



*Thriving Kids offers an amazing opportunity.
Whether it works for children and families will depend on how its implemented.
That requires a systems approach.
Together, we can create the conditions for all young people to thrive.*

The recent announcements of an inter-governmental deal on the *Thriving Kids* initiative, and the accompanying release of the national Advisory Group report, are momentous.

For some time, Queensland Kids Partnership (QKP) has been participating in the cross-sectoral Queensland Foundational Supports working group with Queenslanders with Disability Network (QDN), disability and Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) providers, and others. QKP has also supported the Families in Focus research, and contributed to ARACY's submission to the recent Parliamentary Inquiry.

In particular, QKP has been considering - from a **systems perspective** - what it will take, in addition to the right levels of co-investment and workforce availability, to make the promise of *Thriving Kids* real for Queensland children and families.

QKP is proposing a suite of actions and recommendations to governments and others to bring the systems stewardship and systems approach needed to implement *Thriving Kids* well.

To QKP, the Advisory Group's proposed key principles and elements for the *Thriving Kids* initiative - based on 'supporting children where they live, learn and play' - are very welcome. The Advisory Group brought together the best available science, evidence and lived experience.

We especially like those elements of multiple points of entry and support such as:

- 'no wrong door'
- more soft entry points
- supporting caregivers
- making mainstream services more accessible and capable
- reducing costs
- integration across health and education settings
- more hubs
- better workforce development, and
- the prospect of 3-year-old development checks.

Implementation challenges

Yet many people and organisations hold concerns about this alternative and supplementary pathway to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), and how it will be implemented.

This is especially so for families with children (with and without NDIS plans) for whom the stakes are highest.

There are a big gaps and significant risks between the hope and promise of a 'whole systems' response canvassed by the Advisory Committee, and the reality of current programs and infrastructure in Queensland.

There is also the reality that keeping fidelity to the vision and design of the Advisory Group is extremely hard as governments:

- negotiate resourcing and implementation agreements
- work through what they can do with what they've got, and
- face the challenge of shifting existing mindsets, relationships, capabilities and practices in and across multiple portfolios.

How *Thriving Kids* is implemented is critical.

This is especially so given the short time frame for the roll out of *Thriving Kids*, even with a start date pushed back to October 2026.

If conventional mindsets and 'programmatic' approaches are used, this will not go as children and families need.

The risks and consequences of not taking a systems approach to *Thriving Kids* include:

- competition, rather than collaboration, between services and sectors will be rewarded and reinforced
- procurement could narrow the provider market, leading to longer waitlists, 'postcode lottery' effects, and reduced choice
- lived experience and local expertise of families and practitioners won't drive implementation, learning and adaption
- a 'one-size-fits-all' approach will result in *Thriving Kids* not being fair or fit for the contexts of our vastly different communities and regions across Queensland, and
- the piecemeal, fragmented, inequitable systems that families have experienced for decades, pre- and post-NDIS, could be replicated.

Making systems work for people

As people experience different expectations and frustrations, this can lead to distrust of 'systems', and as our systems become more complex, we must work smarter to make systems work better for all people.

That requires systems stewardship and systems approaches. That takes all relevant systems, sectors and disciplines working together, and doing *with*, not *to*, those with lived expertise.

Since the inception of the Queensland Kids Partnership, we've been figuring out what it takes to bring a deliberate systems approach to weave services and systems together, so they work better for Queensland families and communities in all their diversity.

What a 'whole systems approach' will take

Below is a suite of actions QKP recommends to governments and others to bring the systems stewardship and systems approach needed to implement *Thriving Kids* well.

These are:

1. Adopt **whole-of-systems child and family-centred principles**, and renegotiate the 'inter-face principles', to express what families should expect as they interact with and between different services and systems.
2. Deploy a **common outcomes framework - based on #TheNest** - to provide a holistic view of the inter-dependent needs, strengths and challenges of each and every family.
3. Invest in **parent capability building, lived experience roles and peer-based family networks** to strengthen connections, support self-help and mobilise lived expertise.
4. Use **sound framing and shared language** to ensure negative mindsets are not reinforced and that families and children hear consistent language across all areas.

5. Activate whole of workforce development strategy and provide all practitioners and educators opportunities to learn and develop **common and contemporary knowledge, language, skills and tools** - irrespective of discipline or setting: nurses, early educators, GPs, disability, mental health, hospitals - to support a seamless and coherent experience.
6. Implement shared tools like **The Resilience Scale** - at individual, family, and community levels - across service settings and disciplines, so families carry with them their story and priorities across time and settings, and so practitioners can be on the same page.
7. Ensure **permissive information sharing legislation, protocols and training** between health practitioners, educators, disability and other providers to enable wrap around support and reduce need for families to repeatedly share their stories, diagnoses and plans.
8. Enable **Whole Family plans**, including via apps and web platforms, especially for those with multiple children with developmental delays and/or disabilities, so that child development and family wellbeing and healthy functioning is supported holistically.
9. Urgently **review program eligibility and service access guidelines and referral pathways** to ensure families receive seamless services and supports; and require services to commit to working together as an integrated service system.
10. Activate **Regional Thriving Kids Partnerships** - across health services and PHNs (primary health networks), early learning and education, disability, family and parental wellbeing, local governments, transport - to make the most of local intelligence, relationships and assets, and existing place-based initiatives, supported by regionally based planning and coordination roles.
11. Use **Collaborative Commissioning and relational contracting** methods at regional and place levels to make new investment fit for context - filling gaps, strengthening pathways and making the best use of existing community assets and relationships.
12. Provide dedicated funding for **integrated service hubs and spokes plus navigation roles** - including for new and existing hubs in community, early learning, schools and health settings - to link up local ecosystems.
13. Make dedicated resources available for **systems-level safeguards, monitoring, evaluation and learning**, engaging deeply with the lived experience of families and practitioners to see what's working and what can be improved in real time at local, regional and state-levels.
14. If not already in place, establish state and territory level **Thriving Kids, Thriving Families Cabinet Committees**, plus cross-sectoral CEOs or deputies group, and Expert Advisory Panels, to steward state-wide implementation.

The decisions that are made about how to allocate investment and resources, connect and deliver services, and best support workforces and communities, all have the power to improve outcomes for young Queenslanders and their families.

That is a lot. But these are the systems reforms necessary to make the most of this generational opportunity: to shift systems > to activate communities > to support families > to enable all young Queenslanders to thrive, now and into the future.

Michael Hogan

Executive Convenor, Queensland Kids Partnership

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Queensland Kids Partnership is a partnership of people and organisations working to transform systems, so all young Queenslanders can thrive.

We're bringing together leaders, decision-makers, change-makers and practitioners at all levels across Queensland to connect, catalyse and learn about changing for the better the systems and environments that shape the lives of infants, children, young people and families.

Join our growing movement of people and organisations who are working together to create a fairer, healthier Queensland for every child and young person in every family and every community.