



Child and Family Hubs

An integrated means of enhancing equitable wellbeing for Australia's children and families



Thriving Queensland
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What are child and family hubs?



Child and family hubs (referred to as hubs) are one way of providing high-quality, joined-up, whole-family support from conception through to 12 years, and have been identified as an important way to provide equitable support to Australian communities (Honisett et al., 2023). (Note: Youth hub models are also available for older age groups).

- Children and young people thrive when their strengths are acknowledged and their needs are met in culturally-informed, developmentally-appropriate ways that are ideally close to home. This includes supporting parents and carers, extended family, their community, human services and the wider natural, built and digital environments.
- Child and family hubs (referred to as hubs) are one way of providing high-quality, joined-up, whole-family support from conception through to 12 years, and have been identified as an important way to provide equitable support to Australian communities ([Honisett et al., 2023](#)).
- Hubs aim to offer opportunities to build social connection and adult capability, and convenient, family-centred access to free/low-cost health, learning and social services and programs.
- These offerings should be tailored to the needs of the local community. These can include – but are not limited to – options as varied as healthcare; early learning services; playgroups; parenting programs; vocational training; cultural gatherings; life skills courses; psychoeducation sessions; housing, legal and/or immigration advice; and special interest classes.
- Hubs offer a number of “soft entry” access points for children and families, including those who have not engaged with mainstream services due to complex systems not adequately meeting their needs.
- They operate in a range of settings including primary care, early childhood education centres, schools and Aboriginal community-controlled organisations.
- Research suggests there are conservatively 460 integrated child and family centres (hubs) across Australia ([Deloitte Access Economics, 2023](#)), with this model increasingly gaining widespread interest.

ARACY strongly supports the vision activities of the National Child and Family Hubs Network, and recommends that new place-based funding approaches be trialled to ensure sufficient, predictable, sustainable cross-sectoral resourcing that is informed by and responsive to community need to optimise wellbeing.

What is the impact of hubs?



- Living in proximity to a Sure Start hub (for 0-5 years olds and their families) in England was associated with improved family functioning and children's emotional development ([NESS Research Team, 2004](#)), a significant reduction in children's hospitalisations by age 15 ([Cattan et al., 2021](#)) and improved educational achievement by age 16 ([Carneiro et al., 2024](#)). These effects were greatest for children from low-income backgrounds.
- Analysis of the Community Hubs Australia program found a 350 percent social return on investment for its model placing hubs in primary schools in 100 culturally diverse neighbourhoods across four Australian states ([Deloitte, 2024](#)).

What are the core features of an effective hub?



- Hubs comprise components at the individual/family, community and organisational levels connected and resourced to make sure supports are holistic, seamless, meet local needs and maximise wellbeing.
- Hubs should aim to build integration within and between services and programs to support a smooth, joined-up user experience. This is referred to as the "glue" that holds a hub together, and is made up of business oversight, staff support, community engagement and shared information and technology systems ([National Child and Family Hubs Network, 2023](#)). Access to hub services and programs that are integrated (not just co-located) is critical.
- Hub investment, design, delivery and evaluation needs to adequately consider this "glue" function, which can often be invisible but is central to integrated service provision.
- A number of philanthropic members of the Investment Dialogue for Australia's Children are individually and collectively exploring and resourcing hubs as a means of enhancing individual and collective wellbeing through more integrated service delivery.

National Child and Family Hubs Network



- The National Child and Family Hubs Network (the Network) was established through seed funding from the Ian Potter Foundation in late 2022. It unites leaders, service providers, policymakers and academics to strengthen hubs across Australia through research, advocacy and learning.
- The Network holds the vision of “all families being able to walk through a hub’s welcoming front door and receive the right care and support for their child and family at the right time, leading to improved and equitable health and development outcomes” (Honisett et al., 2023).
- The Network’s Steering Committee is led by the Centre for Community Child Health, Murdoch Children’s Research Institute, and the Network has nearly 1000 members despite only launching in November 2023.

The Network recommends that the Commonwealth Government should invest in integrated child and family hubs as a priority area, with specific financial investment to include:

1. A national approach to implementing, funding, and evaluating hubs (outside the services themselves) including:
 - 1.1. Agreed core components and appropriate governance structures for hubs based on evidence.
 - 1.2. Support existing hubs to improve integration via funding for the ‘glue’
 - 1.3. Establish new hubs, targeted to areas of significant disadvantage, including establishment, infrastructure, and ‘glue’ funding to ensure success.
 - 1.4. Build in guidance and support for ongoing quality improvement and evaluation of hubs through a harmonised set of process and impact measures.
2. Build on the National Child and Family Hubs Network, as an existing national coordinating body, to build capacity, reduce fragmentation, and identify best practice by undertaking research, evaluation, and quality improvement to support and scale integrated Child and Family Hubs across Australia.

Network Early Years Strategy submission, April 2023

The Network is currently finalising a five-year Strategic Plan that is due for release in the second half of 2024. It will focus on five priority areas: invest in the Network; secure long-term funding to support hubs; build workforce capability and culture; use evidence to inform hub implementation; and advocacy.

For more information about the network, see www.childandfamilyhubs.org.au or email ARACY representatives on the Network Steering Committee:

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ARACY's commitment to child and family hubs



- ARACY is a member of the Network Steering Committee through representation by both its national team and Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership (TQKP). Both have contributed to the development of the Network's Strategic Plan.
- ARACY is committed to resourcing, embedding and evaluating the integrative functions of a hub, such as workforce capability and supporting different hub stakeholders to work effectively together. This includes use and adaptation of The Common Approach®, including The Nest, to build the foundations of common language and ways of working within hubs.
- In 2020, funding from the Australian Government Department of Health enabled delivery of a train-the-trainer program in The Common Approach to 18 practitioners in Taree in mid-coast NSW. This included staff of the First Steps Count Child and Community Centre, which has delivered the training to service providers working through its hub as way of building common language, processes and practices as a form of the 'glue' to enhance integrated service delivery.
- ARACY is a Partner Investigator on the Strengths based, tiered, accessible, resources and supports Strengths based, tiered, accessible, resources and supports (STARS) for Kids research project, led by Professor Sue Woolfenden from the University of NSW. The project aims to understand the impact of an integrated Hubs model on children's developmental and families' psychosocial needs in the first three years of a child's life, along with identifying key components of effective hubs and investigating their social return on investment.
- TQKP in 2023-2024 coordinated a project funded by The Bryan Foundation to map hubs in the Queensland context. It also aimed to distil practitioner wisdom and the available evidence base to develop a Framework to inform the design, implementation and evaluation of best-practice family hubs in the Queensland context, and possibly beyond. The Framework was co-designed through consultation with more than 160 stakeholders, including in close consultation with the Network Steering Committee, and is visually depicted here. The Framework and a project summary will be released in August 2024, and made available through TQKP's website. It will be trialled and tested as part of the Network's strategic plan, and form the basis of a related evaluation framework.

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Integrated services should be the default model, not the exception. Service providers operating in a silo should be required to explain ‘why’. Silos are only designed to meet administrative needs of government, not the real life needs of human beings.

Anne Hollonds
National Children's Commissioner



**Contact us to find out more about
The National Child and Family Hubs Network**



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