

Centre for Community
Child Health



The Creswick Foundation

Fellowship in Children and Young People's Mental Health – Project summary

The Children's Wellbeing Continuum - Strengthening Primary Care

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30th June 2026



Introduction

The Creswick Foundation Fellowship supported a program of work exploring how the Children's Wellbeing Continuum could strengthen the role of primary care in promoting children's mental health and wellbeing.

The Children's Wellbeing Continuum was developed by the Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) as an evidence-informed, strengths-based framework to help parents, educators, and health professionals recognise, discuss and respond to children's mental health and wellbeing. The Continuum provides a practical 'snapshot' of how a child is going at a point in time, using four anchor points to describe a range of wellbeing states. Rather than relying on traditional binary and diagnostic approaches, the Continuum provides a simple, accessible and non-stigmatising way to describe a child's wellbeing, supporting earlier conversations and action before concerns escalate.

General practitioners (GPs) are among the most frequent and trusted points of contact for families with young children. They are often the first health professional a family turns to when they notice changes in a child's behaviour, emotions or functioning, placing them at a critical point for identifying early signs of mental health concerns. However, GPs report low confidence in identifying and supporting children experiencing emotional difficulties. Time pressures, limited referral pathways and long specialist waitlists further constrain their ability to act meaningfully within a standard consultation. Parents and caregivers* sit on the other side of the same gap. Many are uncertain whether what they are observing in their child warrants concern, where to turn for help, or whether raising the issue is appropriate at all, particularly before a crisis point is reached. Stigma, limited mental health literacy, and a lack of accessible, non-clinical language all contribute to delayed help-seeking.

Together, GPs and parents/caregivers sit at the critical early interface of children's mental health, yet neither group alone holds the shared language or confidence needed to make the most of the opportunities within primary care. Engaging them as complementary rather than separate audiences became central to this project.

The project aimed to:

- Explore how the Children's Wellbeing Continuum could be introduced and used within primary care to support GPs and parents/caregivers in early conversation and action in children's mental health.
- Understand the experiences, needs and preferences of GPs and parents/caregivers in relation to children's mental health and wellbeing in primary care settings.
- Develop a strategy to support wider uptake and use of the Continuum within general practice.
- Establish partnerships and dissemination pathways to support broader uptake of the Continuum at scale.

* For this project, 'parents and caregivers' are defined inclusively as any adult individual who, by birth, choice, or circumstance, holds a significant role in providing care for a child. This may include biological parents, stepparents, co-parents, adoptive parents, kinship carers, foster carers, Elders, or other guardians, regardless of family structure.

Activities

The following activities were undertaken to achieve the project's aims.

Part 1: Needs Assessment

National consultations were conducted with two core audiences (general practitioners and parents/caregivers) using a combination of surveys and focus groups to capture both the breadth and depth of their perspectives. In total, 14 GPs and 87 parents/caregivers participated.

GPs were invited to participate through our partnership with Emerging Minds and associated professional primary care networks. Consultations explored:

- Current experiences of discussing children's mental health with families.
- Barriers and enablers to early identification and intervention.
- Perceptions of the Children's Wellbeing Continuum.
- Preferences for resources, training and implementation supports.
- Opportunities to strengthen the role of primary care in children's mental health.

Parents/Caregivers were invited to participate through our partnership with Raising Children Network's parent/carer panel. Consultations explored:

- Confidence in recognising and responding to changes in children's wellbeing.
- Experiences seeking support.
- Language preferences.
- Barriers to discussing children's mental health.
- Opportunities to support earlier conversations and action.

Part 2: Outputs

Informed by consultation findings, the project developed a set of tangible outputs and activities. This included synthesising findings into a stakeholder insights report, creating and deepening partnerships with organisations including Emerging Minds, Raising Children Network and Matterworks, developing resources around the continuum, and creating a knowledge translation strategy to support broader uptake of the Children's Wellbeing Continuum. This work focused on building shared language around children's wellbeing, reducing stigma, and encouraging earlier help-seeking through primary care, with resources designed for both parents and GPs, and disseminated through networks each audience already trusts. Key highlights are summarised below.

A. Stakeholder Insights Report

Findings from the GP and parent/carer consultations were synthesised into a detailed stakeholder insights report, identifying priorities, barriers and opportunities for strengthening children's mental health literacy and supporting earlier action across families and primary care.

Key themes included:

- Shared language as a prerequisite for earlier action - both GPs and parents identified the absence of accessible, non-stigmatising language as a central barrier to early conversations, reinforcing the relevance of the Continuum's framing across both audiences.
- Structural barriers in primary care - GPs described significant systemic constraints, including time pressures, limited referral options, and tension between relational care and diagnostic expectation, pointing to the need for resources that are brief, practical, and endorsed by trusted professional bodies.
- Parent confidence and the threshold for help-seeking - while parents were generally confident recognising changes in their child, many were uncertain whether those changes warranted concern or professional support and had mixed experiences with help-seeking, highlighting the importance of resources that validate early action and reduce stigma around seeking help.

B. Partnership Establishment

A critical outcome of this project was the establishment and deepening of partnerships with two of Australia's leading children's health organisations. Emerging Minds is a national organisation funded by the Australian Government to build the capacity of the Australian primary health care workforce to support the mental health and wellbeing of infants, children and families. Its deep reach into GP networks and primary care settings brought both professional credibility and established dissemination infrastructure to the project. Raising Children Network is Australia's most visited parenting website, providing evidence-based information and resources to millions of families. Its parent and carer panel provided direct access to a diverse community of caregivers, and its platform offers extensive reach for family-facing resources at national scale.

Together, these partnerships ensured the work was grounded in the realities of both professional practice and family life, and positioned it for meaningful dissemination through networks that GPs and families already trust.

C. Knowledge Translation Strategy and Activities

Drawing on consultation insights and in collaboration with partner organisations, a knowledge translation strategy was developed to support broader uptake of the Children's Wellbeing Continuum and its key messages, with a focus on building shared language around children's wellbeing, normalising earlier help-seeking, and strengthening the connection between families and primary care.

Central to this strategy was a video series, produced by Matterworks in partnership with CCCH. Designed for parents and the broader community, the short video resources explored how children's mental health shows up in everyday life, how to make sense of patterns and changes over time, and how shared language can support earlier and more effective action. Content also addressed common misconceptions about the GP's role, helping families understand primary care as a genuine source of support, rather than simply a gateway to referral.

D. Resource and Toolkit Development

Consultation findings and the partnerships established through this project laid the foundations for a broader resource ecosystem around the Children's Wellbeing Continuum which is in development. This aims to support more robust and consistent use of the Continuum across families and primary care settings. Concurrently, the Continuum has been embedded within existing national infrastructure, including the Raising Healthy Minds app, and given dedicated prominence through a new GP-facing webpage on the Emerging Minds website, ensuring it reaches both families and practitioners through channels they already use and trust.

Key Reflections

A central insight from this fellowship is that strengthening children's mental health in primary care cannot rest on engaging clinicians alone. GPs and families approach these conversations from different starting points, with different language, different thresholds for concern, and different constraints, yet both are essential to making early support work in practice. Resources and strategies that engage these audiences together, around a shared framework, are more likely to shift outcomes than those that target either group in isolation.

The fellowship experience also reinforced that promoting uptake of evidence-based tools requires more than making them available. Resources need to be developed in response to identified needs, translated into accessible and engaging formats for their intended audiences, and embedded within the channels and relationships people already trust. A needs assessment-informed approach to knowledge translation, rather than conventional, one-way dissemination, was central to the work undertaken here.

Finally, partnership proved critical to this work. The relationships established with national organisations enabled the work to reach diverse audiences and achieve genuine scale. For the Continuum to fulfil its potential as a tool for building shared language across families, practitioners and communities, partnerships of this kind will remain essential going forward.

Impact and Future Directions

This fellowship has meaningfully advanced understanding of how the Children's Wellbeing Continuum can support children's mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention, both within primary care and for parents and caregivers in the broader community. Through the partnerships, knowledge translation activities and resources developed over the course of the project, the Continuum has reached a scale of engagement that reflects genuine community interest and need.

The Continuum is freely available via the [CCCH website](#) and has now exceeded 4,000 downloads, representing significant reach across families, practitioners and the community. Through the activities undertaken during the fellowship, the Continuum has been disseminated to both GPs and families through established professional and community networks, including [video resources](#), a dedicated Emerging Minds [webpage for GPs](#), and other partner channels. Findings from this fellowship will also be shared through academic publication and internal communities of practice, ensuring the learnings from this project inform practice beyond the fellowship period itself.

Future directions will build on the foundations established through this fellowship. This includes further developing the toolkit resources identified through the needs assessment, continuing to embed the Continuum within primary care and community settings, and sustaining the partnerships that have been central to achieving reach and credibility to date. The ultimate aim remains ensuring that families and the practitioners who support them share a common language, and a common confidence to act early, in support of children's mental health and wellbeing.

Acknowledgement

We are grateful to the Creswick Foundation for supporting this fellowship. The fellowship provided an important opportunity to explore innovative approaches to strengthening children's mental health and wellbeing through primary care, generating new insights into how families, practitioners and communities can work together to support earlier action. The support of the Creswick Foundation has enabled the development of new partnerships, new knowledge, and a strong foundation for future work aimed at improving mental health outcomes for children and families.