative], and you know, there's been a little bit of attrition, but it hasn't been the primary story. In fact, the main thing I've had is additional people wanting to join." – TQKP backbone team member #8

Since Phase 2 began, there has been progressively deeper engagement of system actors in learning and development activities, Initiatives and working groups from becoming aware of TQKP's work, to leading actions and acting as ambassadors.

The progressive engagement of actors over time in the period of July 2022 – May 2024 is described in the below engagement funnel (Figure 6). The levels in the funnel are descriptive of engagement over time, but multiple levels of engagement can happen in one instance of engagement too. For example, some learning and development sessions (e.g. a workshop or webinar) are moving people from learners to being engaged in co-design. The model also describes the circular nature of involvement, where someone may be an ambassador on one Initiative but only just becoming aware of or learning about others. As TQKP is maturing and moving to a more action-oriented phase of its development, we'd expect to see system actors engaged at all of these levels from 2024 onwards.

Figure 6: System actor engagement funnel



Timeframes to progress from initiation of relationships to actors committing to progressing actions independently are quite analogous to what we have observed in an evaluation of another similar initiative. This initiative also had a backbone team, competitive relationships and trust issues to overcome, and similar issues with workforce availability and skill which impacted the sectors they were working into. The initial 18 months of funding for the analogous Initiative saw a similar pattern to TQKP of achieving:

- the set up of an effective backbone team capable of bringing their own relationships and networks to support the work
- building collaborative relationships among system actors
- collaboratively designing strategies and actions
- piloting a few smaller scale initiatives which provided early successes to build the confidence of system actors in working collaboratively
- and starting to see action and early outcomes at the 18-month mark.

2.1.1. Engagement is occurring despite external forces

TQKP has been able to drive engagement – both deeply and broadly - despite barriers created by sectoral resource constraints and changes in government.

Resource constraints were named by respondents to the TQKP partnership survey as a key barrier for system actors to engaging (especially for non-profit organisations). Of the 27 responses²² to a question about barriers to becoming more engaged with TQKP, 15 were about the lack of time, the inability to add additional things to an already busy workload, and lack of paid resources or resources.

Table 4: Barriers to becoming more engaged with TQKP

Barrier to engagement	Number of respondents who mentioned this
Current workload, other commitments or time pressures	13
Staff are voluntary	1
Lack of resources	1

Source: TQKP 2023 Partnership survey

²² 'Nil' or 'nothing' responses not counted.

Despite the constraints – and, based on feedback from the TQKP backbone team, in many cases because of the frustrations and moral injury of operating with these conditions – non-profit organisations are the largest cohort engaging with TQKP Initiatives (see Table A 1 in Appendices).

The change in Premier in late 2023 led to a machinery of government change, and a refreshed cabinet ministry. The Government has focussed on responding to youth crime.²³ This emphasis was evident in Bellwether interviews. These showed the relationship between decision makers' appetite for sustained effort toward policy change, and the current educational, social and political context. For example, those who saw youth justice as being a key policy issue in Queensland and observed this to be at odds or disjointed from their own policy space, subsequently reported less appetite for sustained effort towards long term policy change to address systemic challenges such as intergenerational disadvantage affecting specific populations and communities. Despite this, engagement from government is high, with document review showing engagement of representatives from 8 (of the 22) Queensland Government departments²⁴ in Initiative working groups, briefings on Thriving Places, Thriving Kids Network (Thriving Places, Thriving Kids) and the Queensland Place-based Rivermap. More have since been engaged through the Childhood Builders' Enabling Workforces and Organisations project, and the Integrated Systems' Thriving Kids in Disasters project.

2.2. A diversity of system actors are more connected than before

"We wouldn't have set up the working group and had that type of engagement with some of the early years thinking and understanding within the context of corporate services like Goodstart or even C&K [Childcare and Kindergarten Association], or others, we wouldn't have had those relationships nor that voice into our work [without being a TQKP Initiative lead] I think that's been really important. We certainly wouldn't have had the relationship with Tim Fairfax Foundation without TQKP having that sort of brokerage of that relationship." – TQKP backbone team member #1

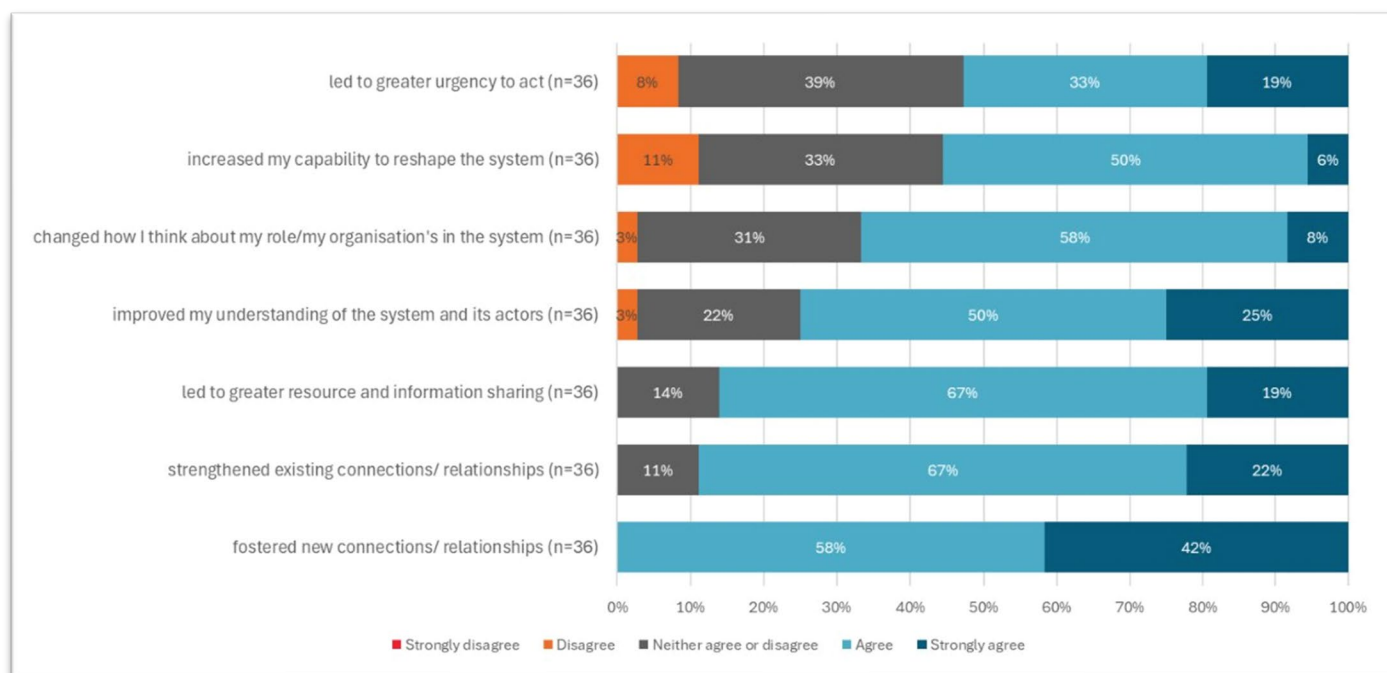
²³ Queensland Government (21 February 2023) Putting community safety first with tougher action on youth crime and its causes [media release], Queensland Government. Available at: <https://statements.qld.gov.au/statements/97218>

²⁴ One of these no longer exists as its portfolio has been divided among other departments.

System actors are, through their involvement in TQKP Initiatives, working with people they would not normally work with, and are more connected across issue areas and sectors than before Phase 2 of TQKP.

This is evident in the TQKP 2023 Partner Survey, where almost all respondents said their engagement within TQKP had increased their network or deepened their connections with their current network, and led to greater resource and information sharing (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Survey responses to the impact of engagement with TQKP



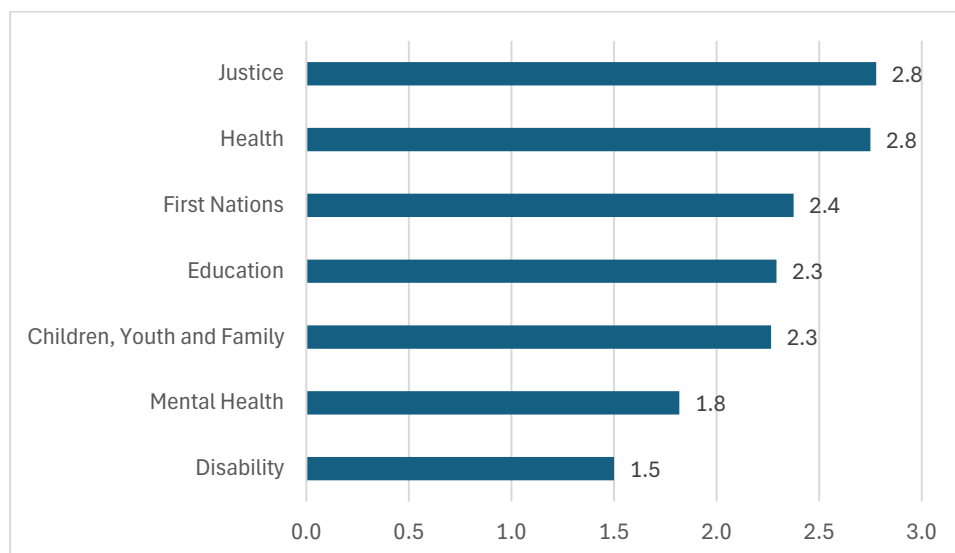
Source: Partners and collaborator responses, TQKP 2023 partnership survey, conducted September – October 2023.

Evidence of the strengthened cross-sectoral connections can also be found in the number and diversity of types of organisations and sectors who are engaged within TQKP working groups, or co-design of strategies or actions. Our document review identified 139 unique organisations (not counting different agencies within departments, or schools within universities) who are active on the working groups or in co-design, across 22 organisation categories (Table A 1). Many of these organisations are involved in multiple Initiatives. Peak bodies, universities, state government and statutory bodies are the most engaged groups by number and in terms of the average number of Initiatives they are involved in (Table A 1).

There is also a diversity of organisations by issue area involved in Initiatives, with the greatest self-reported engagement in terms of the number of Initiatives by those working in health and justice (Figure 8). Interviews with backbone team members suggest that being involved within TQKP is challenging the thinking of government stakeholders to think outside their particular portfolio:

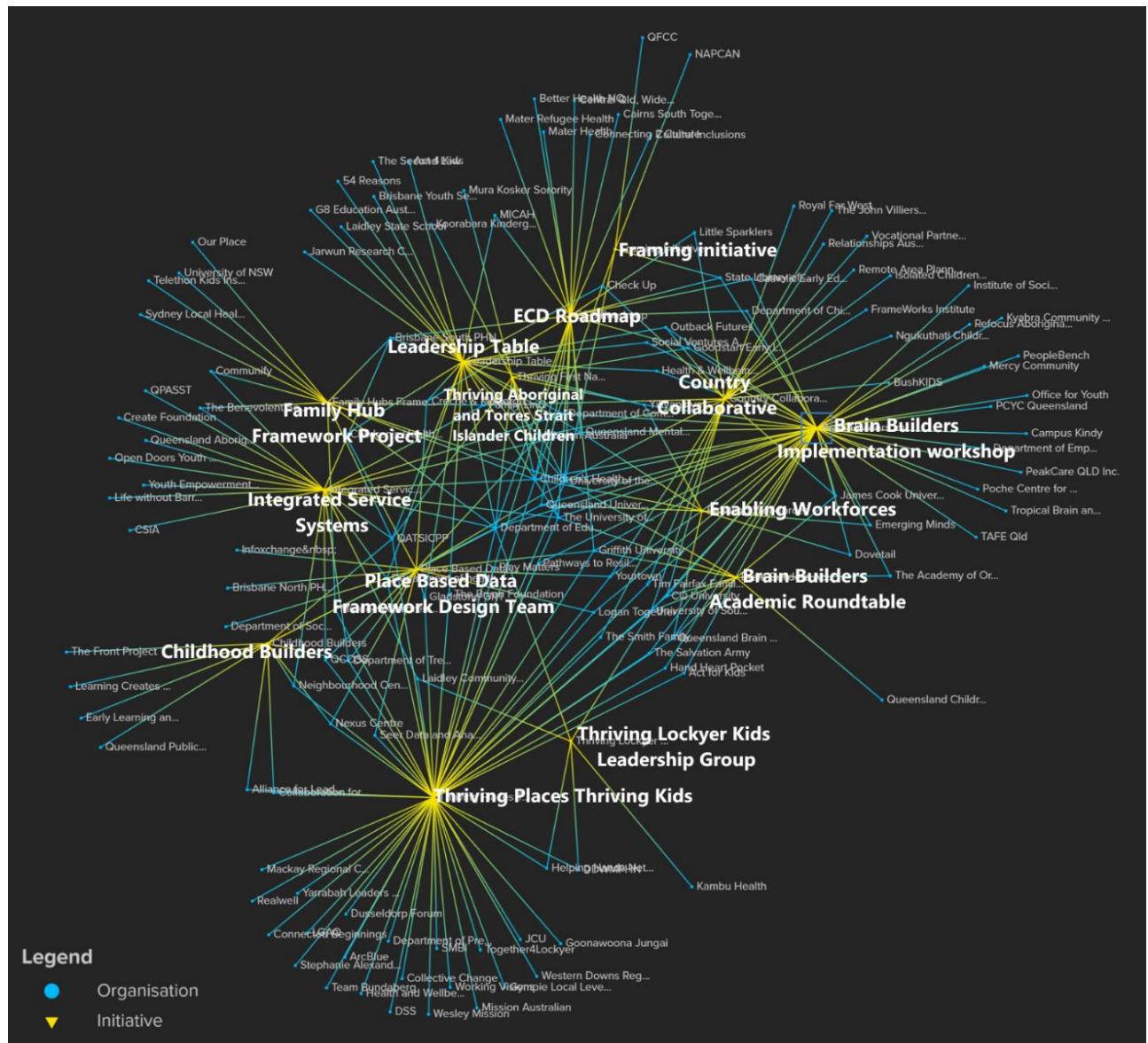
"For some... they have a more of a holistic view on things and being a part of Thriving Kids lets them see beyond their own agenda and connect with departments, with organisations that they probably wouldn't even consider to be important to connect with." – TQKP backbone team member #10

Figure 8: Average number of Initiatives engaged in, by self-reported area (n=73)



Source: Self-reported area and number of Initiatives engaged in: TQKP 2023 partnership survey, conducted September – October 2023. Note: respondents could select more than one system so one respondent may be counted across multiple.

The connections between organisations and Initiatives are illustrated in Figure 9 (organisations are blue nodes, Initiatives are yellow points of convergence). Given the collaborative nature of these working groups and co-design workshops, we can also assume connections between the organisations engaged in each initiative (not shown).

Figure 9: Organisations engaged with TQKP Initiatives*

Source: names of organisations involved in TQKP Initiatives and co-design efforts, based on review of TQKP documents, dated from May 2022-June 2024. Inclusive of Thriving Places, Thriving Kids; Early Childhood Development (ECD) Better Systems Roadmap; Childhood Builders Initiative; Leadership Table; Thriving Kids Integrated Service Systems Collaborative; Family Hubs Framework Project; Thriving Lockyer Kids Leadership Group; Enabling Workforces; Brain Builders Academic Roundtable; Brain Builders Implementation Workshop; Thriving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children Initiative Working Group; Place Based Data Framework Design Team; Thriving Kids Strategic Framing Initiative; Thriving Queensland Kids Country Collaborative Initiative (Country Collaborative).

*Note: this does not capture the entirety of the organisations who are connected with TQKP – which anecdotally in May 2024 was around 500. These are just those documented as being on the above-named working groups in documents available at the time of this report.

3. What methods are working best for engaging multi-sector organisations as partners in TKQP?

"I think we've also made people feel very valued in that process so that their input is worthwhile, and we've found ways to bring in people that not necessarily been involved in things in the past. It used to always be the same sort of departments around the table and the same sort of conversations." –
TQKP backbone team member #4

TQKP's approach involves providing opportunities for co-design and collaborations in all that they do and providing a common language and frameworks through the systems levers, threads and The Nest Framework. They also tailor their approach to align with different interests and ways of working of different sectors to overcome barriers to engaging in cooperative or collaborative efforts.

3.1. What approaches are used by TQKP to catalyse the network, and which should be replicated in future endeavours?

Catalysts speed up, make active or cause reactions or events. TQKP's Initiatives, learning and development activities, and ways of working are doing all of these things, some examples of which are provided in Table 5.

Table 5: Examples of catalysis

Initiative/activity	What was catalysed
Thriving Kids Strategic Framing Initiative (Framing Initiative)	Workforce and organisational capability in using strategic framing increased through multiple workshops, webinars ongoing community of practice, resource development and coaching.

Initiative/activity	What was catalysed
	• Collaboration across 35 community of practice members, prompted peers support in each other's work and co-created resources on framing play for Children's Week. • Key statutory body used framing in external reports • A practitioner and workforce trainer used learnings to improve communication of sleep resources shared on a national platform and in tertiary curriculum. • One large organisation that operates early years programs across Queensland used learnings from the training and community of practice to rework and develop several resources for use in communities and with partner organisations across Queensland. • One partner reviewed a report using learnings from the Framing Initiative training.
ECD Better Systems Roadmap (ECD Roadmap) and ongoing conversations with Queensland Government	• Conversations with multiple departments about the ECD Roadmap, and the Roadmap itself preceded and informed the Putting Queensland Kids First Plan, the first Whole of Government strategy focussed on the wellbeing of children in the early years. The plan itself responds to TQKP's call for a new whole of community, cross-sectoral early years plan by mid-2024 as part of the ECD Better Systems Roadmap. TQKP engaged with key portfolios to influence the final plan. • The ECD Roadmap was used by NGOs, legislative bodies and government departments as a basis for their submission and as a consistent messaging strategy in the short consultation window.
Childhood Builders Initiative (Childhood Builders)	• Co-developed a Gladstone Region Childhood Builders program that brought together partners from The University of Queensland's Queensland Brain Institute (QBI), Yillyapinya, ARACY with Gladstone Region engaging in action Together (GRT) to implement a program that supports participants to learn how to operationalise an integrated suite of evidence-based wellbeing, family

Initiative/activity	What was catalysed
	engagement, brain building, resilience and trauma-informed systems frames and tools. This was supported by funding from Rio Tinto.
Thriving Kids Brain Builders Initiative (led by Queensland Brain Institute)	• Training/resources on brain neuroscience being embedded into TAFE and university course curriculum. • Has led to several collaborative funding applications led by universities/researchers, including successfully seeking funding for several projects focussed at embedding brain neuroscience in early years and schools. • Queensland Child and Youth Clinical Network approached TQKP and UQ's QBI to co-design and facilitate a professional development day for members. This was delivered early 2024, in addition to Brain Builders Community of Practice sessions held twice a month in partnership with Children's Health Queensland's Project ECHO (a virtual knowledge sharing model).
Thriving Kids Integrated Service Systems Collaborative	• TQKP's Hubs Framework has been used as the basis for a practice framework for the joint Department of Education/FamilyLinQ hub at Kingston State School. • Led to a practitioner and workforce trainer being more aware of the need for warm handovers through the perinatal period, which has led to shifts in her practice.

Creating a collaborative environment of trusting relationships (in a system many TQKP backbone team members characterised as historically competitive) has been key to getting the network to commit to action. TQKP are intentional about doing this by:

- positioning themselves as a neutral actor in the system (helped by being philanthropically funded)

- spending time understanding what is 'getting in the way' at a systems level for their partners and those who are engaged, as well as their ambitions for systems change, and shaping projects around these
- being respectful, transparent and having credible individual team members
- using quality tools and methods to lead and facilitate co-design
- creating opportunities in everything they do for input and co-design from system actors
- valuing the knowledge and expertise of systems actors by reflecting it back in summaries and outputs, which then allow another opportunity for input through review.

"We don't have positions we've just dreamt up ourselves, it's come from one of those collaborative fora" – TQKP backbone team member #5

This work, by its nature, takes time.

In terms of their strategic approach, there are 3 things which TQKP is intentional about doing, which work to increase their reach and potential for catalytic action.

1. Having partners lead Initiatives, with a TQKP lead embedded in other organisations. This has created numerous relationships that did not previously exist, harnessing the relationships of both TQKP and the lead organisations. This has included relationships with funders which would not have otherwise existed, with national bodies, and with sectors who are otherwise unlikely to have been involved with lead organisations.
2. Being responsive and opportunistic to what's capturing the interest of the system or sub-systems enables TQKP to capitalise on areas where energy and focus lies (for example with the current focus on and interest in place-based initiatives at a state and federal level), and 'plug in' to existing networks and resources (such as the work of Nexus). They are also responsive to opportunities that increase their reach (e.g. Framing Play for Children's Week resources co-designed by the CoP and developed by TQKP and Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC) for distribution by QFCC during Children's Week).
3. TQKP takes an approach of being open to all, while also strategically targeting key systems actors (including through snowballing – asking key people to bring in others). TQKP has created an open and safe space for large numbers of organisations and individuals to involve themselves to the degree they are able, however TQKP also work to strategically form relationships with actors and leaders in the system to help to ensure the necessary people are involved at the right levels to drive systems change. An example of this is their continuous effort to engage the Queensland Department of Premier and Cabinet, and to drive engagement with organisations and actors who may not have previously been involved in these kinds of conversations or collaborative efforts.

"We've had some of those conversations about 'have we got the right people around the table?'...really thinking about making sure we're not just tapping the same people on the shoulder to participate...thinking about people that might not be at the table is just as critical as those who are at the table..." – TQKP backbone team member #3

3.1.1. What's working with targeted approaches

The work TQKP does to strategically target the key system actors who have a high degree of influence to shape the system is important to its ability to drive the outcomes for the system and children that it was set up to achieve. Some of these actors may not of their own accord engage with TQKP's more 'open' and invitational approaches described in the top layers of the system actor engagement funnel (Figure 6). More work sometimes needs to be done to create trust and an approach to engagement which is suited to the motivations, priorities and barriers of these actors.

"One thing that I think is essential and that my colleagues have done really well is the groundwork they are doing in the regions....a lot of 1-on-1, reaching out leaders within the sectors we're trying to reach and creating those individual relationships....the effectiveness of those efforts...has been evident in the workshops...which have had really high uptake and engagement across the state." – TQKP backbone team member #11

A key theme that stands out from the targeted engagement approaches discussed below is the importance of having Initiatives led by partners, who have the knowledge and experience of the motivations of their sector and colleagues to drive engagement where it may otherwise be difficult for TQKP to gain traction.

Engaging with Queensland Government

TQKP's approach to engaging with the Queensland Government has been multi-pronged, including the 'open to all' approach described above as well as:

- Statements of Collaboration and MoUs with individual departments and statutory bodies
- an approach to two Premiers, and the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, about whole of government Memorandums of Understanding with TQKP and the Queensland Kids Funders Alliance (in 2023, prior to the change of Premier), which have not yet been successful
- leveraging existing relationships held by TQKP backbone staff, and government staff engaged in Initiatives to engage department staff and leadership

- undertaking joint work with or commissioned by agencies and statutory authorities, including:
 - with the State Library of Queensland on *First Five Forever* materials;
 - with the Queensland Mental Health Commission on their Trauma Strategy background paper and the Enabling Workforces and Organisations project
 - with Queensland Family and Child Commission, which hosts the Strategic Framing Initiative
 - with Children's Health Queensland, to utilise the Project ECHO platform for the Brain Builders Community of Practice
 - with the Queensland Child and Youth Clinical Network to engage practitioners from 16 Hospital and Health Services in professional development
- responding to opportunities for input on policies, including Putting Queensland Kids First, and the forthcoming Trauma and Mental Health and Wellbeing strategies.

Reflecting on why a whole of government MOU approach was not successful, the TQKP backbone team felt that this came down to timing and personalities, as there has been more engagement since the new Premier was sworn in. Another key barrier is that there aren't precedents for partnering with an intermediary body like TQKP. It is also likely given governments' generally low risk appetite, that TQKP needs some time to mature and deliver results before Queensland Government is comfortable partnering under a whole of government MOU or in other formalised ways, other than at individual agency and authority levels.

Having found the whole of government MOU approach was not yielding results, TQKP refocussed its efforts towards more direct **informal engagement** of public servants and leadership, especially with a 'briefing' approach, with invitations to departmental representatives. This approach has seen more success, for example with the below approaches held in the first quarter of 2024:

- an Enabling Workforces briefing attended by representatives from 8 departments (32 Queensland Government participants), and subsequent workshop attended by 7 departments (23 Queensland Government participants). The materials for this briefing explicitly identify how TQKP's work on Enabling Workforces will support implementation of several key Queensland Government strategies, addressing a key motivation for public servants
- a Queensland place-based Rivermap briefing attended by representatives from 7 departments
- a series of Thriving Kids In Disasters workshops.

The TQKP backbone team identified some key barriers to engagement with Queensland Government, including:

- where departmental cultures are closed, protective or competitive
- where there is a view of government's role and relationships as primarily one of procurement, not partnership or co-production
- bureaucratic structures (such as permission requirements to formally engage).

A key enabler is that public servants generally share similar aspirations for children and families wellbeing to others within TQKP.

The key approach, which resulted in policies becoming more aligned with TQKP goals, was around relationship building, co-designing and providing the Queensland Government with a documented strategy to improve early childhood development (the ECD Better Systems Roadmap), and responding as a coalition of organisations to the Queensland Government's draft Putting Queensland Kids First (PQKF) plan.

Alignment between Putting Queensland Kids First Plan and TQKP ECD Better Systems Roadmap and submission

"We had a Queensland early years plan, but it was out of date, and it was really only one agency, was the Department of Education, so we didn't have a system systemic approach to early child development... so we convened a working group, we got Accenture to do a piece of work for us, a systems diagnostic piece. And then through co-design and co-development wrote a draft road map on key systems reforms and the key investments. I think we nudged the government to do something in this space, so they create a little task force in the Premier Department to develop what's now come out as the Putting Queensland Kids First draft plan." – TQKP backbone team member #5

"There's direct linkages that the people that were involved in the writing of that [Putting Queensland Kids First Strategy] at DPC are people we had collaborative relationships with and we had shared that Roadmap with so there's a tangible mechanism, I guess to suggest that there has been a relatively direct influence there." – TQKP backbone team member #2

- A first draft of the ECD Better Systems Roadmap went to multiple government departments in October 2023, and briefings were held with the Department of Premier and Cabinet, Health and Education in late 2023.
- In January 2024, TQKP submitted the ECD Better Systems Roadmap to the Queensland Government, for consideration in budget planning processes. This identified priority actions for Government against the 6 systems levers and priority investments against the domains of The Nest Framework.
- In January 2024, the Queensland Government released a draft strategy, *Putting Queensland Kids First* (PQKF), for consultation. This is the first Queensland Whole of Government child development plan.
- In February 2024, TQKP submitted its response to the draft strategy, celebrating that it was a whole of government development plan, which links to social and economic outcomes, and acknowledges key risk and protective factors that support/get in the way of children thriving. The response also pointed out the strategy was not sufficiently cross-sectoral and whole of community, nor explicitly ecological, and that it lacked a focus on key system settings: leadership; workforce; data; public engagement; benchmarking; and how the Strategy is intended to interact with other strategies/plans. This was signed by 16 TQKP collaborators from 14 different organisations²⁵, and TQKP received feedback from

²⁵ Signatories to TQKP's PQKF submission: Darling Downs and West Moreton PHN; Laidley District State School; Brisbane South PHN; University of the Sunshine Coast; The Bryan Foundation; University of Southern Queensland; Act for Kids; Community Hubs Brisbane; Queensland Brain Institute; Brisbane Youth Service; Yiliyapinya Indigenous Corporation; Hand Heart Pocket Foundation; Play Matters Australia; QUT.

other organisations that they drew on what was in TQKP's submission to guide their own submissions, including a statutory authority.

- In June 2024, the *Putting Queensland Kids First Plan* was launched, accompanied by a funding announcement of \$501.9 million²⁶. This directly references and draws on ARACY's The Nest Framework in its framing of what it means to 'put Queensland kids first'. TQKP is working to try and embed The Nest Framework across the system to provide a shared understanding of and language around the domains of child wellbeing. The Plan also addresses most of the points of the TQKP response to consultation: it makes explicit the link between PQKF and existing services and strategies – including workforce strategies, notes investments in a partnership fund to collaborate with NGOs and ACCOs, as well as identifying there will be an evaluation and reporting plan. It does not identify benchmarking. There is strong alignment between many of the TQKP's top 10 investment priorities and opportunities from the ECD Better Systems Roadmap with the investments laid out in the Plan, including: in pregnancy care including home visits and health checks; child development information and services in priority locations; family and early years school-based Hubs; access to basics; funding additional early childhood education and care workforce; housing; a focus on First Nations family wellbeing and partnerships with ACCOs and NGOs to support culturally responsive services; extending free kindy in priority locations. There is no discrete funding for play – which is a key part of The Nest Framework and a recommended investment in TQKP's ECD Better Systems Roadmap.

Engaging with the First Nations sector and communities

There are several aspects to TQKP's engagement with First Nations organisations, leadership and communities which are critical to gaining and maintaining engagement and trust among First Nations people. These are:

- committing to having the work be truly First Nations led by:
 - having First Nations leadership on both the TQKP Leadership Table and Management Board
 - embedding Initiative leadership for the Thriving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children Initiative within The Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak (QATSICPP), a First Nations organisation, with a First Nations project lead
 - supporting Yiliyapinya to accelerate their Deadly Brains initiative, and to advance a First Nations-led brain health agenda at systems levels

²⁶ Queensland Government (02 June 2024) Miles Government makes Queensland kids a priority [media release], The Queensland Cabinet and Ministerial Directory. Available at: <https://statements.qld.gov.au/statements/100469>

- engaging a First Nations researcher to map and report on key strategies, operating context and aspirations for First Nations children, families and communities.²⁷
- supporting First Nations ways of working in consultation and development of the Thriving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children Initiative by:
 - supporting a structure that allows for collective ways of working (embedded with QATSI CPP location and team rather than within TQKP backbone team and offices)
 - being open to a reframe of the TQKP systems levers to make them culturally relevant
 - being flexible with timing (for example delaying planned community consultations to allow space and time after the Referendum outcome)
 - valuing First Nations ways of knowing, being and doing and working to integrate these into other efforts, to benefit non-Indigenous children and families.

Universities and researchers

Key to engagement and action in this space has been the leadership by an academic research institution (UQ's QBI) on the Thriving Kids Brain Builders Initiative, an approach involving the engagement of multiple researchers in developing the Brain Building/Development Modules curriculum and resources, and inviting research leaders to define future actions in advancing applied neuroscience and child development. There is also representation from several universities on TQKP Initiatives and Leadership Table.

To engage researchers, UQ's QBI hosted a Brain Builders Academic Roundtable in July 2023 to identify and build research collaborations with a view to building research and development focused on applied neuroscience and child development in Queensland. Thirty research leaders attended from 10 institutions, and identified key actions which were to drive cross-disciplinary and collaborative research underpinned by a clear, unifying vision for action. TQKP has since reported being contacted in early 2024 to provide a greater number of letters of support than in 2023 for numerous Medical Research Future Fund and Education Horizon grant applications.

Interviews with backbone team members suggest that while there's been success in creating collaboration at the level of individual researchers and institutes, there is still work to be done in engaging leaders of universities at the most senior level, to create an institutionally backed research and development collaborative. This continues to be challenging because of the way universities and research is competitively funded.

²⁷ Barnett, L. May (2023) Queensland's Progress on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Wellbeing.

3.3.2 Training is helping to improve knowledge and confidence, and is translating to changed practice in some cases

The Framing Initiative and Brain Building/Development Modules both stand out as examples of longer-form training (more than one instance of training) which are having a measurable effect on knowledge and confidence, and in shifting mindsets and practices.

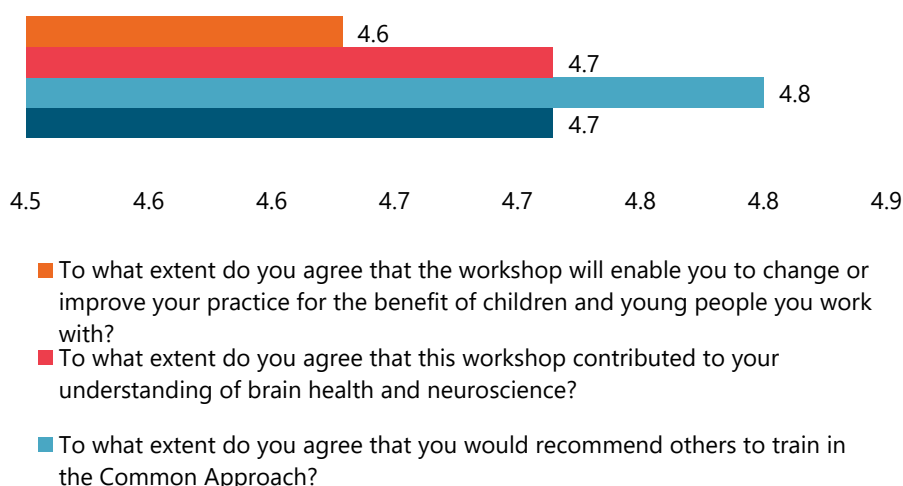
The Framing Initiative involved an initial training workshop, followed by 6 meetings of a Community of Practice. The learnings from these meetings were quickly applied: several organisations re-worked some of their existing communications and practices around the framing principles and; the Community of Practice co-designing a suite of resources with TQKP backbone team members and the QFCC for Children's Week.

"Engaging in the Words that Work – The Core Story has motivated our team to reassess the relevance of our framework and strive for a revised version" – CoP participant²⁸

The Brain Building/Development Modules is an online course with 4 modules, which requires a commitment of 4-6 hours. The survey of participants shows a positive change for more than half of all participants in their understanding of key aspects of child brain development and what can positively or negatively impact on it, and an increase in confidence in their understanding and confidence in applying this in conversations with families.

Similarly, Childhood Builders training (in Inala), while only a one-day training was also effective in improving knowledge and supporting improvements to practice.

Figure 10: Average score (0-5) given by Childhood Builders training (Inala) (n=35)



²⁸ Brown, N (2023) QFCC Reporting to Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership 1 April – 15 December 2023, TQKP.

Source: Childhood Builders – Inala training evaluation report, TQKP

3.1.2. Catalysis is sometimes about flexibility and timing

The final learning from the first 2 years of Phase 2 is that there are occasions in which the timing is not quite right for a great idea. The partners needed to make it happen may not be ready, or might be fighting other fires. However, TQKP can play the role in the system of an incubator – keeping ideas warm until the right conditions come along for catalysis. This was the reflection of the backbone team on what initially was the Community Leadership Capability (C4C) Initiative and was to be led by the Department of Education. Due to difficulties and shifts in the Department's priorities, this did not eventuate. TQKP pivoted and brought this under Childhood Builders as 'Enabling Workforces'. This has since been funded by the Queensland Mental Health Commission and is now being co-designed with input from multiple government agencies and statutory bodies, and with the support of partners, Emerging Minds, Yiliyapinya, UQ's QBI, and Dovetail).

3.2. What approaches are used by TQKP to align the values of various organisations worked well? What should be used in the future?

The key approaches and frameworks used by TQKP which are working well to align thinking and goals of system actors are:

- systems levers
- The Nest Framework
- co-production processes.

The system levers

The TQKP systems levers are working well to create alignment across diverse sectors and priorities. The levers are consistently used by TQKP across Initiatives, activities and communications and support people less familiar with systems thinking to co-design at a systems level. It seems they are also high level enough to allow different groups to bring their own context and thinking in, which works to create buy-in.

"Using the systems levers language and frame has really helped shape and define the work for Together4Lockyer and our Early Years Educators Network." – Together4Lockyer member, social media post

"I have used the system levers as a guide for planning." Government stakeholder, partner survey

Examples are:

- the Together4Lockyer workshop supported participants to think about the local systems using the systems levers, which then informed some of the priorities in their subsequent strategic plan
- the Thriving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children Initiative created culturally adapted version of the levers
- participants in the TQKP 2023 partnership survey gave examples of:
 - aligning research project submissions with core levers of TQKP (University)
 - using the levers as a guide for planning (Government).

The Nest Framework

The Nest Framework (Figure 2) is embedded in TQKP's learning and development activities, information, co-design processes and ways of working. It is providing an effective way of creating a shared understanding and language across the system around child wellbeing domains. The Nest Framework is being used across diverse issue areas and by diverse sectors including Children's Health Queensland, QFCC, Logan Together, Micah Projects and Gladstone Region engaging in action Together (GRT), The University of Queensland's (UQ) Centre for Child Health Research/Queensland Brain Institute's Families in Focus initiative, as well as in the Queensland Government's Putting Queensland Kids First Plan.

Co-design and co-production processes

Co-design and co-production processes (through communities of practice, collaboratives, action groups, working groups) appear particularly effective at creating consensus among actors from diverse sectors. The documents reviewed describe a clear and consistent approach to onboarding and engaging working group and collaborative members in co-design:

- onboarding includes: asking participants what their goals and frustrations are in relation to the system; sharing TQKP's vision and frameworks (The Nest Framework, the systems levers, the Resilience Scale); identifying what further engagement will look like
- reflecting back to participants what was heard in sessions around goals and frustrations, and prioritising these collectively
- drawing out expertise of members with/without other experts brought in to share their advice, on specific priorities
- starting to co-design solutions to priorities, ensuring this is iterative and participants have an opportunity to reflect on each iteration
- allocating actions to take to progress plans.

The co-design processes also help to strengthen advocacy efforts around shared values or hopes for the system. For example, co-production of the ECD Better Systems Roadmap resulted in a PQKF consultation response which had input and therefore buy in from numerous organisations and sectors, which meant it was supported and signed by several organisations, and used by several others to strengthen their own consultation submissions. These processes are also leading to more aligned language in the ecosystem. Brain Building/Development Modules curriculum and resources were co-produced by TQKP, UQ's QBI, Emerging Minds, Yiliyapinya, and researchers from other tertiary institutions. The buy-in has meant that this content is now being embedded in tertiary education courses.

3.3. How effective are TQKP's communication methods at building knowledge and awareness and a pathway to action?

"I think the way of working of being incredibly respectful of what we already know we've got has been the sort of key ingredient...for the growing engagement we've got. We've now got 1500 people in our in-news list, we've got over 3000 subscribers on LinkedIn. There's over 500 people involved in those collaboratives and networks and working groups, sponsored groups...I think it's largely down to the importance we give those relationships and the co-production approach." – TQKP backbone team member #5

It is difficult to distinguish between 'engagement methods' used by TQKP and communications and, given the many touchpoints TQKP has with systems actors (through meetings, presentations, webinars, conferences, working or co-design groups), it is not necessarily meaningful to look at communication methods separately from engagement methods. Sections 2.1, 3.1, and 3.2 cover the efficacy of TQKP's engagement methods in building awareness, knowledge and pathways to action. As such, and given the limitations around data available on growth, reach and engagement of communications materials such as e-newsletters, social media, this section adds only additional findings from the evaluation about the clarity of digital communications and the resourcing of TQKP's communications function.

3.3.1 Communications can be less dense and clearer

Digital communications can continue to be strengthened. As a key method for engaging partners at the top level of the 'systems actor engagement funnel', this is an area important to address to increase TQKP's reach.

"I just don't get the relevant invitation, the campaigns or initiatives seem relatively disjuncted and sector leaders like myself aren't always in the loop." – Partnership survey participant

"Density of communication (sometimes the messaging is too convoluted to digest)" – Partnership survey participant

3.3.2 Resourcing of communications

Available resources for communications – with only one part-time communications role in the backbone team for all the Initiatives – is likely constraining TQKP's ability to engage more broadly and deeply than it currently is. The TQKP backbone team have very strong skills in creating interpersonal relationships (person to person), however the potential of this is not always reached between meetings and gatherings because of low resourcing for electronic communications and the lack of a stand-alone website (ARACY hosts several pages about TQKP on its website) to act as a central repository for TQKP resources, and updates online to allow system actors to 'help themselves' to information and updates. This can impact timeliness, clarity and 'cut through' of communications, as well as people's ability to understand the breadth of TQKP's work and how all the pieces fit together, and feel they are up to date on progress.

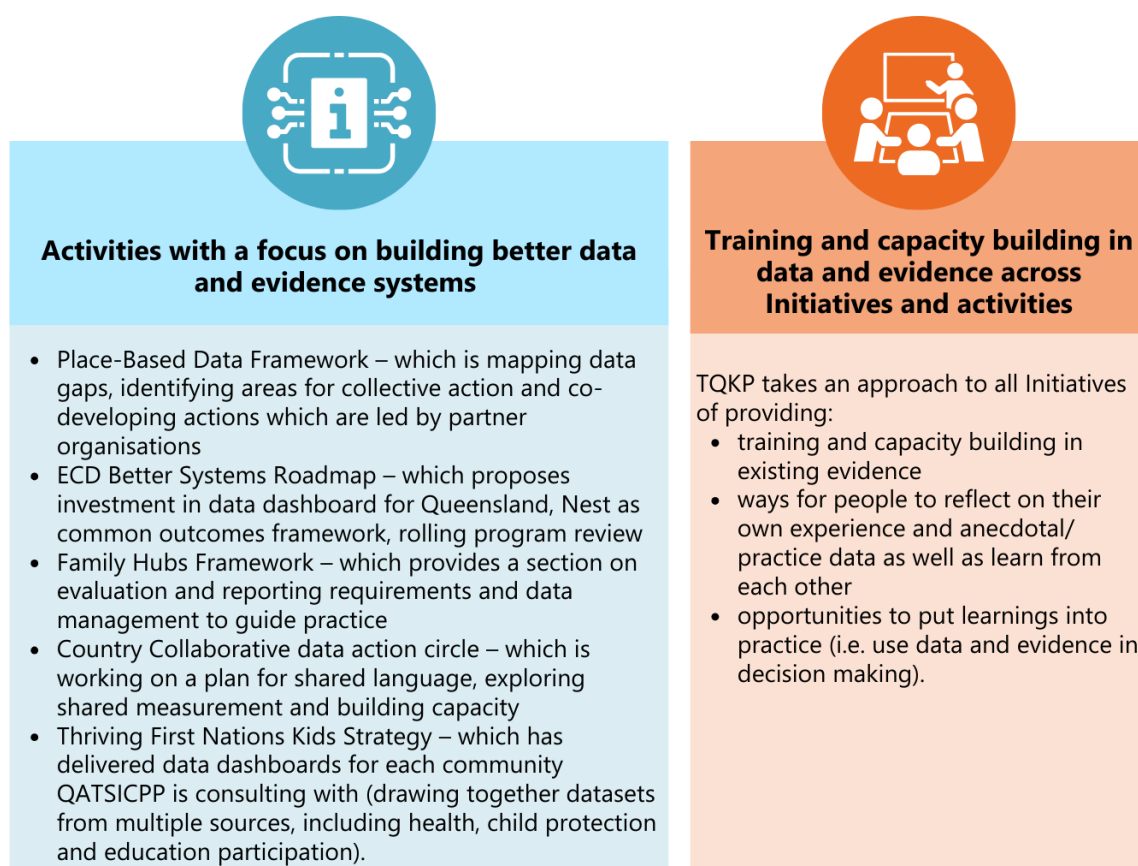
Insufficient communications resourcing is a key risk as TQKP's Initiatives and work continues to grow, as it has the potential to limit opportunities in key strategic policy windows. Having greater communications resourcing would allow TQKP to respond to these opportunities effectively, without the potential that this reduces momentum on other projects.

This being said, there are also emerging examples of communication efforts being undertaken collaboratively with partners who are effectively acting as an additional communications resource on specific pieces of work. For example, the Framing Initiative's Community of Practice is working with QFCC and TQKP to develop and deliver communications materials for Children's Week.

4. How should TQKP improve use of data and evidence in the system?

At a very high level, there are 2 ways TQKP works to influence and improve how data and evidence are used in the system, outlined in Figure 11.

Figure 11: How TQKP is working to improve data and evidence in the system



By building capacity and capability to use existing evidence, TQKP is also building the foundational knowledge needed for system actors and organisations to engage in the activities focussed on building better data and evidence systems. This is necessary, because of the varied levels of knowledge and ability in the system to engage with collecting, analysing, presenting and sharing data and evidence.

This approach is well suited to the maturity of the system and the diversity and scale of the 'system' TQKP works to influence.

4.1. What approaches worked (or are working) best for synchronising partners' measurements of outputs and outcomes?

TQKP's work across the Initiatives, training and other activities to familiarise people with The Nest Framework and the systems levers (and the use of them to frame the collaborative design of Initiatives, strategies and actions) is TQKP's strongest approach to synchronising the measurement of outcomes by system actors for 2 reasons:

- they are conceptual frameworks rather than a series of indicators to be applied, and as such can inform additions and improvements to organisations' existing data capture frameworks (making the scale of change required more feasible and less likely to encounter barriers in resourcing and motivation than a full-scale renovation of existing embedded measurement frameworks and indicators)
- as conceptual frameworks they are malleable to the organisation's specific context and delivery objectives.

There are examples of The Nest Framework being used by systems actors in the shaping of their data collection and reporting, including QFCC, which has explicitly oriented its Data Explorer site around The Nest Framework wellbeing domains (Figure 12). Anecdotally, some place-based initiatives are also using The Nest Framework domains with some adaptations to inform their data gathering activities²⁹.

²⁹ Conversation with TQKP staff, 13 June 2024

Figure 12: QFCC's Data Explorer



Source: <https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/dataexplorer>

However, it is likely that if organisations are to implement changes to their measurement of outcomes based on The Nest Framework and systems levers that they will need to be supported to do so. From lessons on approaches that have worked well in other areas of TQKP's delivery, we suggest this might include:

- supporting further capability building for the sector in: using existing data; understanding what makes a meaningful indicator; monitoring and evaluation and; considerations for planning and undertaking data sharing
- workshops with concrete examples of how The Nest Framework and systems levers can be applied to measurement of outcomes, in a few different contexts
- a Community of Practice for systems actors who want to review their outcomes measurement to assess what improvements might be made to be more reflective of The Nest Framework domains of wellbeing and the systems levers (which help to describe maturity or systems health)
- sharing case studies of success.

While still emerging in terms of being put into practice at the time of this evaluation, the 'data buckets'³⁰ framing in the Place Based Data Framework is also likely to be useful in supporting organisations to identify gaps in their data collection for outcomes measurement.

4.1.1. Challenges and barriers

TQKP's experience in trying to undertake work around shared outcomes frameworks has encountered several challenges.

- It's a cluttered space – there are lots of existing indicators, validated tools, frameworks, approaches etc, but no shared language or taxonomy. There are also other actors trying to do the same or a similar thing (for example, Restacking the Odds).³¹
- It often requires capacity building with partners before it's possible to collectively progress understanding of what measures are useful and feasible.
- It is complex work which comes with many actual and perceived risks around data sovereignty, privacy and security - for this reason it is likely to present as high risk for governments.
- Research doesn't necessarily contain answers or provide a clear pathway – the review of evidence on operationalising resilience frames and tools "found a lack of consensus in approach to measuring resilient outcomes"³² and points to the need to experiment and trial approaches to shared measurement.
- It is difficult to assess what is 'enough' data and indicators to be useful, so there is a risk of any approach becoming a repository of lots of existing tools and indicators rather than providing a clear path to action.

Initially, there was an Initiative to be led by Health and Wellbeing Queensland (HWQld), the Thriving Kids Data Roadmap. Its key objectives were to facilitate adoption of shared outcomes frameworks based on ARACY's The Nest Framework, and to bring together data relevant to the health and wellbeing of children within a public facing data platform and insights hub (GenQ), as well as equip place-based initiatives in Queensland with collective data capacity, capability and practice.

³⁰ The Place Based Data Framework identifies 4 key data types, or 'buckets' which reflect the data ecology place-based initiatives work within - population, service, community and research.

³¹ Murdoch Children's Research Institute's Restacking the Odds initiative aims to provide common indicators across early year services: <https://www.rsto.org.au/resources/rsto-indicators/>

³² Lisa McDaid, Shannon Edmed, Jennifer Maturi, Ning Xiang (2023) Childhood Builders – Operationalising Resilience Frames and Tools Evidence Review Report, Institute for Social Science Research, The University of Queensland.

The initial plan identified several barriers to having a systems view of data:

*"Current activity has for the most part evolved to meet the internal data needs of organisations, often with a specific intent and objective. Whilst there is growing agreement of the importance of taking a systems view to data, the existing capabilities have not yet being scaled or expanded, primarily due to resource constraints and lack of supporting governance and authorisation."*³³

The lack of supporting authorisation became a key issue in the delivery of the Initiative. As noted in the 2022-23 TQKP report to PRF,

*"GenQ was the primary vehicle being pursued to implement the TQKP Thriving Kids Data Roadmap Program Initiative. Despite earlier support, TQKP investment into GenQ was not accepted by HWQld, who instead sought Government funding in the last State Budget. This was unsuccessful."*³⁴

As noted in interviews with decision makers³⁵, a key challenge to overcome in sustaining the effort needed for policy change was both the scale of action required, and the need to overcome a low risk appetite. Both these things are likely to have been barriers to the HWQld application for funding from the Queensland Government.

Our conversation with the backbone team members also suggest that there is not yet sufficient maturity in the system in terms of actors' capabilities around data and evidence collection, analysis and use to support something like shared measures. These conversations indicated there is also more work to be done building relationships of trust and dismantling the culture of competition between organisations and agencies in Queensland before data sharing can be improved system-wide.

4.1.2. Working in sub-systems or 'pockets' of the system

Since encountering the barriers to the Thriving Kids Data Roadmap, TQKP has since pivoted to an approach to improving the use of data and evidence in 'pockets' of the system (i.e. sub-systems), rather than taking a focus on the whole as the Thriving Kids Data Framework did. This includes through the work on the Place Based Data Framework, as well as the Family Hubs Framework, and through the Thriving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children Initiative.

³³ Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership (2023) TQKP Initiative Plan 2023-24: Thriving Kids Data Roadmap.

³⁴ ARACY (2023) Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership ARACY Report to Paul Ramsay Foundation Jan-June 2023.

³⁵ ISSR (2023) Contemporary Policy and its impact to the wellbeing of Queensland Children: Insights from decision-makers, The University of Queensland.

These are more strategic places to intervene as they are parts of the system which:

- are smaller in scale and therefore more feasible to influence within current resourcing
- are ones in which TQKP has strong relationships and traction through its portfolio of work
- have shared characteristics and goals, making it simpler to identify overlaps and opportunities for improvements to and synchronisation of outcomes measurement
- provide a less complex environment in which to test different data collection and outcomes measurement approaches, and be able to assess their effectiveness.

At this stage of the maturity of the system and TQKP's Initiatives within it, this approach is more likely to yield results and lead to examples of successes which can be shared back with other partners and parts of the system to increase capability and confidence.

Figure 13: Example of the work being done with place-based initiatives around data and evidence and measurement



Source: LinkedIn Post, May 2024

More aligned measures and uses of data across the system are likely to be gradually achieved if TQKP continues to:

- provide capacity building in the use of data and evidence through its Initiatives and training opportunities
- support alignment of and shared language around outcomes measurement through The Nest Framework and systems levers

- work with sub-systems to develop and test data collection and outcomes measurement approaches that are systems-focussed, strengths-based and holistic.

This is more likely to be achieved if there is a specific strategy put in place to improve data, evidence and outcomes measurement across the system, which has within its scope all of TQKP's work, and is deliberate about which approaches it will apply for what outcomes. This will help TQKP avoid getting stuck in a phase of 'testing and learning' within pockets of the system, and be able to work towards joining those pockets up towards a more cohesive whole.

Two questions to inform discussions and consultations on a strategy are:

- Assuming TQKP and partners can run experiments in measurement and evaluation in place-based initiatives and Hubs, how will 'pockets' of good practice be connected through shared concepts, practices and knowledge sharing to gradually 'join the dots' for a more cohesive approach to data and evidence use across the system?
- If the goal is Queensland Government buy-in to TQKP's data and evidence approaches and goals (such as a central repository for data on child wellbeing), what evidence might they need before accepting it's a low-enough risk to invest in?

4.2. What learnings can be obtained for collective measures that may inform a) future work of TQKP and b) future systems change work?

It should be noted that shared or collective measurement is not part of how the TQKP backbone team frame their goals for improving data and evidence in the system. This language has come from the questions for this evaluation agreed with the Paul Ramsay Foundation. Regardless, data from and observations on the first 2 years of Phase 2 of TQKP has provided the below insights which can inform future efforts.

4.2.1. Aiming for collective measures at the level of the 'system' TQKP works to influence is unlikely to ever be feasible, but may be more feasible within 'pockets' of the system with shared characteristics, operations and goals

One of the features of TQKP that makes it different to other collective impact initiatives is that it is not exclusive to a particular issue area (for example homelessness, such as Advance

to Zero Brisbane & Logan), or to a bounded community (for example place-based initiatives like Logan Together). TQKP works to influence all service systems, organisations, individuals and communities which impact on any of the domains of child wellbeing defined in The Nest. TQKP explicitly takes an 'open arms' approach, which means that the boundaries of the 'system' which they are working to influence are to a large extent defined by the sectors and actors in the system who are willing to work with them³⁶. This means that the boundaries of the system are likely to continuously grow, and shift as actors move in and out of engagement with TQKP, or in and out of roles which permit them to collaborate with TQKP. Figure 8 and Table A 1 show the breadth of sectors and types of organisations who are involved in TQKP. This provides the cross-disciplinary and sectoral multiplicity of knowledge, expertise and resources needed to work in new ways on new and more joined up solutions, and in this way it is rhizomatic³⁷. However, it also means that there is an enormous diversity in priorities, motivations, values, capabilities, ways of working and types of work delivered, as well as policies, systems and operating environments.

Shared measurement systems with common indicators are upheld by social innovators and social change practitioners Kania and Kramer³⁸ and Mark Cabaj³⁹ as essential to collaborative impact approaches.

"Collecting data and measuring results consistently on a short list of indicators at the community level and across all participating organizations not only ensures that all efforts remain aligned, it also enables the participants to hold each other accountable and learn from each other's successes and failures." – Kania and Kramer, 2011. ⁴⁰

But shared measurement as a concept is in its essence interlinked with the need to measure 'impact', and in this deviates from systems evaluation approaches which recognise that:

- "context is king" – there is relatively little attempt to identify reliable and stable cause and effect relationships as the intervention changes and adapts as does the context

³⁶ As noted earlier, they are also strategic about targeting specific actors who have more influence over policies around and drivers of child wellbeing, and about working to recruit actors from across Queensland.

³⁷ "...any point of a rhizome can be connected to any other, and must be. This is very different from the tree or root, which plots a point, fixes an order..." neither are rhizomes path-dependent but "open and connectible in all of its dimensions...susceptible to constant modification..."

Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari (1987) A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia. Trans. By Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press. Pp. 7 and 12.

³⁸ Kania, J & Kramer, K (2011) Collective Impact, Stanford Social Innovation Review. Available at: https://ssir.org/articles/entry/collective_impact#

³⁹ Cabaj, M. Collective Impact and Shared Measurement Tough but Necessary, Tamarack Institute. Available at:

<https://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/hubfs/Resources/Publications/Collective%20Impact%20Shared%20Measurement.pdf>

⁴⁰ Kania et al, 2011.

- you may not be theoretically or practically able to determine the value of an intervention into a complex system by attempting to measure its impact on higher order or emergent system level outcomes
- systems change methods, and their evaluations need to focus on the kind of knowledge that is achievable in a complex adaptive system."⁴¹

There are several potential barriers, risks and issues with working to embed collective measures in a system as large and diverse as the one which TQKP works to influence.

- Clarity on 'the system' that is the focus for intervention, including the actors and institutions, boundaries and agreed purpose of the system by these actors is fundamental to defining measures of success. Defining the system has been and remains a challenge for TQKP.
- It is unlikely the barriers of time and resources required, as well as willingness of organisations, to embed shared indicators across such a diverse breadth of organisations in the 'system' (and to ensure they are consistently applied) can be overcome.
- The fact that once embedded (because of the time and resources required to do so) shared measures will be extremely difficult to change and will likely continue to be used in a static form regardless of assessments of their relevance or worth, or developments in thinking about what is included in a measure (i.e. the social values directing what data is gathered, how and from whom).
- There is a risk in using shared indicators that context is stripped out of data and findings, given the sheer number of organisations involved in the sectors that comprise the 'system'. This scale also places limitations on time and resources available to effectively share contextualised learnings across the TQK Partnership and more broadly. Without context, shared indicators are unlikely to provide any insight into why improvements or changes in the system are happening, just that they are, which limits their usefulness in informing decision making.
- Embedding shared measures risks overreliance on the shared measures decided upon, potentially at the risk of more meaningful measures, especially as time goes on.
- This approach requires a significant commitment from an entity to aggregate data and govern the collective measurement over time.

Rather than shared indicators, increasing the commitment of actors to use data and evidence in decision making, and use of shared dimensions (in this case The Nest Framework wellbeing dimensions: Loved and Safe, Healthy, Participating, Positive Sense of Culture and Identity, Material Basics, and Learning) in monitoring and evaluation activities is more likely to be something that can be influenced by TQKP and other future interventions at a system of this

⁴¹ Hawkins, A., Rice-Brading, M., Yeong, S (2023) Systems Evaluation Literature Review: a targeted review and technical discussion of possible methods for systems impact evaluation, ARTD.

scale and complexity. To measure this influence will require a strategy with goals and targets, and a monitoring and evaluation plan that can capture changes in organisations' use of the Nest Framework in framing their data collection, analysis and decision making, as well as changes in decision-making processes and practices in relation to data and evidence use.

Shared measures may still be valuable within 'pockets' of the system

Having said this, there may still be value to having shared indicators alongside a continuous learning approach at a smaller scale – within 'pockets' of the system which have shared characteristics, goals and operating environments (as is the case with Hubs and place-based initiatives). This is possible to the extent that there is buy-in from the actors in these sub-systems.

At this scale, it may be manageable to continue to bring in contextual information and learning through communities of practice or similar, "in conjunction with shared indicators which provide concrete indication of progress"⁴². This is not to say that working to create shared measures is the only, most feasible or even best way of improving data and evidence even at this smaller scale. Encouraging the uptake of shared dimensions (e.g. The Nest Framework) may be even more effective – especially if, through trial and testing, this produces lessons for the broader system about how to operationalise these in different contexts for better insights and decision-making.

There is a long period of building the scaffolding needed before being able to converse in the same language about collective or shared measures

Even at the level of 'pockets' of the system, a considerable investment into building a shared understanding and language around data and measures, and the capability of actors in data collection, analysis and evaluative thinking is required before being able to work together to decide on meaningful shared measurement. Once measures are decided, there would also need to be a period of trialling and testing the reliability and validity of these measures in different contexts.

⁴² Ibid.



5. Implications and recommendations

The first 2 years of TQKP's Phase 2 funding have resulted in greater connection between system actors who previously would not have worked together, and the collaborative design and leadership or facilitation of 10 Initiatives, many of which are now at the stage where collaborators are leading actions.

It is clear that TQKP's approach to engaging systems actors – through learning and development activities and co-design and co-leadership of Initiatives is working. The Systems Levers and The Nest Framework are proving useful and used both as ways of providing cohesion and a shared language to diverse sectors and experiences, and as frameworks to operationalise these shared concepts within different contexts.

TQKP's adaptation of the initial system-wide data and evidence approach to one of working through deeper engagement with 'pockets' of the system is strategic. It is more likely to see deeper and lasting improvements in data and evidence practices on this smaller scale than a system-wide approach which, at this stage of the system's maturity, would likely reach more organisations but produce only limited improvements.

The data and evidence of this report is suggestive of several actions that can be taken in relation to TQKP over the next year to improve its chances of influencing changes in the system.

Commit to longer term funding

At the end of 2023, much of the planning and co-design work coalesced towards action – with more actions led by those in the partnership than the backbone team. TQKP is now fully staffed, and all Initiatives are up and running with committed partners and relationships. Longer-term funding cycles are ideal in this phase to allow long-term planning, and will likely provide greater confidence for partner organisations that investing time and resources into the work is worthwhile. The literature suggests that this is a phase in which longer-term funding commitments are critical, and that periods of funding between 7 and 10 years are reasonable for this kind of systems change work by an intermediary⁴³.

⁴³Social Ventures Australia (2022) Insights on Australian field-building intermediaries and their funding journeys towards sustainable impact. Available at: <https://www.socialventures.com.au/assets/Insights-on-field-building-intermediaries.pdf>; Farnham, L., Nothmann, E., Tamaki, Z., Daniels, C (2020) Field Building for Population-Level Change: how funders and practitioners can increase the odds of success, The Bridgespan Group. Available at: <https://www.bridgespan.org/getmedia/6d7adede-31e8-4a7b-ab87-3a4851a8abac/field-building-for-population-level-change-march-2020.pdf>

"In keeping with their institutional priorities and demands, funders tend to back field-building efforts by making short-term program grants or a series of incremental commitments over time. Unfortunately, such approaches have often led to inconsistent support of critical needs in numerous fields... Field actors need this kind of assurance in order to plan with enough ambition to break through social challenges."- Farnham et al, 2020⁴⁴

Update strategy for how TQKP will engage with Queensland Government, drawing on the lessons learned

If the 'system' for intervention is defined as 'Queensland', it would be useful for TQKP to build on existing strategy and document how it will engage with the Queensland Government and public servants, key objectives for doing so, and plans for how to achieve these objectives. This might include:

- stakeholder mapping to identify who has engaged strongly, and where the gaps are, as well as key departments or agencies TQKP needs the engagement of to achieve particular objectives for Initiatives or other goals
- key goals for Queensland Government engagement with specific timeframes for achievement and action plans to deliver on this
- responsibilities within each Portfolio or Initiative for delivering on the strategy
- a plan for monitoring how different engagement strategies are working and for whom.

Develop goals and a strategy to operationalise improvements to data and evidence in the system

At this stage in its development it would be helpful for TQKP to develop a strategy for how it intends to improve data and evidence in the system (at a whole of TQKP rather than Initiative level), which encompasses:

- the kinds of improvements TQKP is working towards in what parts of the system
- the kinds of approaches TQKP will use to achieve these improvements, and the partnerships required to do so
- responsibilities within each Portfolio or Initiative for delivering on the strategy

⁴⁴Farnham, L., Nothmann, E., Tamaki, Z., Daniels, C (2020) Field Building for Population-Level Change: how funders and practitioners can increase the odds of success, The Bridgespan Group. Available at: <https://www.bridgespan.org/getmedia/6d7adede-31e8-4a7b-ab87-3a4851a8abac/field-building-for-population-level-change-march-2020.pdf>

- how it will measure improvements in system actors' capabilities and use of data and evidence in decision-making and practice that result from enactment of the strategy.

Continue to improve communications in response to feedback and provide additional resourcing for this critical function

TQKP should continue to grow resourcing for communications – both within the backbone team, and through co-delivery with partners.

TQKP should also continue to focus on improving the clarity of digital communications (e-newsletters, social media, website pages etc) and be selective and strategic about the actions each communication is designed to drive.

Specific improvements suggested by the data are:

- increasing the available full-time equivalent (FTE) for communications in the backbone team to ensure TQKP can be responsive to policy windows, without losing momentum on other projects
- continue to look for opportunities for partners to co-deliver communications
- aim for a reading level of Year 7 to make content as accessible to as many people as possible⁴⁵. This does not mean making content less complex, but making sentences digestible.
- simplify messaging and put the most relevant information to the reader first – this is generally the key few points you want the reader to take away, and may mean putting a link in documents or other communications to an overview of TQKP and its frameworks
- use digital communications to lead readers to one or 2 calls to action and test if this improves click-throughs on calls to action (e.g. click something, sign up to something, get involved in something)
- create a website as a central repository for people to find updates on TQKP and resources/materials (this is under development currently)
- ensure TQKP staff are supported to apply a consistent TQKP style, through templates or similar, and ensure it complies with accessibility requirements (especially around font colours on backgrounds).

Continue to work at the different levels of systems change

TQKP has impacts at different levels of the system (as identified in Figure 3). These levels interact in non-linear ways generating outcomes that are not generally predictable, meaning

⁴⁵ Australian Government (2021) On the level with readability. Available at: <https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/blog/level-readability>

it is not usually possible to draw causal links between one level of the system and the others. It also means actions may appear unconnected in a simple sense, but logical from a systems perspective, and using this lens TQKP could focus on 3 levels of systems change.

- At the level of the explicit conditions of systems change: TQKP should aim for work with the 'pockets' or sub-systems in which it engages (or are in TQKP's sphere of influence) to lead to:
 - successful outcomes (such as in the use of data for decision-making)
 - create advocates or 'ambassadors' of TQKP's work and
 - result in an expansion into TQKP's larger sphere of interest.
- At the level of the relational conditions of systems change, TQKP should aim to maximise the number of new people entering their networks who report that they are engaging more and better with other people aligned to their common interests.
- At the level of the transformative conditions of systems change, TQKP should continue to work to shift the understandings and priorities of systems leaders and key actors across the government, non-government, tertiary, corporate and philanthropic sectors; and challenge deeply held beliefs, values or assumptions that are limiting outcomes for children.
- At the level of the whole system, the measures of success that should inform decisions about the relative investment in different strategies should generally focus on change at the deepest levels of change, or the most fundamental leverage points for change⁴⁶ for which it is considered feasible that action may have consequences. It is critical to continue to learn and adapt from what has been most successful to expand the sphere of influence and drive further change.

⁴⁶ Meadows, D (1999) Leverage Points – Places to Intervene in a System, The Sustainability Institute. Available at: https://www.donellameadows.org/wp-content/userfiles/Leverage_Points.pdf

Appendices



Appendix 1. Additional tables and figures

Table A 1: Engagement with TQKP by organisation type*

Type	Number	Average number of Initiatives engaged in
Peak body	10	6
University	9	4.5
Queensland Government	8	3.1
Statutory body	9	2.6
Neighbourhood Centre	2	2
PHN	4	2
Social enterprise	1	2
Place-based initiative	5	1.8
Philanthropic body	7	1.7
Education and ECD providers	6	1.5
Nonprofit service provider	27	1.5
Aboriginal organisations	8	1.4
Nonprofit skills and training provider	10	1.4
Federal Government	3	1
Hospital and Health service	3	1
Local Government	2	1
Consultant	9	1

Type	Number	Average number of Initiatives engaged in
Other collaboratives	4	1.5
Research Institute	6	1.8
Hub	1	3
Nonprofit research organisations	2	1.5
Software and data company	3	1.6
	Total 139	Average across types 2

Source: Document review, inclusive of: Thriving Places, Thriving Kids; ECD Better Systems Roadmap; Childhood Builders; Leadership Table; Thriving Kids Integrated Service Systems Collaborative; Family Hubs Framework Project; Thriving Lockyer Kids Leadership Group; Enabling Workforces; Brain Builders Academic Roundtable; Brain Builders Implementation Workshop; Thriving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children Initiative Working Group; Place Based Data Framework Design Team; Framing Initiative; Country Collaborative. Descriptive categories ascribed inductively.

*Note: this does not capture the entirety of the organisations who are connected with TQKP, just those who are documented as being on the above named working groups in documents available at the time of this report.

Appendix 2. Training outcomes from Brain Building/Development Modules

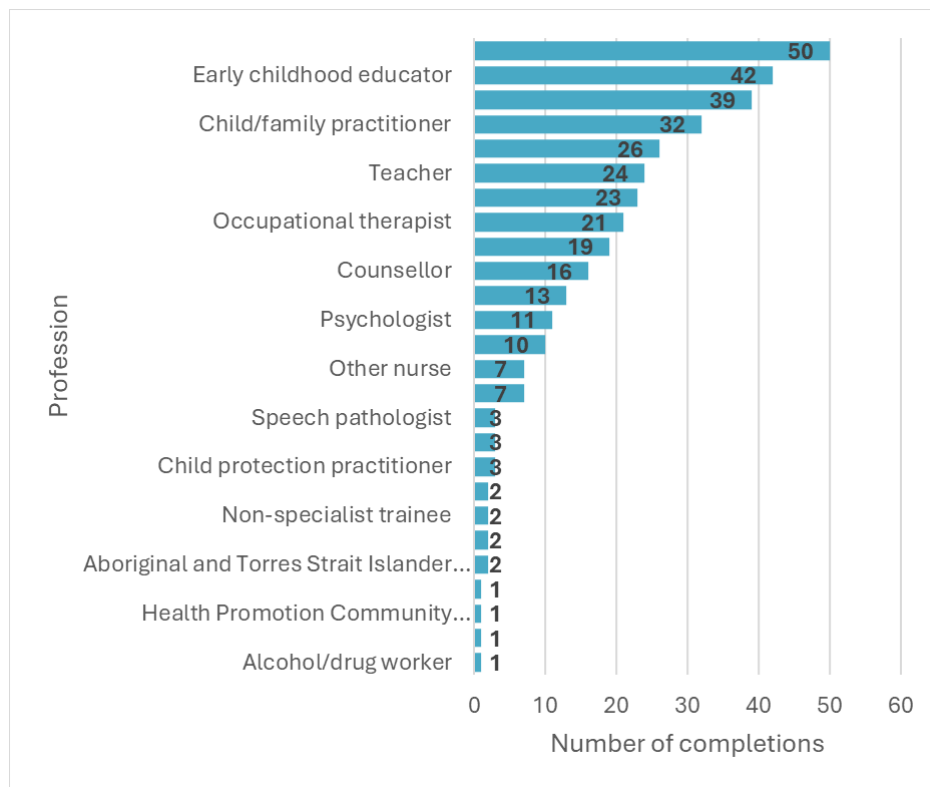
Emerging Minds supplied a 6-month report on completions and feedback on the Brain Building/Development Modules. Below are some key statistics from that report.

Within 6 months, a total of 628 completing the whole course (an average of 104 per month), but more have completed individual modules (an average of 142 per month completing at least one module).

Table A 2: Completions of Brain Building/Development Modules

Number who completed	Module
853	1
732	2
68	3
628	All 4 modules (the course)

- 74% of those who completed Module 1 completed the whole course
- 86% of those who completed Module 1 completed Module 2 (14% of those who completed Module 1 did not go on)
- 91% of those who completed Module 2 completed Module 3 (9% of those completing Module 2 did not go on)
- Data from completions of Course 1 (n=361) in the 6 month report shows the professions with the highest completions were social workers (14%, n=50) and early childhood educators (12%, n=42).

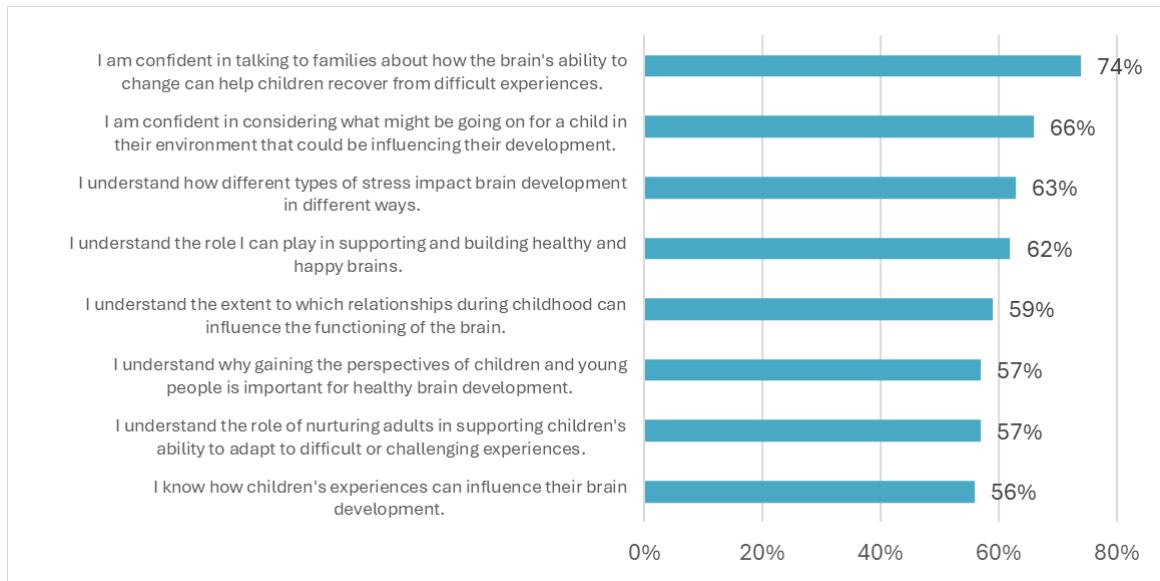
Figure A 1: Number of completions by profession

Source: *Emerging Minds 6 month report on Brain Building/Development Modules Completions, Course 1: Understanding Brain Development*

There were additionally 2669 podcast listens (an average of 444 per month).

Of the 480 people who responded to both the pre and post surveys, more than half noted improvements across a range of understanding and confidence outcomes. Taking the course had the most impact on confidence, with 74% of people experiencing an increase in confidence in talking to families about how the brain's ability to change can help children recover from difficult experiences; and 66% experiencing an increase in confidence in considering what could be going on for a child that might be influencing their development. Least changed were people's knowledge of how children's experiences can influence their brain development, and the understanding of the role of nurturing adults in supporting children's ability to adapt to difficult or challenging experiences – this is likely due to a relatively good grounding in these topics already in the general public and amongst the professions who have taken the training.

Figure A 2: Percentage of participants who experienced positive change in scores between pre and post test



Source: *Emerging Minds 6 month report on Brain Building/Development Modules Completions, Course 1: Understanding Brain Development*

Looking at the average scores given across the cohort, and the change between average scores in pre and post surveys, the dimension with the greatest degree of change is also confidence in talking to families.

Figure A 3: Degree of change between pre and post surveys, based on averages



Source: *Emerging Minds 6 month report on Brain B Completions, Course 1: Understanding Brain Development*

Appendix 3. Environment scan sources

The below were reviewed to help inform this report:

- Griffith Centre for Systems Innovation. 2024. Advance to Zero Brisbane + Logan, Year Two Learning Report. Accessed 10 June 2024: <https://www.brisbanezero.org.au/media/2wcfud5e/zero-report-year-two-final.pdf>
- LinkedIn (TQKP account) – scanned for specific events and instances of feedback mentioned in documents
- Platform C. Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership. Accessed 28 May 2024: <https://platformc.org/connect/initiative/thriving-queensland-kids-partnership>
- Platform C. Logan Together Case Study. Accessed 28 May 2024: <https://platformc.org/case-studies/logan-together-case-study>
- Queensland Mental Health Commission (20 March 2024), Thriving Queensland Kids and partners team up for Commission funded workforce project [media release]. Accessed 5 June 2024: <https://www.qmhc.qld.gov.au/media-events/news/thriving-queensland-kids-and-partners-team-up-for-commission-funded-workforce-project>
- Queensland Government (21 February 2023) [Putting community safety first with tougher action on youth crime and its causes](#) [media release], Queensland Government, accessed 5 June 2024.
- Queensland Government (02 June 2024), Miles Government makes Queensland kids a priority [media release], The Queensland Cabinet and Ministerial Directory. Accessed 5 June 2024: <https://statements.qld.gov.au/statements/100469>

These were searched for and used as supplementary evidence or corroborating evidence to support analysis.

Appendix 4. Document review tool

Document review survey

1. Please select your **name (reviewer)**
2. Please copy in the **link to the document**
3. Please provide a short (one-sentence) **description** of the document
4. Who is the author of the document?
 - TQKP
 - Research partner/collaborator
 - Non-Government partner/ collaborator
 - Queensland Government
 - Other
5. Based on your reading of the document, do you feel that the document is **useful for informing the evaluation** of the program(s) against the rubric dimensions?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Unsure
6. What is the time period covered by the document?
7. Which TQKP Programs are covered by the document? (A program is covered if the document provides information likely to inform a rating of that program against one or more rubric dimensions)
8. Which geographic location(s) is the document relevant to?
 - A single community (place-based)
 - Metro Queensland
 - Regional/remote areas of Queensland
 - Numerous regions of Queensland but not all of Queensland
 - The whole of Queensland
 - Queensland and other states
 - The whole of Australia
 - None of these
9. Which sector(s) is the document relevant to?

10. List any partners/collaborators/organisations engaged with and what the engagement/partnership was?
11. Based on your reading of the document, how would you rate the document against the dimension of **Authority**: Who is responsible for the intellectual content? Does the author have qualifications, association with responsible recognised organisations? Do they work in the field? Are they a recognised expert, identified in a variety of sources? Do they know what they're talking about? Do we know who they are?
 - High
 - Moderate
 - Low
 - N/A
12. Based on your reading of the document and in light of the above rubric, how would you rate the document against the dimension of **Importance**: Is it meaningful? Does it add context? Does it enrich and add to the current evaluation, particularly add something unique? Or does it strengthen a current rating? Would the evaluation be lesser without it? Is it integral, representative, typical?
 - High
 - Moderate
 - Low
 - N/A
13. Based on your reading of the document and in light of the above rubric, how would you rate the document against the dimension of **Objectivity**: This incorporates opinion, expert or otherwise. Is it balanced or does it have an unstated bias? A position paper/public release from TQKP has a particular point of view.
 - High
 - Moderate
 - Low
 - N/A
14. Are there any other comments that you have in relation to the document?
15. What evidence does the document provide about engagement with TQKP, its Initiatives or activities? (what were attendance numbers, was there feedback, what elements or approaches worked to engage people?)
16. What evidence does the document provide about connectivity of individual leaders and change agents? (opportunities for them to connect, relationships, information sharing)
17. Is there any evidence of change?
 - Yes

- No
- 18.** What evidence does the document provide about the capabilities of leaders and change agents?
- 19.** Is there any evidence of change?
- Yes
 - No
- 20.** What evidence does the document provide about connections and collaborations between organisations?
- 21.** Is there any evidence of change?
- Yes
 - No
- 22.** What evidence does the document provide about the extent to which improvements in knowledge and capabilities in individual leaders, especially neuro-capability and models such as The Nest Framework are being embedded in organisations/sectors through policy, practice or evidence frameworks, training or other means?
- 23.** Is there evidence of organisational change?
- Yes
 - No
- 24.** What evidence does the document provide about connectivity and communication between the research community and front-line service delivery organisations (evidence of research translation)
- 25.** Is there evidence of organisational change?
- Yes
 - No
- 26.** What evidence does the document provide about the availability of capacity building opportunities and training in the evidence base for child wellbeing (neuro-capability)?
- 27.** Is there evidence of an increase in access?
- Yes
 - No
- 28.** What evidence does the document provide about access to funding opportunities as a result of involvement with TQKP (or as a result of collaborative application with TQKP)?
- 29.** What evidence does the document provide that leaders are adopting a systems lens in strategies and actions?
- 30.** What evidence does the document provide that child and adolescent development is on the policy agenda for QLD?

- 31.** Based on this document, where would you assess child and adolescent development is on the policy agenda?
 - High - acknowledged as of critical importance by QLD Govt
 - Medium – sometimes acknowledged/acknowledged by some but other issues are often prioritised by QLD Govt
 - Low – Other issues are consistently prioritised by QLD Govt
- 32.** What evidence does the document show that TQKP's partners understand what is expected of them and act on it? (do they identify actions and/or undertake actions in alignment with TQKP goals, values and interests? Do they contribute resources to develop TQKP values and goals?)
- 33.** What evidence does the document provide that TQKP is seen as a legitimate actor in the system and is trusted by sectors to lead improvement and system change?
- 34.** What evidence does the document provide that TQKP activities are designed and enacted with engagement and input of different sectors?
- 35.** What evidence does the document provide of barriers to the engagement or interest, or policy resistance of different sectors?
- 36.** What evidence does the document provide that TQKP has adequate (or not) resources to progress its plans (staffing, IT, time, funding etc)?
- 37.** What evidence does the document provide that TQKP is working to a plan and communicating that plan clearly and effectively?
- 38.** What evidence does the document provide that TQKP is responding to emerging issues?
- 39.** What evidence does the document provide that activities are improving funding alignment with TQKP values and goals (and childhood wellbeing evidence base)?
- 40.** What evidence does the document provide that funders are engaged in understanding what works in terms of funding childhood wellbeing programs?
- 41.** Are there any details about budget expenditure (\$ committed or expended)
- 42.** Are there any potential sources of data named in this document which we can request from TQKP?

Appendix 5. Maturity matrix informing document review and interview thematic coding

Table A 3: Maturity matrix informing thematic coding

Category & lever	Dimension	Evidence of change relative to the category
TQKP Phase 2 objectives (Objective 1) (Lever: Concerted leadership)	Improving the connectivity of leaders and change agents (Function: linkage agent; knowledge broker)	Positive change in the degree to which the partners surveyed by TQKP in 2023 are connected (have contacts/relationships), are communicating/ sharing information.
TQKP Phase 2 objectives (Objective 1) (Lever: Concerted leadership)	Improving the capabilities of leaders and change agents (Function: Building capacity in others)	Activities have made an effective contribution to improving capabilities of leaders and change agents
TQKP Phase 2 objectives (Objective 2) (Lever: Stronger Workforces)	Improving connectivity of workforces and organisations (Function: linkage agent)	Activities have progressed organisations' position on the collaboration continuum
TQKP Phase 2 objectives (Objective 2) (Lever: Stronger workforces)	Improving the capabilities of workforces and organisations to contribute to child and adolescent development, especially neuro-capability (Function: building capacity in others; knowledge broker)	Activities have improved the capabilities of workforces and organisations – especially neuro-capability
TQKP Phase 2 objectives (Objective 2) (Lever: Stronger workforces)	Improving the capabilities of workforces and organisations to contribute to child and adolescent development, especially neuro-capability (Function: linkage agent; knowledge broker; facilitating collaborative sense-making)	Improved connectivity and communication between research community and front-line service delivery organisations (research translation)

Category & lever	Dimension	Evidence of change relative to the category
TQKP Phase 2 objectives (Objective 3) (Lever: Stronger workforces; Engaged Public)	Improving capabilities and capacities of caregivers and communities to contribute to healthy child and adolescent development (Function: linkage agent; knowledge broker; building capacity in others)	Through the 10 Phase 2 Initiatives, partners have better access to evidence base, capacity building opportunities and funding, and are better resourced to take advantage of them
TQKP Phase 2 objectives (Objective 4) (Lever: Concerted leadership; Integrated Delivery; Putting Data and Evidence to Work)	Improving systems strategies that contribute to child and adolescent development (Function: knowledge broker; building capacity in others; facilitating collaborative sense-making and decision-making)	Key actors adopt a systems lens in their organisation's emerging strategies and actions
TQKP's systems-shaping capabilities (Lever: Concerted leadership; Smarter investment)	Improved policy attention on child and adolescents' development issues (Function: Building capacity in others)	The position of child and adolescent development moves up the policy agenda of government decision makers and key sector agents
TQKP's systems-shaping capabilities (Lever: Concerted leadership; Integrated Delivery)	Improved coherence of system actors' goals and values (Function: Linkage agent; Facilitating collaborative sense-making and decision-making)	TQKP's partners understand what is expected of them and act on it
TQKP's systems-shaping capabilities (This is a necessary condition underpinning the efficacy of all levers)	Enablement of TQKP as systems change agent by system actors (Necessary condition underpinning effective performance of all functions)	The sector's view of TQKP's legitimacy and mandate granted
TQKP's systems-shaping capabilities (Lever: Concerted leadership; Integrated Delivery; Putting Data and Evidence to Work)	Enablement of TQKP as systems change agent by system actors (Necessary condition underpinning effective performance of all functions)	There is participation in activities from leaders in all relevant sectors and constituencies, and engagement in steering/ co-designing TQKP's activities, goals and agenda, and shared measures.

Category & lever	Dimension	Evidence of change relative to the category
TQKP's systems-shaping capabilities (This is a necessary condition underpinning the efficacy of all levers)	Organisational resourcing and capabilities (Function: Necessary condition underpinning function as Linkage agent)	TQKP backbone team has the resources (including IT resources) and skillsets required to build new relationships while maintaining and deepening existing ones
TQKP's systems-shaping capabilities (This is a necessary condition underpinning the efficacy of all levers)	Organisational structure and capabilities (Necessary condition underpinning effective performance of Linkage Agent and Facilitating collaborative decision-making functions)	TQKP has a strong understanding of potential sources of policy resistance and how to respond to overcome resistance
TQKP's systems-shaping capabilities (This is a necessary condition underpinning the efficacy of all levers)	Organisational structure and capabilities (Role: Necessary condition underpinning effective performance of all functions)	TQKP navigates the tension between being agile and responsive, and delivering on its plan in order to meet its broader goals
TQKP's systems-shaping capabilities (Lever: Smarter investment)	Smarter investment and funding (Function: knowledge broker; Facilitating collaborative sense-making and decision making)	TQKP activities designed to influence policy or advocacy systems contribute to an increase in the share of government and philanthropic funding for child wellbeing, and an improvement in how well funding aligns with the childhood wellbeing evidence base and identified areas of need
TQKP's systems-shaping capabilities (Lever: Smarter investment)	Smarter investment and funding (Function: knowledge broker; Facilitating collaborative sense-making and decision making)	TQKP activities designed to influence policy or advocacy systems contribute to structural change in funding: increasing the length of funding contracts, and investment types that promote integration across the system (co-investment, inter-agency investment, commissioning for outcomes, and impact investment)

Appendix 6. Contemporary policy and its impact to the wellbeing of Queensland children: Insights from decision makers

Contemporary policy and its impact to the wellbeing of Queensland children: Insights from decision- makers



Title:	Contemporary policy and its impact to the wellbeing of Queensland children: Insights from decision-makers
Prepared for:	ARTD Consultants
Prepared by:	Dr Miriam Yates & Professor Tim Reddel
Date:	7 th December 2023
Revision:	14 th December 2023

The Institute for Social Science Research at the University of Queensland (UQ) acknowledges the Traditional Owners and their custodianship of the lands on which UQ operates. We pay our respects to their Ancestors and their descendants, who continue cultural and spiritual connections to Country.

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Appendices

Appendix A	Interview guide
Appendix B	Stakeholder demographics

Executive Summary

This report distils and describes the views of 9 key decision makers from the policy ecosystem interviewed to provide key insights regarding the current policy landscape in Queensland relating to the wellbeing of children. These interviews were conducted in the context of an evaluation of the Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership.

Agenda setting in policy making contexts is reliant on the convergence of key policy levers. According to Kingdon's Agenda Setting Theory, these include: the attention of policy makers, an appetite to invest sustained effort over time, and politics. When the majority, or more, of these levers are mobilised, a policy-window is created in which change becomes more feasible relative to standard policy operating contexts. To generate an understanding of the contemporary policy landscape as it affects the wellbeing of Queensland's children, a series of interviews were conducted with key decision makers affecting change to the lives of children in Queensland.

Key decision makers were identified by the Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership's backbone team, who were prompted to nominate prospective interviewees they considered "knowledgeable and innovative thought leaders whose opinions about policy issues carry substantial weight and predictive value in the policy arena." A total of eight interviews were undertaken with 9 interviewees representing a variety of sectors (e.g., mental health, early childhood education, youth justice, public and community sectors, policy making and governance). A mixture of metropolitan and regionally based interviewees was included within the final sample.

While not exhaustive, nor delivering full theoretical or policy saturation regarding themes represented across the entire dataset, the responses shared are suggestive of important policy levers that provide useful context about the current policy agenda and how this informs policy making affecting the wellbeing of Queensland's children.

In summary, a total of nine questions (see Appendix A) were posed to each interviewee (see Appendix B) spanning topic areas including the existing policy landscape in Queensland, key advocates operating in the space of children's wellbeing, policy changes required to improve the wellbeing of Queensland's children, cross-sectoral collaboration and impactful lived experiences relating to Queensland's children.

Key insights from Interviewees

- Policy making in Queensland relating to children's wellbeing is disjointed with pockets of collaboration evidenced in some spaces and not others.
- Policy attention is currently monopolised by the disproportionate focus on youth crime and the current government's desire to appear 'tough on crime'.
- Narrowly defined and, at times, reactive policy attention and sentiment drives resource distribution and coordination within the children's wellbeing space in ways that reinforce disparate policy making and implementation efforts. For example, current attention on youth crime in Queensland was observed by some interviewees as driving Governmental resource allocation and distribution.
- Collaboration, coordination, and a more systematic approach to Queensland children's wellbeing could be supported through a centralised or overarching policy function that

uses various levers (e.g., funding, policy, governance) to drive cooperative approaches and impactful outcomes.

Contemporary focus of policy making in Queensland

Contemporary policy issues that interviewees described as being foci for the current government spanned housing and homelessness, educational disadvantage, health, education, and cost of living pressures. Insights tended to coalesce around interviewees' field of expertise (e.g., health focused decision-makers raised health-related policy issues). That said, interviewees from a range of policy domains and disciplines noted the current government's prioritisation of youth justice. As one interviewee shared:

"At the moment, it's all youth justice. The youth justice policy agenda is driving everything ... that's hugely problematic in a lot of ways ... you can see the impacts of that kind of rapid policy making on the run and then the impacts that that has in terms of direct service delivery on the ground... Youth Justice has crowded everything out, really. It's taken up oxygen and blocked the ability to get other work done. ... It's really hard to have conversations beyond that. We've even stopped, like, doing little bits of work because the YJ situation has made it too messy on the ground and nobody knows what's being funded where and what's going on."

Some interviewees observed that the policy focus on youth justice was to the detriment of their policy focus areas (e.g., health, education, etc.). The sentiment of being 'tough on crime' – described by some interviewees as the current government's view – was at odds with preventative, and more effective strategies that their policy domains might contribute to. It was also noted by interviewees that the youth justice policy area cuts across other focus areas including First Nations youth, educational disadvantage, housing and homelessness and child safety, among others.

When describing the most urgent or important issues affecting children in Queensland, interviewees largely described policy areas encompassing educational disadvantage (e.g., literacy and numeracy) and education standards, physical health and psychological wellbeing (e.g., mental health, physical health indicators), childhood nutrition and health outcomes, and youth justice. In responding to this question however, interviewees also raised related issues surrounding service delivery (e.g., accessibility issues, adequate levels of service to meet needs) and the effects of a geographically dispersed state on the services available to Queensland's children.

Appetite for sustained effort toward policy change

When asked to contemplate the appetite for sustained effort towards change within the policy making sphere relating to the wellbeing of Queensland's children, interviewees appeared to rely on the current educational, social and political context they observed to drive their responses. For example, those who saw youth justice as being a key policy issue in Queensland *and* observed this to be at odds or disjointed from their own policy space, subsequently reported less appetite for sustained effort towards long term policy change to address systemic challenges such as intergenerational disadvantage affecting specific populations and communities.

Most interviewees mentioned the need for greater coordination or integration to improve outcomes for children, although the favoured approaches varied. Some interviewees felt a centralised decision-making authority (e.g., Minister, Child Advocate) or body tasked with overseeing and being accountable for the wellbeing of children in Queensland would be an effective strategy, due to its potential to manage, monitor and oversee funding and action as this relates to children's wellbeing. Other interviewees noted better integration across

sectors – such as through co-location and coordination of children’s services – as offering a meaningful contribution to impactful outcomes for the wellbeing of Queensland’s children. One interviewee described tangibly how this could look in relation to health and education outcomes of children, suggesting:

“... we could be delivering health services out of libraries and talking to the librarians about looking for signs for early literacy issues when they run their little reading groups and then referring them back in [to other services or Departments]. We could be doing so much and that’s like a really basic example, but education and health could actually be really connected here.”

A core challenge to sustaining the effort necessary for policy change, as described by interviewees, was the magnitude of action required to systematically work towards the wellbeing of Queensland’s children, and the need to overcome vested interests and low risk appetite. As one interviewee explained:

“... we’re not into any of the structure a bit and that’s the bit where all of our vested interests would have to come on the table and there’d be significant risk because there would be things where you said we’re not going to do that anymore”

Interviewees were cognizant of the divergent interests of various disciplines (e.g., health, education, child protection) and how these informed the appetite for policy shift. This was reiterated in the differences in interviewees’ personal willingness to endorse and support specific policy agendas, and in their reflections on the various political forces (described below), that inform their work. Some interviewees also described the need for a paradigm shift to a ‘systems lens’ to support integrated, collaborative and cohesive efforts to support the wellbeing of Queensland’s children.

Political forces informing policy directions and policy making

Political forces describe an array of contextual elements that can impact policy making and the attention of policy makers. These include public sentiment and mood, advocacy efforts, competing crises, constant portfolio shifts, which can all drive attention and energies towards one policy approach or another. In the context of children’s wellbeing in Queensland, decision makers described election cycles, media reportage and the funding system as being key drivers of policy directions and policy making.

Several interviewees noted the impact of local and national media portrayal and publishing as impacting the policy direction, particularly in relation to youth justice. They noted that the Queensland media picked up and amplified the Government’s sentiment and vice versa of ‘tough on crime’ and the portrayal of ‘youth crime as a crisis’ within the state. Interviewees also noted this approach is at odds with evidence-based approaches to disrupting the systemic issues that inform youth crime behaviours. For those interviewees with work portfolios overlapping with youth justice (e.g., housing, education, social disadvantage, etc.), this focus was noted as directly impacting their daily work outcomes through shifting funding, policy attention, and policy making. For those interviewees with work portfolios are more distal to youth justice (e.g., early education, early childhood health, etc.), the impact of media attention and focus was observed as influencing policy attention and appetite for engagement within their domains of children’s wellbeing in Queensland.

Interviewees also shared that some of the drivers of a disjointed approach across departments to policy making at present include attention being directed to the upcoming (re)election rather than joined-up government that underpins a focus on systems approaches to complex social problems. One interviewee highlighted:

“... even ministers in the same faction, are not really interested in partnering or doing any combined pieces of work, so there's no forums where they work together very effectively and most public servants will take the cue from that ministerial level and everyone's like, this is mine, this is yours...”

Across interviews, the funding system was also noted as a significant political force driving attention and work planning. For example, while some interviewees noted the impact of disjointed funding in service delivery, others noted the impacts of lacking funding or no funding as guiding and influencing their advocacy efforts and attention. This produced a context wherein interviewees described ‘following the sentiment’ of the Queensland political landscape to effect change within their sphere of influence. Importantly, what this suggests is that decision makers are influenced by political forces that see them (re)producing policy directions and efforts that they may understand as less desirable or optimal yet are bound to by the status quo. As one interviewee shared:

“... we don't have any kind of policy settings at the moment really that require agencies to work together. We don't have anything where there's pooled funding. We don't have anything that makes ministers really work together and they tried it with the kind of Advance Queensland ... you've kind of either got to incentivize public servants to work together and come out of their silos or you have to penalize them if they don't... it's really clear politically, that ministers don't want to work together. I think that's really quite obvious from this government.”

Interviewees described these forces as creating the conditions for a more disjointed policy making environment, with the attention and focus of policy makers being governed by external pressures, rather than allowing for a systematic and planned approach.

Advocacy in the context of Queensland children's wellbeing

When prompted to think about advocacy in the children's wellbeing space, interviewees provided examples of ‘missed opportunities’ or advocacy efforts that have not achieved their intended impacts. Broadly, these examples aligned to reflections regarding the release of key reports, policy positions or key documentation wherein an advocacy impact could have been realised but was not, due to ill-timing, failing to capitalise on attention of key figures and organisations, or through a lack of efforts to engage the relevant policy actors in producing meaningful change. (These reflections were general, rather than about any specific organisation).

Interviewees were also prompted to share their insights on the individuals, groups, or organisations they saw as key advocates in the space of Queensland children's wellbeing.

A range of suggestions were provided, centring around the below groups:

- Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak (QATSI CPP)
- Queensland Council of Social Services (QCOS)
- Thriving Kids Queensland Partnership (TKQP)
- Youth Advocacy Centre (YAC)
- Queensland Child and Family Commission

While not exhaustive, this list represents the views of interviewees on the relevant advocacy groups currently having impact within Queensland.

Of the nine interviewees, more than half (5) described some familiarity with the Thriving Kids Queensland Partnership (TKQP). This ranged from deep engagement with the work portfolio of TKQP and sustained engagement with the work agenda currently underway at TKQP to familiarity with senior leadership driving engagement with the TKQP. In reflecting on the impact of TKQP, one interviewee shared:

[TKQP is] working very hard to establish credibility. I think the systems leadership idea is something that Michael is doing a really good job of; trying to get that out there a bit more and focus more on the unique QLD aspects. The other thing I would say is they do a really good job of bringing First Nations voice, better than some of the Interstate examples of similar kinds of organisations that that I've seen.

Appendix A Interview Guide

1. Thinking about policy issues in general—not just issues related to children—what three issues or priorities do you think are at the top of the Queensland Government policy agenda right now?
2. Thinking about issues affecting Queensland's children, specifically, what three issues do you think are the most urgent or important?
3. Currently, what individuals, constituencies, or groups do you see as the main advocates for improving outcomes for Queensland's children?
4. Considering the state's current educational, social, and political context, what do you think are the three key policies or processes that need to change to support better outcomes for Queensland children?
 - a. What sectors would need to implement these changes?
5. What is the one policy, system or process change you would be most willing personally to support in relation to Queensland children's wellbeing and life outcomes?
 - a. How much support do you think there is currently across the state for this kind of change?
6. Thinking about all the different sectors that support children's growth, development and wellbeing, what do you think are the necessary elements to create cross-sectoral collaboration and a shared purpose?
7. What kinds of cross-sectoral collaboration would you be most willing to be involved in?
 - a. cross-sectoral forums, communities of practice and knowledge sharing events
 - b. collaborative service delivery and risk sharing
 - c. place-based collaborations
 - d. funding or co-funding cross-sectoral initiatives or activities
 - e. collaborating across sectors on research and evaluation (outcomes measurement)
 - f. co-location of personnel to develop cross-sectoral capabilities and knowledge sharing
8. What kinds of messages, stories or data have you encountered in the past 6-12 months that have been most influential on your views about children's wellbeing in Queensland?
9. What, if anything, have you heard about the Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership, led by ARACY?

Appendix B Stakeholder Demographic Table

Stakeholder Type	Sector/s	# of Interviewees
Queensland Government Departments	• Early Childhood • Health • Education • Youth Justice	5
Academia	• Early Childhood Health & Wellbeing	1
First Nations Organisational Leaders	• Non-profit Service Providers	1
Childcare Sector Leaders	• Early Childhood Education	1



CRICOS Provider Number 00025B

Contact details

Professor Tim Reddel

T +61 7 3346 7801
M +61 0407 743 038
E tim.reddel@uq.edu.au
W uq.edu.au