

Building an innovative early childhood health and wellbeing system
that supports children's development



03 The power to change
a child's life

How we are working
together across health,
education and community

04 Life in the first
2000 days

How the first 5 years of a person's
life is the most critical time to
break systemic inequity

06 Championing
children

How Child Health
Pathways positively
influence the future

Acknowledgement of Traditional Custodians

Baugull nyungai Gurumba bigi Maroomba biggee

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we live and work, and of the many different nations across the wider Brisbane south region. We pay our respects to the Elders, past, present and emerging as the holders of the memories, the traditions, the culture and the spiritual wellbeing of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across the nation. We acknowledge any Sorry Business that may be affecting the communities as a whole.

In the spirit of reconciliation, partnership and mutual respect, we will continue to work together with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to shape a health system which responds to the needs and aspirations of the community.

This information is accurate as of 01/11/2022. All information and content in this publication is produced in good faith by Brisbane South PHN and is based on sources believed to be reliable and accurate at the time of development. Whilst every effort has been made to ensure information and content is up to date and accurate, readers should not rely on the data cited but treat it as indicative only. Brisbane South PHN does not accept any responsibility or liability for any loss or damage as a result of any errors, inaccuracies, incompleteness or any discrepancies in the data, nor do we guarantee or make any representations in the data.

While the Australian Government has contributed funding for this material, it has not reviewed the content and is not responsible for any injury, loss or damage however arising from the use of, or reliance on, the information provided herein.





About us

Brisbane South PHN (Primary Health Network) has a vision for the best possible health and wellbeing for every person in the Brisbane south region.

Our purpose is to partner to build a health and wellbeing system in which every person in the Brisbane south region, especially those with the greatest need, is supported to live well and experience care that is connected, high-quality and easy to access.

Get in touch with us via contactus@bsphn.org.au or call 1300 467 265.

In this issue

- 02 CEO message
- 03 The power to change a child's life
- 04 Life in the first 2000 days
- 06 Championing children
- 08 Our impact
- 09 1 child's story



CEO Message

Early childhood is a critical time for children's health and development, and establishes foundations for future wellbeing.

In Brisbane south, most children do well and start school with the ability to progress. However, in some areas developmental vulnerability is well above state average – and in some communities, is almost double.

Research tells us the socio-economic consequences of not receiving support in early childhood can run into billions of dollars over the course of a person's life (Moore, Arefadib, Keyes and West, 2017). What happens in the first 2000 days of life predicts how well a child may learn in school, their performance throughout education and, in an increasing number of cases, future involvement in the criminal justice system.

Stronger health support systems are essential to improve early childhood outcomes, with strong policy positions currently supporting this across both state and federal governments.

This edition of *Primary Health Impact* highlights how we are reforming the health system, in collaboration with our partners, to support children across their 'First 2000 Days', or their first 5 years.

In collaboration with our partners, over the past 5 years we have successfully led First 2000 Days strategies such as our Thriving and On Track (TOTs) program, which increases access to developmental screening and early intervention services for children aged 2.5 to 3.5 years in the Logan and Inala areas — with trials underway to expand across 0 to 5 years.

Since 2020, more than 2700 children have accessed developmental screenings through TOTs, with 700 referrals made to early intervention services and 85 vulnerable families receiving support via holistic services.



Our work actively changes children's lives and futures, but despite the great progress made, more work is needed to deliver this work meaningfully and sustainably at scale.

We're calling on long-term government and philanthropy investment in our First 2000 Days strategies such as TOTs and other early childhood health system reform initiatives led by Brisbane South PHN.

I hope you enjoy this edition — please don't hesitate to drop me a line if you'd like to get in touch.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike Bosel". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kind regards
Mike Bosel
Chief Executive Officer

Our partners in early childhood health system reform include Children's Health Qld, Metro South Health, Department of Education, Logan Together, The Salvation Army, Mission Australia, CSIA, The Yunus Centre, Griffith University, SMBI Listeners, Village Connect, Brisbane ATSICHS, The Benevolent Society, ACCESS Community Services, Gunya Meta and Beenleigh Housing and Development.

The power to change a child's life

To break cycles of systemic inequity and inequality, children and families in Brisbane south need strong and sustainable early childhood development supports. Our First 2000 Days approach has the power to change a child's life, through health, education and community working together.

In Brisbane south, children from less-advantaged communities are at higher risk of developmental issues and the ongoing impacts of systemic inequity and inequality, because of reduced access to the health care system. They are less likely to access the services that they need and the result is that many children start school not ready.

With what we now know about early childhood development, systemic inequity and inequality cannot be allowed to continue.

In a significant new initiative, Brisbane South PHN, education and health partners, alongside Logan community leaders have collaborated on a First 2000 Days approach to early child development.

'The value is around how we collaborate effectively as partners to look at the whole child; particularly between health, education and our community partners, explained Rebecca Minter, Manager Early Years Improvement, Early Childhood Education and Care, Queensland Department of Education.'

'We are not just looking at children from an individual lens; we are looking at how we support children holistically,' she said.

'Initiatives within the First 2000 Days approach provide a soft entry point to have conversations about early childhood development with families,' Rebecca added.



With strong emphasis from both levels of Government—including the Federal Government's *Early Years Strategy* and Queensland Government's *Advancing Queensland Priorities – A Great Start for all Children* whole of government strategy—philanthropic and research partnerships have also sought to improve policy, systemic responses and investment into integrated early childhood development supports that work.

'A First 2000 Days approach enables us to work together in ways that are so much bigger than what we could achieve individually,' explained Fran Bugden, Manager, Child and Youth Program Development and Coordination, Brisbane South PHN.

'If we wait until children turn up at school to identify developmental issues, we've missed a really critical period in the early years to support their brain development.'

She continued, 'to see long-term meaningful change, we have put our strategies, policies and research together into action, to ensure children can do as well as possible when they reached school. This isn't achievable through individual programs alone.'

Read more about the impact of our First 2000 Days approach next.

Life in the first 2000 days

In a significant new initiative, Brisbane South PHN, alongside our partners and community leaders, have collaborated on a First 2000 Days approach to early child development. It's innovative and it's working.

Previously, children and families in less-advantaged communities of the Brisbane south region, such as Inala and Logan, have continued to experience significant challenges and reduced access to the health system. Due to our work to reform the health system, this situation is changing for the better.

'We created The First 2000 Days initiative because the first 5 years of a person's life is a critical time for their physical, cognitive, social and emotional health,' explained Matt Statham, General Manager, Child, Family and Older People, Brisbane South PHN.

'Children who are behind on their development when they start school rarely catch up to other children, and their development at school entry is an excellent predictor of their educational achievement at the end of school,' he said.

Indeed, in some parts of Brisbane south more than 1 in 3 children need help with their development. This compares to 1 in 5 children nationally (AEDC, 2022).

What we face now is the result of systemic health inequality and inequality that has been ongoing for decades, resulting in some children not starting school ready. With what we know now about the ongoing impacts of early childhood development, these inequalities cannot be allowed to continue.





'Our First 2000 Days initiative is an innovative and integrated approach that supports early childhood development in local and targeted ways as part of our commitment to health system reform,' explained Matt.

'The main supports of the First 2000 Days include access to comprehensive antenatal care, regular child health and development check-ups from birth until age 5, sustained nurse home visiting, parenting support and quality early education and care,' he said.

'On top of this, our partnerships all seek to collectively obtain improved policy, systemic responses and investment from government into fundamental early childhood supports.'

Children and families across the Brisbane south region need a stronger, more sustainable early development support system if we are to see long-term meaningful change.

The result is support for less-advantaged families in local, targeted and culturally-safe ways. We have achieved this through community engagement and collaboration; human-centric design in the context of community; and local learnings and evaluation. We've also taken the time to work with the communities to build trust and agree on what is important to their children's development.

Collaborative, place-based approaches like our First 2000 Days work to create meaningful long-term change.

Our work in Brisbane south has meant that:

- **2700** children have accessed child developmental screening
- **650** children have had further child health assessments with a nurse via their childcare centres
- **700** children have been referred for early intervention
- **370** children have been identified with developmental delays
- **85** vulnerable families have been supported holistically by Child Health Champions
- **50** children have been seen through school pop-up clinics.

What's needed now is ongoing investment from government and philanthropic bodies to break the cycle of inequity and inequality for children in Brisbane south.

Read more about the incredible people who are championing children next.

Championing children

Strong early childhood development positively influence all aspects of a person's future. That's why our Child Health Pathways Professionals act as champions for children through our First 2000 Days approach, to link them with services that support their growth and development.

Children benefit from regular health and development checks. This enables developmental issues to be identified and children to access early intervention services in a critical period for brain development. Child health and development checks can be completed by a Child Health Nurse. However, not all families can access that service, which means some children go unchecked and unsupported.

As part of our First 2000 Days approach, we moved childhood development screening into local communities within Brisbane south. We also empowered childcare educators and families to help identify children who need support. The result being more children and families have accessed the help that they need.

'Thriving and on Track [TOTs] is a collaborative initiative that helps families access early childhood development checks and support services,' explained Fran Bugden, Manager, Child and Youth Program Development and Coordination, Brisbane South PHN.

'Sometimes we are looking at families that may have their own mental health challenges; who are facing domestic violence; and/or who are experiencing financial circumstances', explained Robyn Masters, a Child Health Pathways Professionals working within TOTs in the community.

'We will see what it is that they're needing support with, then we work with that family to get those supports in place.'

Child Health Pathway Professionals (also known as Community Connectors in some communities) are an innovative part of TOTs that offer families and communities welcoming, supportive and holistic support to navigate the health care system and access support. They do critical work on the ground with families; including everything from linking parents to domestic and family violence services and mental health support, to assisting with securing food parcels.

Feedback from families has been that Child Health Pathway Professionals like Robyn provide 'a fun, family feel' during support sessions and help them 'feel welcome and safe.' 'We feel valued for our own opinion,' explained a parent.

'Me and my family felt culturally-safe to be ourselves and I was grateful to be able to ask Child Health Pathway Professionals and Speech Pathologist questions when I didn't understand.' - a TOTs parent.

Rebecca Smith, an Early Childhood Educator working in Kingston and 1 of our TOTs Partners added, 'This gives us as educators the opportunity to have those difficult conversations with parents and to be able to talk about anything they have concerns about.'



Our impact

Our work supporting early childhood development in Brisbane south has meant that:

over
2700
children have accessed
child developmental
screening.



over
650
children have had further
child health assessments
with a nurse via their
childcare centres.



over
370
children have been
identified with
developmental delays.



over
700
children have been
referred for early
intervention.



over
85
vulnerable families have
been supported holistically
by Child Health Champions.



over
50
children have been seen
through school pop-up clinics.



1 child's story

Breaking the cycle of childhood inequity and inequality

Every day, we have the privilege of witnessing stories of children and families who benefit from our work. Here is 1 story, about a family who gained access to services and support.

This story is about a 4-year old child who lives with a family member in the Brisbane south region. Like many children their age, they enjoy playing outside, building puzzles, and are known to be very active and interested in mathematics. This child has many strengths, but their family needed additional support to ensure they could thrive and be on track with their development.

Working in collaboration with the Queensland Department of Education Early Childhood Education and Care centre (ECEC), they were referred to our Child Health Pathway Professionals (also known as Community Connectors in some communities). The reason they were referred was multi-faceted and complex; at the time of referral, the child and their family had no consistent support.

This 'has been a God send,' reports the family member, after obtaining holistic support.

With a proactive and supportive family member, our Child Health Pathways assisted the family to contact NDIS for a review of the child's needs. The result was recommendations for regular intervention sessions with specialist services.

Our Child Health Pathways Professional also helped them access a Paediatrician due to the severity of the complexities they faced.

With waitlists up to 12-18 months long, they may not have been able to access or navigate the health system in a timely way. The family member was supported too, with access to the Queensland Community Support Scheme for help at home.

This support 'has been a God send,' reports the family member, of their engagement with our First 2000 Days approach. Whilst every child and family is different, our initiatives have made a positive impact for this child and the people supporting them.

Our member organisations

Brisbane South PHN has 21 members from across communities, not for profits, health and peak bodies who provide critical support for our work across policy, health reform and other matters - including opportunities to improve the mental health of people in Brisbane south. We are grateful for their guidance and expertise as we seek to support the best possible health and wellbeing outcomes for every person.



References

- Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment. (2022). *Australian Early Development Census: Levels of developmental vulnerability by community*. URL: <https://www.aedc.gov.au/data-explorer/>
- Moore, T.G., Arefadib, N., Deery, A., Keyes, M. & West, S. (2017). *The First Thousand Days: An Evidence Paper – Summary*. Parkville, Victoria: Centre for Community Child Health, Murdoch Children's Research Institute.
- New South Wales Health. (2019). *The First 2000 Days: Conception to Age 5 Framework*. URL: https://www1.health.nsw.gov.au/pds/ActivePDSDocuments/PD2019_008.pdf

This publication uses data from the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC). The AEDC is funded by the Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment. The findings and views reported are those of the author and should not be attributed to the Department or the Australian Government.