

The National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission (NHHRC)
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The Australian Commissioners and Guardians for Children and Young People welcome the opportunity to provide comment on the NHHRC's interim report *A Healthier Future for all Australians*.

The attached submission has been prepared by the Commissioners and Guardians across Australia that have a mandate to promote the well-being of children and young people:

- Mr Howard Bath, Children's Commissioner, Northern Territory.
- Ms Kerryn Boland, Children's Guardian, New South Wales
- Ms Gillian Calvert, Commissioner for Children and Young People, New South Wales.
- Mr Bernard Geary OAM, Child Safety Commissioner, Victoria.
- Ms Elizabeth Fraser, Commissioner for Children and Young People and Child Guardian, Queensland.
- Mr Paul Mason, Commissioner for Children, Tasmania.
- Mr Alasdair Roy, Children and Young People Commissioner, ACT.
- Ms Michelle Scott, Commissioner for Children and Young People, Western Australia
- Ms Pam Simmons, Guardian for Children and Young People, South Australia.

With your approval we would like to place a copy of this submission on the Commission's website. Making work such as this publicly available is one way of demonstrating our accountability to the children and young people in our jurisdiction. Your consideration of this request at the appropriate time would be much appreciated.

For further information please contact Ms Lou-Anne Lind, Principal Policy Officer at the NSW Commission for Children and Young People on 02 9286 7221 or at lou-anne.lind@kids.nsw.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

Gillian Calvert
NSW Commissioner
March 2009
(on behalf of the above Commissioners and Guardians)

JOINT COMMISSIONERS' AND GUARDIANS' RESPONSE TO THE NATIONAL HEALTH AND HOSPITALS REFORM COMMISSION (NHHRC) INTERIM REPORT: *A Healthier Future for all Australians*

Introduction

The Commissioners and Guardians focus on promoting the well-being of children and young people. Our independent status allows us to build partnerships across the government, non-government and business sectors and positively influence legislation, policy and service delivery to achieve the best outcomes for kids. A key part of this role is promoting the voices of children and young people in decision-making so that policy better reflects their needs.

The Commissioners and Guardians would welcome the opportunity to engage the Australian Government on an on-going basis about the health needs of children and young people so that the NHHRC's reform agenda continues to effectively support kids' well-being.

Themes, Key Reform Directions & Principles

The Commissioners and Guardians welcome and support the themes, key reform directions and principles presented in the interim report. The Commissioners and Guardians are also pleased to note the NHHRC's commitment to improve health outcomes for children and young people and invest in prevention of injury and illness. Specific comments relating to the four themes include:

- *Taking responsibility*: children and young people have told the Commissioners and Guardians that they want a greater say in managing their own health. For this theme to have meaning, the NHHRC's final report needs to reflect a stronger commitment to involving children and young people in the design and delivery of the reforms.
- *Connecting care*: the Commissioners and Guardians support the need for integrated service delivery for children and young people (and for this to continue across their lifespan) and welcome the commitment to invest in a healthy start to life. We would like to draw the NHHRC's attention to the *Every Child Matters* approach in the United Kingdom (UK) that supports integrated service delivery for children and young people at the local level (see below for additional information).
- *Facing inequities*: the Commissioners and Guardians welcome the principle of universal entitlement to health care which recognises the inequities faced by specific groups of children including those from Aboriginal backgrounds, those living in rural and remote areas and children living in out of home care. The Commissioners and Guardians also support the introduction of national benchmarks around the healthy development of children and young people to help address the current inconsistencies across jurisdictions.
- *Driving quality performance*: the Commissioners and Guardians do not have a particular preference for any of the governance options. Instead, we would like to encourage decision-makers to view the three governance options through a lens of improved service delivery for children and young people i.e. which of the three options will deliver the best health outcomes for children and young people across Australia? The Commissioners and Guardians recommend that a stronger focus is needed on measuring and reporting health outcomes for children and young people nationally and that this should be an integral part of the reform process. Finally, the Commissioners and Guardians are keen to make sure that children and young people are involved in shaping the strategic directions for whichever options is chosen.

UK Approach: Every Child Matters

The Laming Inquiry was established in 2003 to investigate the circumstances leading to the death of Victoria Climbié, an eight old child who had multiple contacts with the National Health Service (NHS) in the UK. *Every Child Matters*, the government's policy response to this inquiry, is built around five key outcomes to well-being in childhood and later life:

- being healthy;
- staying safe;
- enjoying and achieving;
- making a positive contribution; and
- achieving economic well-being.

Every Child Matters introduced an approach known as the Children's Trust Pathfinders. The key features of this model include:

- a child-centred response informed by the views of children, young people and their families;
- re-configured and integrated front-line delivery organised around children and young people rather than professional boundaries or existing agencies; and
- inter-agency cooperation, joint planning and pooled resources.

The model is underpinned by national legislation that requires agencies to cooperate with one another to safeguard and improve outcomes for all children and young people. Like many other health consumers, children and young people do not have the information, authority and resources to navigate and negotiate across multiple service providers. The emphasis on inter-agency cooperation and implementation at the local level, rather than a system bureaucratically-drive from above, creates a support system more accessible and responsive to children and young people.

A 2007 evaluation of the Children's Trust Pathfinders reported that there were early indications of improved outcomes for children and young people at the local level due to increased agency cooperation. The evaluation also highlighted that the approach improved the efficiency of services which allowed efficiency savings to be invested into preventative work.

The Commissioners and Guardians encourage the NHRRC to consider such a locally integrated service model for Australia. Further information can be found at:

<http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/>.

Greater Involvement of Children & Young People

Children and young people have told the Commissioners and Guardians that their health is important to them and that they want a greater say in managing their own health. Children and young people understand and experience 'health' differently to adults. For children and young people, the focus is on healthy development and for adults the focus of health is on disease management. Children and young people have told Commissioners and Guardians that health is about 'feeling good'. At an Ask the Children, a 17 male said, "Older people's concerns might be cancer, sickness, hospitals, ambulances... to us, it's not just about physical stuff, it's about being happy and just general well-being."

For the proposed reforms to be effective, children and young people need to be engaged directly so that their perspectives can guide the design, delivery and evaluation of health services. The Commissioners and Guardians recommend that participatory mechanisms be developed to support the engagement of children and young people around the health reforms. An example of this could be the establishment of a children and young people's advisory panel.