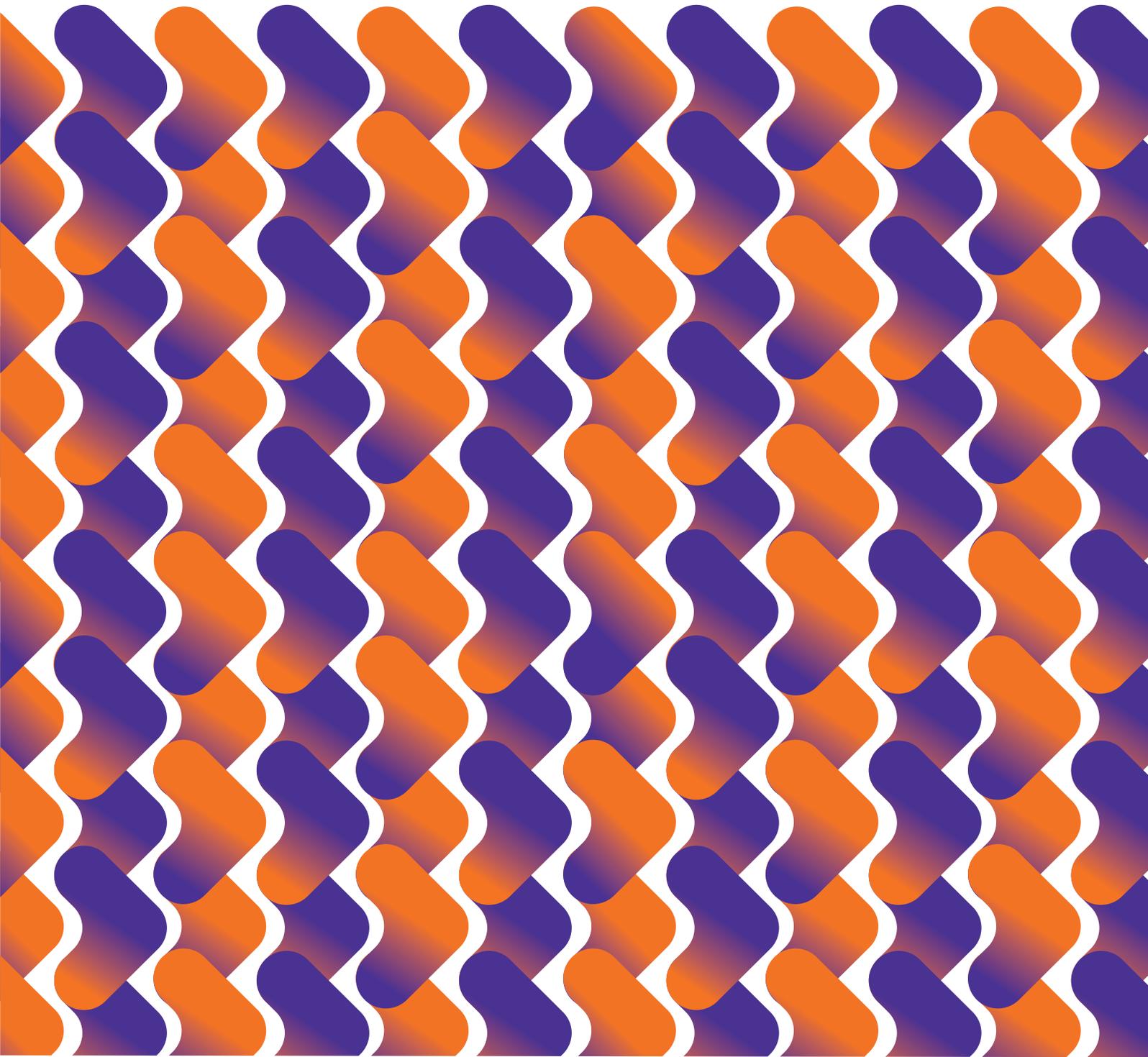


Practical Solutions. Supported by evidence.

Year in Review 2017-18



Parenting Research Centre

Year in Review 2017–18

Practical solutions. Supported by evidence.

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Introduction

The Parenting Research Centre helps children thrive by bringing scientific rigour to the practical task of improving services and support provided to parents, carers and families.

We seek better outcomes for children by increasing effectiveness and fostering innovation in the way families are supported in their parenting. To do that, we work with a broad network of government and community organisations in the fields of health, education and welfare, helping them to find the answers they need to best support families.

Our collaborative, partner-focused approach not only enables us to bring the best available evidence to the table in a timely and useful way for our clients and partners, but it ensures we maintain strong, trusted relationships with them. In 2017–18, we supported a wide range of agencies to design and deliver programs that put the best evidence on parenting support into action.

Key highlights of 2017–18

- We completed a major research project with the internationally respected FrameWorks Institute about how to change the public conversation on parenting to deliver better outcomes for children. The research shows a radical shift is needed in the way messages about parenting are communicated to the public if we want to increase understanding of, and backing for, publicly funded parenting support.
- We celebrated the end of Raising Children’s Network’s first decade of providing trusted information for parents with a breakfast attended by key government and community stakeholders.
- Our major Parenting Today in Victoria survey of 2600 parents was launched by Victorian Minister for Early Childhood Education the Hon. Jenny Mikakos MP. This research is providing valuable insights for policy and practice into how parents are faring and how they seek help when they need it.
- Our partnership with Emerging Minds – a major initiative to improve the mental health of children – saw the launch of a national portal to provide real-time access to resources, training and support for professionals working with families.
- We continued work to develop and implement practice frameworks with key partner organisations including Key Assets, Wesley Mission and The Smith Family – helping them to redesign how they work with families.
- Five of our staff were certified as SafeCare providers, enabling them to deliver this evidence-based program directly with families in their homes. They also underwent training to be certified as coaches in the program, which aims to reduce child abuse and neglect and which we are helping the NSW Government to pilot.
- We established a new collaboration with Tokyo Kasei University to train Japanese practitioners in our Parenting Young Children program.
- Our 15 ParentingNow webinars for parents on topics ranging from healthy eating to sleep, screen time, behaviour and anxiety, attracted nearly 1500 attendees.
- We developed a new five-year Strategic Plan for our organisation, defining the key goals to guide our future direction.

How we work

We believe that the way we work is as important as the type of work that we do.

In all of our work, we take a collaborative, partner-focused approach that enables organisations to build their own and others' capacity to deliver good parenting support.

We design, adapt, implement and evaluate approaches to parenting support in partnership with our clients, driven by the common aim of improving services.

Our unique combination of skills, combined with our partners' insights and capabilities, means that we can respond adeptly to client need and provide timely advice backed by rigorous research. This combination of skills is outlined in the diagram below.

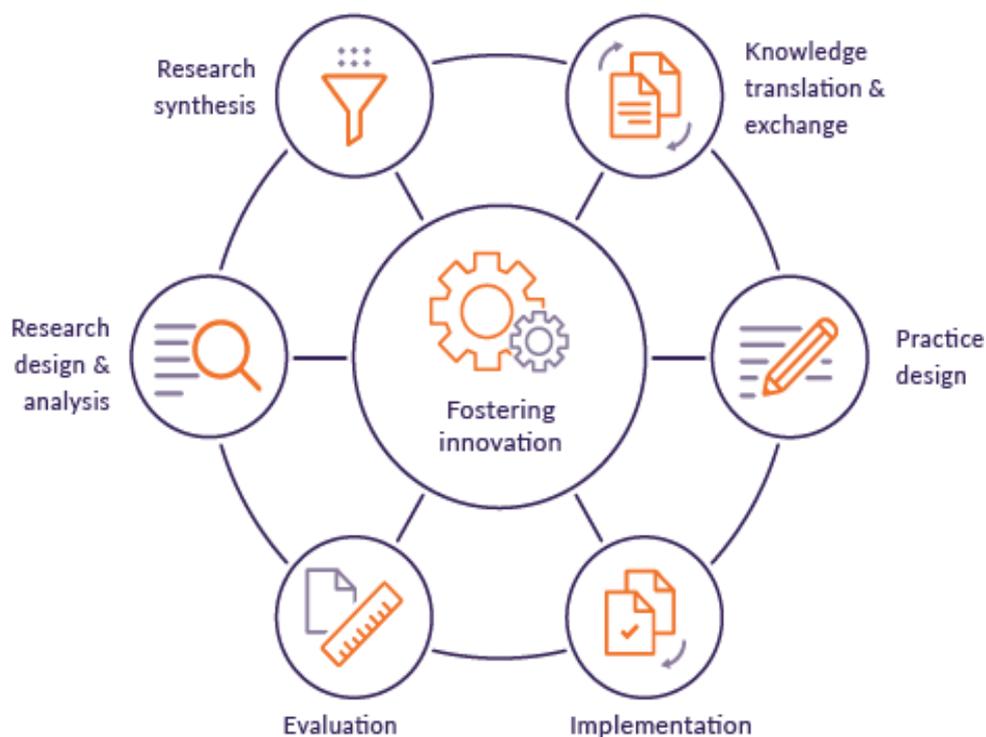


Figure 1 The Parenting Research Centre's areas of practice

Looking to the future

Strategic Plan 2018–2023

We recently developed a new five-year Strategic Plan to guide the PRC's direction through to 2023. This plan will ensure that we remain a strong, viable organisation with the necessary skillset to achieve our mission of helping children and families thrive by driving improved ways of supporting parenting. It outlines five key goals, with associated objectives for each:

1. Advocate for effective parenting support
2. Be a leader in advancing evidence-based policy, services and systems related to parenting support
3. Drive innovation in parenting support
4. Increase reach and impact of evidence-based parenting
5. Build a thriving enterprise and organisation.

These goals are linked to our Theory of Change, which shows how we help drive evidence-informed policy and practice (see figure below).

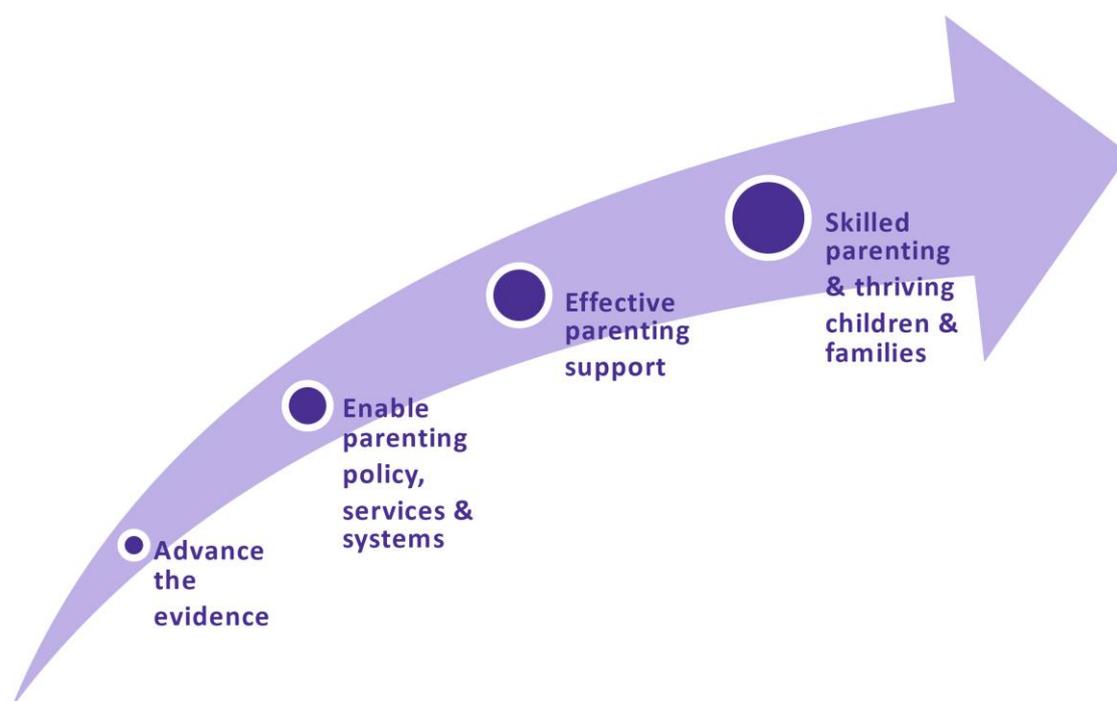


Figure 2 Parenting Research Centre Theory of Change

1. Achievements in supporting families in parenting their children

A key plank of our work is to provide practical support to help families raise their children. In 2017–18, we reached out to parents and carers both through traditional methods and by using newer digital technologies, to provide them with evidence-based, practical information and resources on parenting. Our key achievements are outlined below.

1.1. Raising Children Network

[Raising Children Network](#) is a leading Australian parenting website, developed and produced in collaboration with the Murdoch Children’s Research Institute and The Royal Children’s Hospital Centre for Community Child Health.

The website, which is funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services, provides free, evidence-based and accessible information and resources about parenting issues ranging from pregnancy through to adolescence.

This year, raisingchildren.net.au marked its 10th anniversary with a celebration breakfast at Parliament House, Canberra. The event was launched by Senator the Hon. Simon Birmingham, then Minister for Education and Training, who spoke about the importance of raisingchildren.net.au as an easily accessible resource for parents. More than 60 MPs, education and social services staff and senior members of peak bodies and service providers attended the breakfast, which was a wonderful opportunity to showcase the achievements of the site and its increasing importance to Australian parents.

In 2017–18, raisingchildren.net.au also progressed work with the Singapore Government to provide consultancy, training, content and development of new resources for their parenting portal, which went live on 1 April.

Visitors to raisingchildren.net.au

The [raisingchildren.net.au](#) website and its associated [Twitter](#) feed and [Facebook](#) page, continued to be a valuable resource for the community. During 2017–18:

- 42,085 people accessed the site each day, compared with 40,855 in the previous year
- 12.1 million unique visitors viewed 24.4 million pages on the website
- our Twitter followers grew by more than 8% over the year, to 6076
- more than 201,000 people followed the raisingchildren.net.au Facebook page by June 2018, a 17.9% increase on the previous year
- close to 70% of visitors came to the website via a mobile device.

Enriching content

We produced 53 new content resources and updated 610 resources on raisingchildren.net.au, including articles, videos and Parenting in Pictures guides, to reflect current scientific knowledge. New content features included:

- fully reviewing, updating and relaunching content on the [autism therapies](#) and [media use by children](#)

- launching a new section featuring collections of content in 15 languages other than English
- releasing a suite of 20 [videos](#) containing tips and information on play and learning, covering topics such as how boredom helps development, low-cost play ideas, rough and tumble play and messy play
- new resources on coping with [stillbirth and neonatal death](#)
- new content on [child mental health](#), [family violence](#), and [advocating for children with additional needs](#).

Community engagement

In September 2017, raisingchildren.net.au published a suite of new evidence-based resources on [same-sex and gender-diverse parenting](#), which was created in a project funded by the Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet.

The resources were promoted widely via our social media channels attracting strong engagement, as well as being promoted by the stakeholders involved in their development, including Rainbow Families and Relationships Australia.

Sharing our content

The site's resources continued to attract interest from organisations seeking high-quality content for parents. At the end of June 2018, RCN had agreements in place to share content with 17 different organisations. During 2017–18 our content was used by organisations including the following:

- The Royal Foundation (UK): We provided content for the Heads Together – Mentally Healthy Schools website, led by The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge and the Duke and Duchess of Sussex.
- The Ministry of Health, Government of British Columbia, Canada, licensed 80 articles on child development
- The Department of Education and Training Victoria website sought and used 10 new pieces of content on child development
- The new Victorian Government Maternal Child Health app embedded our content to help parents and carers find essential and trustworthy information on child health, learning and development
- The StoryPark app, a cloud-based secure platform where childcare educators and families can share photos, videos, observations and learnings also made extensive use of our content. The app has a reach of 4000 childcare centres across Australia and 2000 across NZ, which cares for 280,000 children.

1.2. My Time

[MyTime](#) is a national peer support program for parents of children with developmental delay, disability and chronic health problems. It is coordinated by Parenting Research Centre, delivered by community partners and funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services.

MyTime is coordinated across Australia with 12 agency partners. During 2017–18, MyTime supported 3700 registered members through 5200 sessions, and continued to engage with parents through social media. A snapshot of the program statistics for the year showed:

- MyTime attracted 701 new [Facebook](#) page likes, increasing the total number of likes to 3585

- there were more than 1000 queries received through the MyTime website
- types of sessions conducted included: Coffee and chat (45%), guest speakers with structured topic (36%), special events (11%), self-care (8%)
- average attendance at each session was six members and four children
- 56% of members lived in major cities, 29% in inner regional areas, 11% in outer regional areas and 4% in remote locations.

1.3. Driving digital engagement

During the year we continued to engage and support parents by harnessing digital technologies, an increasingly popular way for parents to seek information and support. As well as successfully maintaining our key parent-facing platforms raisingchildren.net.au and MyTime, we also continued to deliver and develop webinars for parents.

We rebranded our series of free, live and interactive webinars under the banner ParentingNow. The webinars are developed by our staff here at the Centre, hosted by raisingchildren.net.au and cover a range of topics important to parents. They are presented by an expert with specialist knowledge and supported by a facilitator. They are also recorded so parents can watch them later.

Four stand-alone webinars (Sleep 0-6 months, Sleep 6-12 months, Healthy Eating, and Screen Time) as well as two courses (Behaviour and Anxiety) were delivered during the year.

Levels of satisfaction among webinar attendees were high. An evaluation of the Anxiety course showed attendees had marked improvements in understanding anxiety, confidence in managing it and preparedness to manage it after the course.

Overall, we delivered 15 webinars to 1451 attendees and attracted 2832 YouTube views. The most popular topics were sleep and tantrums. The tantrums series was the most visited afterwards, with 607 YouTube views for the first week alone.

2. Achievements in enhancing the capacity of child and family services

We play a key role in improving child outcomes by developing the capacity of services in the health, welfare and education sectors to provide effective parenting support. In 2017–18, we supported a wide range of agencies to work more effectively with parents, with a focus on developing practice frameworks to help organisations make the ‘how’ of working with families as explicit as possible.

2.1. Designing evidence-informed practice frameworks

Our practice design team works with clients to help them adapt and develop evidence-informed interventions, programs and services that work in the local context. During the year we helped a number of agencies develop practice frameworks that will allow them to:

- improve their services to children and families
- better build and retain knowledge
- develop and evaluate practice more systematically
- more effectively share good practice across the organisation.

We completed design work on projects with Wesley Mission, Key Assets and The Smith Family, as detailed below, and also carried out further work installing and implementing those projects.

Our design work and the co-design process we used to develop the practice frameworks continues to be well received, attracting interest from government and other NGOs about framework development.

Key Assets Australia and New Zealand

We began working with Key Assets last year to help them refine the way they worked with carers in their Fostering Services. Our continued partnership has involved developing and delivering an evidence-informed practice framework so Key Assets can reform service delivery and practice in foster care services.

During this second year of the project, we co-designed the framework with a group of senior leaders from across Australia and New Zealand. The Fostering Services Framework was delivered in early 2018, and Key Assets identified trial sites for initial implementation. Initially implementation of the framework in those sites was planned for completion by December 2018.

The success of this Framework has led to us expanding our work and adapting the Framework to Key Assets Family Preservation and Restoration Services.

Wesley Mission, NSW

Wesley Mission previously engaged us to develop an evidence-based practice framework to help staff improve case management and parenting support as part of its delivery of the NSW Government's Brighter Futures initiative. In 2017–18, we supported the start of installation and implementation of the co-designed practice framework across Wesley's three Brighter Futures sites

in Western Sydney (Brighter Futures is a targeted early intervention initiative for vulnerable families).

Due to the extent and comprehensive nature of the framework, we have adopted a stepped approach to training and coaching. The final work was due for completion at the end of the 2018 calendar year.

The Smith Family

We partnered with The Smith Family to co-design an evidence-based practice framework for their Learning for Life program, which aims to keep disadvantaged students engaged in education.

In 2017–18, we completed the practice framework, which will guide how support is provided to families in the Learning for Life program. We began the installation phase of the project, conducting an organisational readiness assessment and developing training that will initially be implemented across 14 sites nationally.

The next step will be delivering training and on-the-job coaching for the Team Leaders who are supporting Family Partnership Coordinators to implement the practice framework across the 14 sites. We are also drafting a Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) evaluation to monitor implementation and impact of the practice framework.

Waminda South Coast Women’s Health and Welfare Aboriginal Corporation

We have worked with Waminda South Coast Women’s Health and Welfare Aboriginal Corporation in NSW since 2015 to train and support staff. Our work has helped staff implement strategies designed to enhance their clients’ child development, family safety and parental coping.

During 2017–18 we worked together to develop a culturally appropriate and organisationally consistent ‘Coping Skills’ module. The module was designed for teams within Waminda to support their clients in improving skills in problem-solving, self-regulation and communication.

We delivered a one-day training program to a group of Waminda staff to introduce them to the content of the module, and worked with a smaller, select group of those trained staff to operate as practice support ‘coaches’ to their newly-trained colleagues while they started using the module with their clients on a daily basis.

The overall aim of this work has been to build Waminda’s capacity to make use of the new module and to enhance its ability to deliver the module independently and sustainably without the need for further external support into the future.

2.2. Implementation support

SafeCare®

During 2017–18, we continued our major contribution to making the internationally recognised SafeCare program available to some families in Australia. SafeCare is designed to reduce child abuse and neglect. We are working with the NSW Department of Family Services to trial the program with six agencies at 14 sites across NSW that are part of the NSW Government Brighter Futures initiative. This evidence-based parenting program is run by the National SafeCare Training and Research Centre, Georgia State University, US, and has been shown to reduce recurrence of child abuse and neglect by 26%.

We have established a Parenting Research Centre SafeCare Support Unit to support, and ultimately train, Brighter Futures practitioners in SafeCare. In 2017–18, five of our staff achieved certification as Providers, meaning they can deliver SafeCare directly with families in the home. During the year the same staff were undergoing training as Coaches, meaning they will be able to coach other practitioners in delivering the program.

By June 30 there were 41 workers delivering SafeCare to families in trial sites across NSW, and 12 coaches. Since late 2017, 24 families have completed the program with another 101 participating. An evaluation of the program's effectiveness and cost benefit was due to begin in 2018.

The program gained national prominence when it featured in *The Sydney Morning Herald* and syndicated press in September 2017.

***smalltalk* supported playgroups**

The [*smalltalk*](#) program, funded by the Victorian Department of Education and Training, supports parents experiencing disadvantage to enhance the home learning environment for their young children.

In 2017–18, we continued to support the scale-up of *smalltalk* in Supported Playgroups around Victoria, increasing the number of providers to 64 across 53 Local Government Areas, a 56% increase on the previous year's figure of 36 providers.

The PRC *smalltalk* team provides training and offers post-training and implementation support to all providers. We reached a significant milestone this year, with nine providers achieving sustainable change, meaning they have built their internal capacity to a point where they can continue to offer *smalltalk* without requiring our ongoing support.

The year also saw the completion of four two-day training events resulting in 67 new *smalltalk* facilitators. There are now an estimated 135 *smalltalk* facilitators across Victoria and these facilitators have access to a range of post-training practice support. As part of this support we delivered 27 on-site practice coaching observation and feedback sessions and three practice talk webinar-style sessions attended by 40 facilitators.

In another highlight, an extension of *smalltalk* called Still Talking was designed by Brimbank Council to build on the progress made by families taking part in *smalltalk*. This project was named as a finalist in the 2017 Victorian Early Years Awards, which recognise leaders in strengthening services for children and families.

The Victorian Department of Education and Training also provided additional funding of \$200,000 for *smalltalk*-related projects. The first project will develop a *smalltalk* module to bring a stronger focus to language development and the second project will develop and pilot the use of *smalltalk* by family service providers. Planning is underway, with the projects due to commence in the next financial year.

2.3. Improving educator and practitioner interactions with parents

Goodstart Early Learning Australia

Goodstart Early Learning engaged us in late 2016 to adapt and implement our Making Moments Matter program for its centres.

The Making Moments Matter program focuses on improving the quality of everyday interactions educators have with children, in order to build and maintain relationships and positively influence child development.

After a co-design process, we have now trained 64 educators, Centre Directors and Goodstart Early Learning Consultants in Making Moments Matter. Of those, 52 have gone on to engage in on-the-job coaching using video feedback.

All educators reported a greater understanding of educator-child interaction skills, the importance of their role on children's learning and development and were more confident to use the skills in their work with children.

Working with parents in early childhood education and care

Early childhood educators frequently need to communicate with a child's parents, often about tricky or sensitive issues. Taking a partnership approach to work with families is a key practice principal of both the Victorian and National Early Years Learning Frameworks and an important aspect of the National Quality Standards. During the year, in a project funded by the Victorian Government Department of Education and Training, we developed a set of resources to help educators navigate the complexities of working with and meeting the needs of parents.

We engaged and worked with a small number of early childhood education and care (ECEC) services to develop:

- resources and training to support centres to improve their relational environment through everyday interactions with children, parents and each other
- a series of interactive videos to support educators in raising a concern with a parent or responding to a parent's concern or complaint
- a guide to the process of working through sensitive and complex matters with families.

An online portal was completed to house these resources and will be accessed by practice coaches throughout a field test, which will inform a larger experimental trial to be conducted in 2019.

WA Country Health Service

Throughout the year, we delivered a 10-part, online, video-based program to more than 360 allied health and community nursing staff across 21 sites throughout Western Australia, as part of a project funded by the Western Australian Country Health Service (WACHS).

The program, *Working with Parents Practice Series on Collaborative Goal Setting*, aims to support a flexible learning process that has the potential to reach staff over a large geographic area. It focuses on developing practitioners' skills in supporting families to identify meaningful and highly motivating goals, and the content is targeted at practitioners who are providing family-centred, early intervention services to children with developmental delay/disability and their families.

The project was rolled out in the context of a rigorous evaluation we are conducting in partnership with the University of Melbourne, to assess the effectiveness and usefulness of the program in supporting development of practice. We completed data collection in June 2018, and reports will be available in the next financial year.

2.4. Supporting child and youth mental health

We maintained our involvement during the year as a key consortium member for Emerging Minds: the National Workforce Centre for Child Mental Health. This initiative aims to build the capacity and skills of the clinical and non-clinical workforce to improve mental health outcomes for children aged 12 and under.

In November 2017, the National Workforce Centre online portal was launched and it now contains a wide range of resources. There has been a strong response to this web hub, with an average of more than 5500 unique visitors to the portal each month and 5400 new e-learning registrations. A total of almost 2400 new and existing e-learning courses have been completed to date.

We have completed a number of rapid evidence reviews summarising data, literature and policy relating to key topic areas, which the consortium is now using to develop content for professionals. In addition, the internal evaluation framework we developed will guide the use of new measures and tools to evaluate the Centre's success.

We have also played a lead role in developing content for an online course called Building Blocks, which explores the foundations of children's social and emotional wellbeing and which is now available to practitioners via the web hub. And we are set to lead an extension project of Emerging Minds, the broad aim of which is to identify gaps in service provision between universal and mental health specialist services, identify priority gaps and develop practice solutions to address these gaps.

The Emerging Minds project is funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and other partners include: Australian Institute of Family Studies, Australian National University and the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners.

2.5 Delivering training to build capacity and improve service delivery

There has been national and international demand for our expertise in customised training throughout 2017–18, with numerous agencies contracting our services.

We delivered a range of *smalltalk* training in Singapore for both the Early Childhood Development Agency and Curious Thoughts programs. We also provided *smalltalk* training and support across Australia, including for Benevolent Society on the Gold Coast and Save The Children in Darwin and Katherine, NT.

Our CEO Warren Cann delivered two half-day master classes for Western Australia's Centre of Parenting Excellence, on 'Contemporary trends in parenting support' and 'Evidence based practice in parenting support'. The master classes were attended by more than 200 policy makers, services managers and practitioners.

3. Achievements in informing policy and practice

A central focus of our work is driving the use of evidence that demonstrates what works in parenting and family support. But putting evidence into practice is a complex process, involving the interplay of many factors. We act as an intermediary, working closely with policy makers, organisational leaders and practitioners to help them apply the evidence in a way that addresses their challenges and at the same time meets their needs and works for their local context.

3.1 Building internal capacity

A focus within governments and NGOs to ensure the programs and services they fund are based on solid scientific evidence has led to many agencies seeking our help. We continue to support agencies to build internal capacity to use evidence, and to put in place systems for continuous quality improvement and sustainability. Some of the agencies we delivered value to in 2017–18 are outlined below.

Windemere Child and Family Services

Our previous work with Victorian-based agency Windemere Child and Family Services involved evidence-building with their community partners. And in 2017–18 we embarked on three additional projects with this agency.

We began work with Windemere to review its 2017–2018 Cranbourne Communities for Children (CfC) initiative and to co-produce a document showcasing the range of programs and services it provides to families. The report will be accessible to Windemere's Community Partners, other CfC Facilitating Partners and the broader Cranbourne community.

We have also been engaged to deliver a professional education program for the CfC Cranbourne community partners and Windemere staff that will support them to document and share practice evidence. We will conduct three workshops as well as coaching on: Program Logics, Program Evaluation, and Writing for Publications.

The third project is a review of Windemere's Engaging Families' program, involving a review of their current documents and procedures, and working with the agency to meet the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) criteria for promising programs. This is currently underway.

Centacare Geraldton, Western Australia

During the year, we completed our evaluation of the Staying Connected program, a group program run by Centacare Geraldton. The agency committed to the rigorous evaluation process as a feature of delivering evidence-based services to its clients. We worked with Centacare Geraldton to help them collect as much data as possible and make the most use of the data they were able to collect. The agency will be able to use this report as a basis for further evaluations.

National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Learning and Development project

In 2017–18 the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services asked us to develop a professional learning package to support workers in the Child and Families Services sector. The aim of this package was to help workers identify and support families with a disability to access and navigate the services and supports they need as part of the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

We developed four e-learning packages and associated resources in close collaboration with the Department and the workforce. They were: Understanding disability; Preparing to work within the

NDIS; Working in partnership with families in the NDIS and Working collaboratively with other services and the NDIA. A suite of workshops and webinars will be delivered in the coming year with project due to be finalised in September 2018.

3.2 Supporting better outcomes for vulnerable children

Targeted Early Intervention initiative – NSW

The NSW Department of Family and Community Services Targeted Early Intervention (TEI) reform is designed to ensure that services intervene earlier with families and children at risk of significant harm, to avoid them coming into contact with the child protection system.

We have been a part of this departmental reform to help ensure parents receive effective parenting support programs and services. Our work involved reviewing existing parenting programs with good evidence for improving child outcomes. We also designed an evidence-informed Parenting Support Assessment Framework, which aimed to give agencies funded under Targeted Earlier Intervention another way to demonstrate how their programs and practices make a difference to families.

The Framework was designed to help agencies strengthen the way they design and deliver approaches that work for families. It provided clear pathways for them to further develop the evidence base for their program or practice. For agencies with parenting support that is already achieving local outcomes in line with the TEI reforms, the Framework provides guidance on the extent to which these programs or practices could be delivered in other districts.

This project was an exciting opportunity for us to support a state government in developing a pragmatic, decision-making framework with the potential to improve service effectiveness. It also provides an opportunity to cement an evidence-based culture in child and family services in NSW.

We developed the Framework in close consultation with Department of Family and Community Services Districts, AbSec and other peak bodies.

Quality Assurance Framework for children in out-of-home care

We continued our work with the NSW Department of Family and Community Services to trial a Quality Assurance Framework to give caseworkers access to reliable comprehensive data in real-time about the safety, permanency and wellbeing of children in out-of-home care.

During 2017–18, this work involved delivering training and coaching support to 55 out-of-home care caseworkers, plus managers and leadership at the six trial sites.

The training and coaching covered various aspects of the Quality Assurance Framework, including gathering data from carers on children and young people's wellbeing, and saw

caseworkers at the six sites used validated screening tools to assess the mental health and wellbeing of approximately 75 children and young people in care.

We were also involved in developing a questionnaire for children and young people in care to measure their sense of safety and permanency in their placement.

3.3 Evaluating policy and program initiatives

Intensive Family Support services, Queensland

During 2017–18, we worked in partnership with the University of Queensland to evaluate the Queensland Government's Intensive Family Support (IFS) service in 22 sites across Queensland. This

involved examining how the service was implemented and how effective it was. IFS services provide intensive case management and support for vulnerable families and those with complex needs who otherwise may be at risk of child protection intervention. We were commissioned to undertake this work by the Queensland Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women.

We conducted multiple analyses and comprehensive consultations with departmental representatives, IFS staff and families receiving IFS support as part of our evaluation. This resulted in a series of reports to the Department, including areas for consideration in the ongoing implementation of the IFS model across the state.

Another component of this project involved evaluating the Local Level Alliance initiative (LLA), its functioning and best practice across Queensland. The LLA is a multi-agency network of community service providers who work together to ensure vulnerable families have access to high-quality services to help them safely care for their children. The evaluation provided suggestions for continued quality improvements, including a summary of strengths, challenges and best practice principles for effective LLA functioning.

YFS Logan

YFS – a non-government organisation based in Logan in south-eastern Queensland – is trialling a new way of working with highly vulnerable, multiply complex families called Sure Steps. The program is aimed at families living in public housing who have a child aged under eight years. It seeks to improve the children's prospects, improve the parents' wellbeing and identify service system improvements and opportunities to help vulnerable families achieve their goals.

YFS invited us to design and conduct an evaluation of the early stages of the program's implementation, as well as providing information to support the continuous improvement of the initiative. Our evaluation found Sure Steps used a number of innovative strategies to keep parents engaged.

Following our evaluation, the Queensland Department of Housing and Public Works has funded this project for a further two years.

Mission Australia

We were commissioned, through the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) Expert Panel, to co-design and conduct an evaluation for Mission Australia's Communities for Children (CfC) Dandenong program. The evaluation focused on Mission Australia's facilitating role in supporting other local community organisations to deliver evidence-based programs for families.

We assessed aspects including how effectively Mission Australia is supporting provider agencies to build their capacity to develop evidence-based programs, and how it is supporting community partners to meet mandated reporting requirements. We also conducted interviews with workers from organisations being supported by the organisation. And we reviewed documentation to recommend improvements to the support and collaboration it offers as Facilitating Partner to its Community Partners.

The work may provide a basis for conducting evaluations of client outcomes in the future.

3.4 Knowledge synthesis supporting policy decision making

An important part of the decision-making process in policy and practice is to look at what the research evidence says works – or doesn't work – in similar real-world situations. We play an

important role in providing the expertise to evaluate and identify the evidence policy makers and service providers need to guide their work. During 2017–18, we were commissioned to conduct a number of evidence reviews on key issues to support decision-making.

Improving outcomes for Aboriginal children

We conducted a literature and evidence review for the NSW Government's Their Futures Matter reform program to identify effective and promising Aboriginal Community Controlled programs and services in Australia.

Their Futures Matter was interested in existing and historical services and programs that improve outcomes for Aboriginal children, young people, families and community for those involved in child protection and/or out-of-home care.

Reviews on parents involved in the child protection system

During the year, we also conducted two scoping reviews for the NSW Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) focusing on parents involved in the child protection system. One review identified strategies that agencies and service providers could use to help better engage parents in services they may need while involved in child protection, with findings set to inform a FACS parent engagement plan. The other review looked at interventions, services, practices, therapies and programs that provide support to birth parents who have a child in out-of-home care. The findings of these reviews, delivered in 2017, will inform FACS in developing supports for parents with children in care, as well as informing the parent engagement plan.

Rapid evidence assessment of models of triage and segmentation

We were also commissioned to conduct a rapid evidence assessment on triage and segmentation models in child protection, by the Boston Consulting Group, which had been engaged by FACS to investigate options for redesigning their child protection entry system. We provided subject matter expertise on the child protection system. And we reviewed the evidence for triage and segmentation models in child protection, which are used to assess and prioritise cases. We also provided suggestions regarding the design of a future triage and segmentation model for FACS.

3.5 Thought leadership: sharing our expertise

Changing the conversation about parenting

We know there are major gaps between what the research tells us about parenting, and how the public generally thinks about this important role. In 2016, we mapped these gaps in our '[Perceptions of Parenting](#)' research project, conducted by the FrameWorks Institute, a US non-profit organisation specialising in communications research on important social issues.

During 2017–18, we progressed a new research partnership with the Australian Government Department of Social Services, Victorian Government Department of Education and Training, NSW Government Department of Family and Community Services, and The Benevolent Society to investigate how best to overcome the gaps we have found. This project looked at how to frame issues about parenting and parenting support in a way that resonates with both policy makers and the general public.

More than 7600 Australians took part in the research, which was conducted by the FrameWorks Institute. The project revealed that many current efforts to communicate about 'effective parenting' are counterproductive. This is because Australians see parenting as an innate and individual pursuit,

rather than something that is the responsibility of society more broadly. We found that a new 'master narrative' is needed that talks about parenting in terms of child development, rather than in terms of parents being effective.

These findings give us a clear way forward to communicate more effectively with parents. Two 'Reframing Parenting' summits were held in 2018 to discuss a new approach to communicating on parenting issues. And we began plans to work with our partners on a new tranche of work to help disseminate these findings to organisations across Australia who work with children and families.

Stakeholder events

We connected with our stakeholders in a number of different ways during the year, including through events that showcased our work, shared new insights and drove new thinking about improving child outcomes by supporting parents.

Major events included:

- September: the raisingchildren.net.au 10-year anniversary event at Parliament House in Canberra, launched by the then Federal Minister for Education and Training, The Hon. Simon Birmingham MP
- November: Contemporary Trends in Parenting Support in Brisbane led by Annette Michaux and Associate Professor Julie Green
- November: Parenting Today in Victoria survey findings launched by Victorian Minister for Early Childhood Education The Hon. Jenny Mikakos MP in Melbourne.

These events, which brought together people from the spheres of policy, program and service delivery across the government and non-government sectors, led to further opportunities for us to connect with our key stakeholders on how to advance outcomes for children.

Parenting Young Children extended to Japan

Japanese practitioners are set to be trained in our Parenting Young Children program after we formed a new collaboration with Tokyo Kasei University this year. Japan is the third country to take up the program, joining Sweden and Norway.

Parenting Young Children is a home-based parent education program that builds parenting skills and confidence in parents with an intellectual disability. The training of Japanese service providers on the program's principles was due to take place before the end of 2018.

Realising the Potential Early Childhood forum

We were pleased to be a key partner in the Victorian Department of Education and Training's Realising the Potential early childhood forum attended by approximately 1000 early childhood practitioners, policy makers and researchers in June. Opened by the Victorian Minister for Early Childhood Education, the Hon. Jenny Mikakos MP, the event focused on 'unlocking the potential in early childhood' by showcasing international and Australian evidence on the benefits of investing in early childhood, a whole-of-system approach, quality and excellence. Our CEO Warren Cann delivered presentations at two well-attended sessions on how educators might work together with families to promote positive parenting.

Submissions and opinions

We lodged two submissions to Government inquiries during 2017–18, as well as submitting opinion pieces for publication in mainstream and specialist media outlets to share our expertise and cement our position as thought leaders in evidence-based parenting support.

In November 2017, we prepared a [submission](#) to the NSW Government Inquiry on support for new parents and babies, which was being conducted by the Legislative Assembly Committee on Community Services. Our submission argued that parenting is a skill that can be learned and the majority of parents are capable of parenting well, given the right support.

We also prepared a [submission](#) to the National Children's Commissioner regarding Australia's progress in implementing the Convention on the Rights of Children. The submission said parenting support was fundamental to positive child outcomes.

Our strategy of submitting opinion pieces from our subject matter experts to advance conversations around key aspects of our work will give us greater opportunities to lead the public conversation on important parenting issues.

During the first six months of 2018, two articles were published that shared the findings of our Parenting Today in Victoria study (see 4.1) and addressed how certain aspects of the findings could add to current policy thinking.

- January: *The Conversation*. "[Schools can't tackle child literacy levels alone – it takes a village](#)", authored by Dr Catherine Wade, looked at what the study findings revealed about child literacy levels and advocated looking beyond schools and engaging parents as key players in any policy solutions on literacy.
- May: *The Mandarin*. "[Policy focus on building parent confidence will reap rewards for us all](#)", authored by Dr Catherine Wade highlighted the importance of parent confidence to child outcomes and the benefits of focussing on this when designing parenting programs and services.

Media coverage

Our media work throughout 2017–18 helped to strengthen our brand and foster positive and constructive dialogue about parents and parenting.

During the year, we engaged with mass media on 56 occasions, culminating in 550 media stories.

The following topics received the most media attention:

- '[Boredom is good for kids](#)': promoting new play video content on raisingchildren.net.au
- Parenting Today in Victoria [survey findings launch](#)
- '[How Safecare is making a difference to families](#)': syndicated article in the *Sydney Morning Herald*
- '[How to spot the signs of bullying](#)': promoting raisingchildren.net.au content on bullying to coincide with the National Day of Action Against Bullying.

International relations

We have been involved in several projects to share our expertise internationally this year.

In May 2018, CEO Warren Cann visited Singapore and delivered a 1.5-day training workshop on our working with parents practice framework to KK Women's and Children's Hospital staff.

Warren also visited other government and philanthropic agencies that fund parenting support and are interested in evidence-based programs and joint projects. He and raisingchildren.net.au Executive Director Associate Professor Julie Green were invited by the University of Wollongong to meet with a number of senior representatives from Chinese organisations focused on maternal and child health, research and paediatrics in Wollongong. They presented on community approaches to supporting early childhood development, highlighting raisingchildren.net.au and our other initiatives such as MyTime and *smalltalk*.

In March, we hosted a South Korean delegation that sought a meeting with us to discuss parenting and intellectual disability. We spent time talking with the delegates about our work with Healthy Start and Parenting Young Children and learned about the family support system in Korea.

In November, Professor Maurice Feldman from Brock University in Ontario, Canada, spent two weeks with us as a visiting scholar, during which time he delivered three professional training activities in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane on parenting skills assessment and development for parents with intellectual disability.

Membership of advisory committees

Many of our executive and senior staff members contribute to a range of advisory committees, expert reference groups and panels. We were involved in the following advisory committees in 2017–18.

- Member of the Federal Government Department of Health Panel of Program Reviewers and Evaluators (Jan 2018 – current)
- Member of the West Australian Commissioner for Children and Young People Panel for the Supply of Policy and Research Services (July 2017 – current)
- Member of the Australian Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet Collaborative Evaluation, Research and Planning Panel (Nov 2015 – current)
- Member of the New Zealand Ministry of Social Development MSD Research and Evaluation Services Panel (July 2015 – current)
- Member of the Victorian Department of Education and Training Specialised Educational Services Panel (Aug 2015 – current)

Warren Cann, Chief Executive Officer

- Kindergarten Reform Expert Panel, Victorian Department of Education and Training
- beyondblue National Education Initiative Advisory Council
- Child Mental Health Working Group
- Parent Engagement Expert Reference Group, Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY)
- Early Childhood Development Advisory Group, Victorian Department of Education and Training
- Ministerial Expert Panel for Early Childhood Development, Victorian Department of Education and Training

Associate Professor Julie Green, Executive Director, raisingchildren.net.au

- Perinatal Society of Australia and New Zealand (PSANZ) Consumer Advisory Panel
- Children as Contributors Advisory Committee, The Jack Brockhoff Child Health and Wellbeing Program, University of Melbourne
- Education Advisory Committee, Melbourne Children’s Campus, Department of Paediatrics, University of Melbourne
- Participant Working Group, Early Years Health Translational Research Grants Scheme, NSW Health
- Early Childhood Australia Digital Policy Advisory Group
- National Community Child Health Council
- The National Health & Medical Research Council Mental Health and Parenting Working Committee

Annette Michaux, Director

- Consumer Advocacy Advisory Group: Child Safe Organisations – National Principles. Australian Human Rights Commission
- National Coalition Steering Group Child Safety and Wellbeing & Member of the National Forum for Protecting Australia’s Children
- Beyond Blue National Education Initiative: Technical Advisory Network
- Early Intervention Council, NSW Family and Community Services
- Youth Health and Wellbeing Advisory Group, NSW Health
- NSW Kids and Families Scientific Advisory Committee (NSW Health)

Derek McCormack, Senior Knowledge Exchange Specialist

- Children’s Contribution Research Project Advisory Group, Melbourne University
- ASDetect Clinical Reference Group, LaTrobe University
- Australian Science Communicators Association

Associate Professor Jan Matthews, Principal Research Fellow

- Queen Elizabeth Centre Research Advisory Group
- Independent Research Advisory Group for the HIPPIY Australia National Longitudinal Study (HANLS 2016-18).

Dr Catherine Wade, Principal Research Specialist

- Research Committee, The Association for Successful Parenting (USA)

- Clinical Working Group of the Funds In Court Human Rights Advisory Committee of the Supreme Court of Victoria
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Naomi Hackworth, Senior Research Specialist

- Early Years Awards Judging Panel, Victorian Department of Education and Training

4. Building the scientific knowledge of parenting to drive innovation

4.1 Launch of Parenting Today in Victoria survey

In November, Victorian Minister for Early Childhood Education The Hon. Jenny Mikakos MP launched the findings from our [Parenting Today in Victoria survey](#) – the most comprehensive survey ever conducted on the concerns, needs and behaviours of Victorian parents.

We surveyed 2600 parents of 0–18-year-olds, asking them more than 100 questions to fill important gaps in our knowledge about how parents are faring, and the relationships they have with their children.

Funded by the Victorian Government, the survey showed that more than nine in 10 parents are confident in their parenting. However, parents of teens reported feeling less effective than parents of younger children. Other findings included:

- seven in ten parents were concerned their children spent too much time on electronic devices
- sleep was a persistent problem for half of all parents with babies, and a third of parents with teenagers
- more than 40% of parents wished they did not become impatient with their child so quickly
- more than half of children under two and nearly half of children aged three to five were not being read to every day.

Launching the findings to leading policy makers and sector professionals in November, Minister Mikakos said the survey would provide the Victorian Government with valuable information to support its Early Childhood Reform Plan.

During the year, we also developed a suite of Research Briefs to provide in-depth analysis and interpretation of the survey data on:

- Parenting Children with Additional Needs
- Parenting with Disadvantage
- Parenting Support in the Early years

The second wave of the survey will be conducted in February 2019.

4.2 Sharing new knowledge through published papers and presentations

During 2017–18, we contributed to published papers in numerous peer-reviewed journals, and presented at conferences in Australia and internationally, as detailed below.

Journal publications

1. Bennetts, S.K., Cooklin, A.R., Crawford, S., D’Esposito, F., Hackworth, N.J., Green, J., Matthews, J., Strazdins, L., Zubrick, S.R. & Nicholson, J.M. (2017). What influences parents’ fear about children’s independent mobility? Evidence from a state-wide survey of Australian

parents. *American Journal of Health Promotion*, 32(3), 667–676. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0890117117740442>

2. Bowtell, E., Aroni, R., Green, J. & Sawyer, S. (2017). Contrasting disclosure practices and experiences of school support for parents of Australian adolescents with cancer, cystic fibrosis and anorexia nervosa. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 22(2), 176–191. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2017.1362049>
3. Cortis, N., Smyth, C., Wade, C. & Katz, I. (2018). Changing practice cultures in statutory child protection: Practitioners' perspectives. *Child and Family Social Work*. <https://doi/full/10.1111/cfs.12580>
4. Cyril, S., Green, J., Nicholson J. M. N., Agho, K., Polonsky, M. & Renzaho, A. (2017). Barriers and facilitators to childhood obesity prevention among culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities in Victoria, Australia. *Australia New Zealand Journal Public Health*, 41(3), 287–293. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/1753-6405.12648>
5. Forbes, F., Wynter, K., Wade, C., Zeleka, B. Fisher, J. (2018). Male partner attendance at antenatal care and adherence to antenatal care guidelines: Secondary analysis of 2011 Ethiopian Demographic and Health Survey data, *BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth*, 18, 145. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12884-018-1775-4>
6. Hackworth, N. J., Matthews, J. M. M., Westrupp, E. M., Nguyen, C., Phan, T., Scicluna, A., Cann, W., Bethelsen, D., Bennetts, S. K. & Nicholson, J. M. (April 2018 –online first). What influences parental engagement in early intervention? Parent, program and community predictors of enrolment, retention and involvement, *Prevention Science*, 19, 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11121-018-0897-2>
7. Isobel, S., Goodyear, M. & Foster, K. (2017). Psychological trauma in the context of familial relationships: A concept analysis, *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*. Online, August 2017. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838017726424>
8. Macvean, M.L., Humphreys, C. & Healey, L. (2018), Facilitating the collaborative interface between child protection and specialist domestic violence services: A scoping review, *Australian Social Work*, 71(2), 148–161. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0312407X.2017.1415365>

9. Naughton, M.F.A., Maybery, D.J. & Goodyear, M. (2017). Prevalence of mental illness within families in a regional child-focussed mental health service, *International Journal of Mental Health Nursing*, 27(2), 901–910. <https://doi.org/10.1111/inm.12386>
10. O'Connor, A., Skouteris, H., Nolan, A. & Hooley, M., Cann, W., & Williams-Smith, J (2017). Applying intervention mapping to develop an early childhood educators' intervention promoting parent–child relationships, *Early Child Development and Care*. Online, August 2017. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2017.1362401>
11. Renzaho, A., Green, J., Smith, B. & Polonsky, M. (2017). Exploring factors influencing childhood obesity prevention among migrant parents and communities in Victoria, Australia: A qualitative study. *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health*. Online July 2017. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10903-017-0620-6>
12. von Doussa, H., Sundbery, J., Cuff, R., Jones, S. & Goodyear, M. (2017). 'Let's Talk About Children': Investigating the use of a family-focused Intervention in the gambling support services sector, *Australia and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy*, 38(3), 482–495. <https://doi.org/10.1002/anzf.1233>
13. Wade, C., Matthews, J., Bent, C., Neill, E., Petrovic, Z., Fisher, J., Michaux, A., Cann, W. (2018). Parenting Today: A state-wide representative survey of contemporary parenting experiences, *Children Australia*, 43(1), 77–85. <https://doi.org/10.1017/cha.2018.7>
14. Westrupp, E. M., Bennett, C., Cullinane, M., Hackworth, N., Berthelsen, D., Reilly, S., Mensah, F., Gold, L., Bennetts, S., Levickis, P. & Nicholson, J. (2018). EHLS at School: Protocol for the school-age follow-up of the Early Home Learning Study cluster randomized controlled trial, *BMC Pediatrics*, 18:148. <https://bmcpediatr.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12887-018-1122-y>

4.3 Ethics committee

- Emeritus Professor Alan Hudson: Chair
- Susan Gribben
- Beth Holman (Joined October 2017)
- Ian Jungwirth
- Associate Professor Jan Matthews
- Douglas Marshall
- Dr Fiona May (Active until Dec 2017)
- Helen Reilly

- Dr Gina-Maree-Satore
- Maggie Troup

5. Leadership and governance

Board

- Tass Mousaferiadis – Chair – Retired from Board November 2017, after completing six-year term
- Dr Alison Roberts – Deputy Chair until November 2017
- Juliette Alush – Appointed Chair, November 2017
- Tracey Gibson
- Dr Lindsay Heywood – Retired from Board November 2017, after completing six-year term.
- Linda Hornsey
- Andrew Hume –Appointed Deputy Chair, November 2017
- Marina Jury
- Gregory Molyneux
- Tania Phillips

Executive Team

- Warren Cann – CEO
- Associate Professor Julie Green – Executive Director raisingchildren.net.au
- Annette Michaux – Director
- Christian Thompson – Director

Financial report

The Parenting Research Centre Financial Report 2017–18 is available from our website.

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