

7 June 2024

National Mental Health Commission
PO Box R1463
Royal Exchange NSW 1225

Via email: engagement@mentalhealthcommission.gov.au

Dear National Mental Health Commission secretariat

Re: Draft National Guidelines for including mental health and wellbeing in Early Childhood Health Checks

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Draft National Guidelines for including mental health and wellbeing in Early Childhood Health Checks. As you may be aware, our 2024 budget [submission](#) recommended the Government introduce funding to support universal annual child health checks during the first 2,000 days in general practice

The RACGP supports a guideline for including mental health and wellbeing in Early Childhood Health Checks. We have identified some areas which are not addressed in the draft and provide comments relating to these areas below.

- The RACGP agrees with taking a holistic view of a child's mental health and wellbeing. With more than 22 million Australians visiting a general practitioner (GP) every year for their essential health care, general practitioners are the most accessed service across Australia's healthcare system. In rural areas, it is often the only service available.
- GPs are usually the first point of contact for families, providing care through all stages of life. As such, general practice is central to providing holistic care and plays a key role in the early delivery of mental health care. The role of the family GP and how best to work with the GP should be incorporated within the guideline wherever possible to ensure better mental health outcomes for children can be achieved.
- Better collaboration between GPs and other primary care services, such as child health nurses is needed. The guideline should emphasise the importance of care coordination and bidirectional communication between overlapping and parallel services, such as state-funded child health services and general practice.
- There is a significant disconnect between the provision of early childhood healthcare in general practice and Early Childhood Health Checks in the current document. There is a missed opportunity for those performing Early Childhood Health Checks to enquire about access to healthcare, to encourage connection with the patient's regular GP and to encourage promotion of preventive activities such as immunisation.
- The guideline focuses on improving how Early Childhood Health Checks are performed. Optimum or minimum standards for a health check should be first clearly defined. Once this is determined it will be easier to incorporate further improvements.
- Additional commentary about triaging resources to ensure adequate access for those most in need should be included in the guideline.
- It is also important to note that using the acronym ECHC for Early Childhood Health Checks can be confusing given NSW uses this acronym for their Early Child Health Centres.



RACGP
Royal Australian College
of General Practitioners

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Thank you again for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Draft National Guidelines for including mental health and wellbeing in Early Childhood Health Checks. For any enquiries regarding this letter, please contact Stephan Groombridge, National Manager, Practice management, Standards and Quality Care on 03 8699 0544 or stephan.groombridge@racgp.org.au.

Yours sincerely

Dr Nicole Higgins
RACGP President