

CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

Healthy Kids: Bringing Early Childhood Education & Care communities together to improve the health of Queensland kids

2nd Asia Pacific Conference on Integrated Care, Melbourne, 11-13 November 2019

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Introduction: Early education benefits all children, especially those experiencing disadvantage. Early education produces the greatest return when it's high quality. High quality services are less likely to be accessed by children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, despite having the most to gain.

Healthy Kids brings together Health, Early Childhood, and Education sectors to deliver a free early childhood health and wellbeing workforce strategy for the early childhood education and care (ECEC) sector within identified communities.

Practice change implemented: Needs assessment of ECEC services, environmental scan of learning opportunities, and consultation of Early Childhood organisations revealed there was a lack of free, health-based PD available.

Aim & theory of change: Healthy Kids aims to enhance developmental outcomes of children in vulnerable communities through building capacity of ECEC sector to integrate key child development messages and strategies into everyday practice. This is achieved by coordinating free, quarterly webinars delivered in partnership with educators in local communities. Events includes a live webinar with content specialist, Q&A, networking, reflective practice, and newsletter.

Targeted population and stakeholders: Healthy Kids is delivered in ten communities across Queensland vulnerable in children's outcomes and socio-economic status. Less children are "on track" across many developmental domains when compared to both Queensland and Australian results on the Australian Early Development Censuses (AEDC).

Stakeholders involved include a range of key organisations with an early childhood focus, at both local and Advisory Group levels.

Timeline: Healthy Kids has been delivered from 2017-2019. CCHW is scoping communities and sector need for a further series.

Highlights:

- Community capacity and ownership to deliver program
- Translation of strategies into daily practice
- Developing or reigniting community early childhood networks
- Increasing subscription numbers for each newsletter
- Requests for Healthy Kids by other communities

- Increased opportunities for collaboration amongst partners

Comments on sustainability: Whilst CCHW provided support and facilitation for initial events, capacity building and exit strategy has allowed communities to take over the local delivery. CCHW continues to source health content, oversee coordination of local events, and publication of each newsletter.

Comments on transferability: Use of technology to deliver consistent health promoting messages to the ECEC (or other) sectors across the state with a framework that promotes communities of practice.

Conclusions: Evaluation suggests participants found the program to be useful, relevant and of value to their role as an educator, increasing their knowledge and skills around specific topics and application to daily practice.

Discussions: The presence of local champions makes a positive impact in how Healthy Kids is accepted by educators, as does visible cross-sector networks and relationships.

Lessons learned:

- Co-design of program between Health, Educators, and Early Childhood and Education-focused organisations
- Advisory group – guiding implementation, problem-solving, and sharing existing networks
- Creating a supportive environment to allow integration of different professional experiences