



Mental health inquiry – draft report

# Factsheet: Early Childhood, Children and Young People

**Early identification of risks in children and young people enables intervention and prevention of mental illness. This can significantly improve mental health and social and economic outcomes.**

## Children and young people face greater mental health risks



Mental ill-health affects **one in seven** 4 to 17 year olds.



More than **one in four** 16 to 24 year olds had mental illness in the past 12 months.



Mental ill-health in young people can **affect their whole life** – with high cost for the individual, their family and the broader community.

Promoting mental health and wellbeing needs to start early in a child's life. This includes monitoring social and emotional development in young children, in the same way their physical growth is regularly checked. It also means supporting parents, because helping parents helps their children.

For many children, preschool or school is the place where risk factors for social and emotional development are first identified. Early childhood education and care centres and schools need help to support children's social and emotional wellbeing and to be effective gateways for students and families to seek help. Many teachers and schools find this role very challenging – teachers also need to be supported as part of their training and professional development. Schools need dedicated wellbeing leaders to assist both teachers and students.

“ Research shows this [pre-adolescent to early adult years] is the time that many challenges/risks and mental illnesses begin, but we do very little to prepare the family and community, as a whole’.

*Connect Health and Community, sub. 94, p.11*



About 1 in 8 of 15 to 29 year olds are not engaged in school, training or work. This group is at risk of mental ill-health, and without targeted support may not re-enter education or work.



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## The Productivity Commission's Inquiry makes a number of recommendations to address these issues:



Expansion of early childhood health checks to assess social and emotional development.



Expansion of parent education and support programs.



Skills development in social and emotional wellbeing for teachers and other educators through their initial training and professional development.



Ensure all schools (over a certain size) have a full-time senior teacher dedicated to student mental health and wellbeing, who also maintains links to mental health support services in the local community.



All tertiary institutions should have a mental health and wellbeing strategy stating how they will support student mental health.



The Individual Placement and Support model of employment support could be used to help place disengaged youth into education or work.

The effects of the early childhood and school education reforms would improve the wellbeing of children and young people with poor mental health, and would have ongoing positive effects on their quality of life and employment outcomes. Over time, employment among those affected is expected to increase from 43,000 to 58,000 adding from \$4.3 to \$5.6 billion in income annually.

**\$5.6  
BILLION**



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