

Regional Thriving Kids Partnerships (RTKPs):

A Queensland-wide model to connect systems, regions and families to support children aged 0–8 with developmental delay and/or autism to thrive.

INVESTMENT	REACH	FOCUS	MODEL
\$13.65M over two years during implementation of Thriving Kids	16 regional partnerships across Qld with place-based approaches	0–8-year-old children and their caregivers	Joined up regional and local plans and pathways
Purpose Implement Thriving Kids in Queensland to be fit for purpose and context in each Queensland region by bringing together government, health, education, disability, family, First Nations, community, local government, PHN, university, TAFE, philanthropic and place-based partners.			
State leadership Queensland Thriving Kids Implementation Committee plus stakeholder forum.	Regional convening Regional and local partnerships aligned to HHS regions and tailored to community context.	Family voice Parent representation, lived-experience networks, advisory groups and feedback loops.	Learning system Shared data, innovation labs, learning network and continuous improvement.
1. AUTHORISE Bilateral agreement, expectations, convenors and accountabilities.	2. ESTABLISH Engage partners, map assets and needs, agree roles.	3. DELIVER Action regional plans, integrated pathways and innovations.	4. LEARN Outcomes, feedback, learning loops and adaptation.
Funding proposal: Regional partnership capacity: \$325K per region per annum average. Innovation labs/projects: \$500K per annum. Statewide learning network: \$250K per annum. Statewide coordination: \$350K per annum. Data and related support: \$500K over two years.		Asks of the Queensland Government: • Include RTKPs in the Qld Thriving Kids bilateral agreement & implementation plan. • Commit funding for RTKPs. • Convene a second Ministerial roundtable for co-design. • Call for EOIs for RTKP host entities and a Statewide Learning Network co-host.	

Proposal for Regional Thriving Kids Partnerships in Queensland

1. Executive Summary

Children thrive when governments, communities and service providers work well together to support children and families according to their needs. *Thriving Kids* provides an unprecedented opportunity to bring together governments, people, and organisations, to support children with developmental delay and/or autism, now and into the future.

This paper outlines a proposal to the Queensland Government for 16 **Regional Thriving Kids Partnerships**. An investment of \$13.65M over two years is proposed to leverage the full value of existing and new networks, resources, infrastructure and capabilities.

This is proposed as a joint initiative, to be led by the Department of Families, Seniors, Disability Services and Child Safety (DFSDESCS), with the Department of Health and 16 Hospital and Health Services (HHSs), the Department of Education, and in collaboration with Primary Health Networks (PHNs), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled organisations (AICCOs), local governments, disability and community organisations, place initiatives, philanthropies and universities.

This intent of Thriving Kids is to better support children aged 0-8 with developmental delays and autism who have low to moderate support needs and their caregivers. Utilising regional and local engagement, needs assessments and planning, the partnerships will integrate efforts, resources and links from various stakeholders, including Disability, Health, Early Learning and Education, Child Safety, Mental Health, Community Services, Parent and Family Wellbeing Services, First Nations and CALD organisations, and local libraries.

The aim is to implement the national Thriving Kids Initiative well – not as one size fits all – ensuring it is both ‘fit for purpose’ and ‘fit for context’ for Queensland’s diverse regions through productive community engagement, cross-sector collaboration, systems co-design, and service and support integration. This is especially important in remote, rural and regional Queensland, which require community-designed models tailored to the realities and inequities they experience.

2. Background

The Thriving Kids Initiative is designed to promote early identification and support for children with developmental delays and autism, and for their parents and caregivers. By aligning with the design principles and features of the Thriving Kids Advisory Group, and the National Agreement, this proposal for **Regional Thriving Kids Partnerships** aims to:

- create a coherent and tailored framework for implementation at a regional and local level
- connect national, state, regional and local efforts
- bring systems, sectors and disciplines together in a ‘whole systems approach’
- enable community-shaped approaches within multi-level governance, and
- mobilise and leverage existing and new networks, resources, infrastructure, relationships and capabilities.

This proposal has been shaped by contributions from:

- members of the Queensland Foundational Supports Working Group
- QKP's Inter-Generational Stewardship Table
- QKP's Country Kids Collaborative
- QKP's Hubs and Spokes Collaborative, and
- Primary Health Networks (PHNs).

3. Objectives for RTKPs

The proposed objectives for Regional Thriving Kids Partnerships are to:

- Enhance Collaboration:** Foster partnerships among stakeholders, including disability, health, First Nations, education and community organisations, and parent networks and support groups, and existing child-focused place initiatives.
- Empower Caregivers and Communities:** Engage caregivers and communities in decision-making processes to ensure services and supports are responsive and effective.
- Utilize Local Data and Insights:** Leverage existing and emerging data and insights from local engagement, needs assessments and planning frameworks (including population and demographic data, service-use and administrative data, service and workforce mapping) to inform commissioning and service delivery, along with data and insights from the lived experiences of parents with children with developmental delays and autism.
- Support workforce capability and capacity:** Facilitate regional workforce capability and capacity collaboration, identifying strengths and gaps, and mechanisms to build skills and attract and retain workforces, through continuous learning, micro-credentialling, and cross-organisational and inter-disciplinary training.
- Inform and improve Investment, Commissioning and Contracting:** Facilitate collaborative state, regional and local-level investment and commissioning, and relational contracting, to leverage existing and new assets, relationships and resources.
- Enhance integrated service delivery and service quality and clinical governance:** Design and enable integrated service planning, facilitate clinical and non-clinical pathways, and facilitate service quality and clinical governance, based on regional and local assets and relationships.
- Facilitate Systems Learning:** Establish mechanisms for continuous learning and adaptation based on data-driven insights and community feedback, with a focus on a key systems questions of how to adapt in real time supports to very different regional contexts, best utilise local and regional knowledge, surface what is working well or not so well, and strengthen local and regional eco-systems, while maintaining equity across the state.

4. Proposed Structure

a. State-level Partnership

A **Queensland Thriving Kids Implementation Committee** - convened by the Director-General of DFSDSCS with senior executive level representatives of the Departments of

Education and Health, DPC, Treasury, and Children's Health Queensland - would oversight the Regional Partnerships initiative. This would receive input from a **Queensland Thriving Kids Stakeholder Forum** of key state-level agency, peak (inc. QDN, QATSI CPP, QAIHC), sector, parent, philanthropic and expert, and regional partnership representatives, particularly from the disability, ECEC, AICCOs and child health sectors.

b. Regional and Local-level Partnerships

Regional Thriving Kids Partnerships would operate in 16 regions across the whole of Queensland. Some may be based on existing networks and collaboratives. These would also leverage sub-regional and local / place initiatives and enable community-led partnerships with Indigenous communities and organisations. Children's Health Queensland would play a key role both in its catchment and statewide.

Each partnership will operate aligned to the boundaries of Hospital and Health Services across Queensland to address the diverse regional circumstances and needs of Queenslanders.

Optimally, RTKPs would be implemented statewide simultaneously as an early implementation action, even if the commissioning of additional supports and services by DFSDSCS and other agencies is staggered over the period from Oct 2026 to Jan 2028. Regional Partnerships would engage key representatives (including disability, health, early years, AICCOs, places, PHNs and universities), and connect with a broader network of stakeholders in each region and statewide. These networks would include:

- **Department of Families, Seniors, Disability Services and Child Safety (DFSDSCS):** Key role in supporting vulnerable families and children.
- **Hospital and Health Services (HHSs):** Tertiary and community health care providers in each region.
- **Department of Education:** Oversee early childhood and provides school education and support.
- **Primary Health Networks (PHNs):** Facilitate connections and commissioning among health services and community organisations using local data.
- **Disability Services:** Address the specific needs of children with disabilities and their caregivers, including existing NDIS Early Childhood Approach partners.
- **Parent Support and Family Services:** Provide essential support to families, enhancing wellbeing and resilience.
- **First Nations community-controlled organisations:** Provide a suite of child and adult health and other services and supports, including family well-being and child development.
- **Child and Family Hubs:** Provide an integrated range of supports and services for children and families.
- **Playgroups:** Provide informal early learning and socialisation opportunities for children and families.
- **Neighbourhood Centres:** Serve as community hubs for resources and support.
- **Local Libraries:** Serve as community hubs for resources and engagement, promoting early learning and social connections.

- **Local Governments:** Play a role in community planning and resource allocation to support children and families.
- **Early Learning Providers and Early Childhood Services:** Provide childcare centres and early education programs, and other child development services.
- **CALD organisations:** Provide culturally responsive and safe services and support, and advocacy and community development.
- **Community services:** Provide a host of other human services for families with children with developmental delay or autism.
- **Schools:** Provide school-based educational initiatives and support.
- **Child and Maternal Health Services:** Focus on the health of mothers and children.
- **General Practitioners:** Provide primary health care and referrals.
- **Philanthropies:** Invest in community-shaped innovation and integration initiatives.
- **Place-based initiatives:** Facilitate community engagement, planning, support and service design and innovation.
- **Universities and TAFE:** Undertake research and provide teaching and credentialling for workforces engaging children with developmental delays and autism and their families.

5. Key Components of the Initiative

a. Collaborative Partnerships

- **Joint Initiative:** The collaboration between the DFSDSCS, HHSs, Department of Education, with AICCOs, PHNs, community, tertiary and philanthropic partners, ensures that key systems and sectors work together to provide holistic and integrated support for children and families.
- **Shared Resources and Expertise:** Each partner brings unique strengths and expertise, allowing for more comprehensive service delivery. For instance, health services can provide medical support, while education offices can focus on early learning.

b. Family and Community Engagement

- **Empowering Families:** Involving families in decision-making processes fosters a sense of ownership and ensures that services align with their needs. (see more below)
- **Awareness Campaigns:** Using local data to inform community awareness campaigns can help reduce stigma and promote understanding of developmental delays and autism, encouraging support and inclusion.
- **Equity Focus:** Address the needs of groups experiencing multiple adversities and vulnerabilities, including Indigenous families and those from culturally diverse backgrounds, ensuring equitable access to resources and support.

c. Utilisation of Local Data and Insights

- **Lived Experience of Parents:** Gathering data and insights from parents' lived experiences is crucial. This qualitative data offers insights into the challenges and needs families face, informing service design and delivery and accountability.
- **Regional Profiles:** By analysing local demographics and service usage, the initiative can identify gaps (including workforce gaps) and tailor services to best use regional and

local assets and capabilities and meet specific community needs. This includes understanding cultural contexts and accessibility concerns.

- **Asset Mapping and Gap Analysis:** Identifying both community assets (like libraries and playgroups) and service gaps helps ensure that existing resources are used effectively and new services are developed where needed.

d. Tailored Design and Capability Development

- **Eco-system Design and Delivery:** Supports and services will be designed based on local data, community input and evidence about what works in what circumstances, ensuring they are relevant, well-coordinated and effective. This might include general and targeted or specialised programs for peer- and lived-experience based supports, service navigators, educational support, health resources, parenting support or family counselling.
- **Integration Across Supports and Services:** Creates seamless support and service pathways (e.g. by advancing the pathways work proposed by X-Stitch), ensuring families can easily access the support they need while navigating through multiple systems.
- **Collaborative Commissioning:** Investments should be collaboratively commissioned across agencies, adapted for each region, along with reformed approaches to relational contracting. This should reduce administrative burden and duplication of compliance and reporting.
- **Service and support innovation labs and integration projects:** Investments to incentivise and document service and support integration and innovations, and to develop propositions for scaling promising local or regional innovations.
- **Workforce and organisational planning and development:** Existing and new investments, initiatives, forums and mechanisms (including the Early Years Institute, TAFE and universities) for workforce planning and capability development would be activated in each region.

e. Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

- **Continuous Improvement:** By aligning with the Federal Government's proposed evaluation of Thriving Kids, and by establishing metrics for success, such as increased access to supports and services (including culturally safe supports), and developmental and family wellbeing outcomes, the partners can continuously learn and evaluate their effectiveness and make necessary adjustments.
- **Feedback Loops:** Engaging parents and community members in feedback processes ensures that services remain responsive to evolving needs.
- **Regular Learning Loops:** Creates processes for agency, community and stakeholder feedback, learning and reporting to inform ongoing improvements.
- **Statewide Learning Network and Community of Practice:** Convening a Thriving Kids Learning Network across the 16 regional partnerships and existing peaks, and a community of practice for regional convenors, to strengthen innovation and collective impact, share and spread good practice, and disseminate stories of good practice.

This would focus on key systems questions such as:

- how to adapt supports to very different regional and local contexts

- how best utilise local knowledge
- how to best leverage existing resources
- how strengthen local, regional and statewide eco-systems, while maintaining appropriate consistency and equity across the state, and
- how to ensure culturally safe supports.

6. Empowering families

Of particular importance is that Thriving Kids is implemented in ways that empower families, at all levels, especially in the own family decision-making processes.

Regional Partnerships can contribute through several key strategies:

a. *Inclusive Engagement*

- **Parent Representation:** Actively involving parents and caregivers in partnership meetings and planning sessions ensures their voices are heard. This representation can help shape policies and programs that directly affect their children.
- **Lived experience and peer workers and networks:** Lived experience and peer workers and networks would play a key role in engaging parents and other caregivers.
- **Advisory Groups:** Establishing parent advisory groups allows families to provide ongoing feedback and insights, ensuring that their experiences inform decision-making.

b. *Feedback Mechanisms*

- **Surveys and Focus Groups:** Regularly conducting surveys and focus groups helps gather input from families about their needs, challenges, and preferences. This data can guide the development and adjustment of services.
- **Community Forums:** Hosting community forums where parents can share their experiences and suggestions fosters open dialogue and encourages active participation.

c. *Collaborative Program Development*

- **Co-creation of Services:** Families will be involved in co-designing programs and services, ensuring that they are relevant and aligned with community needs. This collaborative approach builds trust and ownership.
- **Tailored Solutions:** Using insights from families, services can be tailored to address specific cultural or contextual needs, making them more effective.

d. *Information and Resources*

- **Access to Information:** Providing families with clear, accessible information about available services and resources empowers them to make informed choices for their children.
- **Workshops and Training:** Offering workshops on topics like advocacy, navigating services, and understanding developmental delays equips families with the knowledge and skills to advocate for their children.

e. *Empowerment Through Education*

- **Awareness Campaigns:** Educating the community about developmental delays and autism helps reduce stigma and supports families in advocating for their children in broader contexts (e.g., schools, healthcare).

- **Skill-Building Opportunities:** Programs that teach families how to effectively engage with service providers and advocate for their children further empower them in decision-making processes.

f. Support Networks

- **Building Peer Support:** Creating networks for families to connect with one another fosters a sense of community and shared experience, allowing them to support each other and share strategies.
- **Resource Referrals:** Connecting families with local resources and support services can enhance their capacity to make informed decisions and navigate the available options.

7. Implementation Plan

Phase 1: Authorise Regional Partnerships

- **Bilateral implementation mechanism:** Build 'regional partnerships' as a key mechanism into the bilateral agreement between the Queensland and Australian Governments.
- **Communicate expectations:** the Minister for Families, Seniors, Disability Services and Child Safety would communicate Governments' endorsement for, expectations of and operating approach for Regional Partnerships.
- **Identify and resource 'Regional Thriving Kids Convenors':** DFSDSCS would designate resources for 15 regional partnership convenors and commission/engage government or non-government entities as Regional Partnership Convenors.
- **Outline key design elements and accountabilities of Regional Partnerships**

Phase 2: Establish / Enhance Partnerships

- **Engage senior executives and key managers:** engage relevant CEOs and regional managers and outline expectations and accountabilities.
- **Identify Key Stakeholders:** Engage locally and regionally to surface key partners and existing local or area-level networks and plans in each region.
- **Agree mix of regional and local partnerships:** Settle who will do what at regional and local levels, including with place-initiatives as convenors, delivery partners and potential hosts.
- **Facilitate Initial Meetings:** Organize workshops to discuss shared goals, emphasizing the importance of local data.
- **Create Regional Profiles:** Collectively map and assess the unique needs and assets of each region based on local needs and asset assessments, demographic and service data, and lived experience insights of caregivers and practitioners. This could leverage and adapt current PHN and HHS Joint Regional Needs Assessments and planning processes. This should include assessments of workforce strengths and gaps.

Phase 3: Develop and Deliver Action Plans

- **Facilitate integrated service models and pathways:** Co-develop the integrated service delivery arrangements and clinical and non-clinical pathways that work in local contexts and draw on innovations elsewhere or statewide.

As proposed by X-Stitch, clinical pathways should link and integrate HHSs, PHNs, GPs, paediatricians, child development and maternal health services, and allied health practitioners, and to non-clinical supports and services including parent and family well-being, playgroups, ECECs, hubs, schools and community services.

They should also provide a clear interface with diagnostic/NDIS pathways for children whose needs exceed the threshold for Thriving Kids.

- **Statewide Learning Network and Community of Practice:** Convening a learning network across the 16 regional partnerships, and a community of practice for regional convenors.

Phase 4: Monitor, Evaluate and Learn

- **Establish Outcomes and Metrics:** Define outcomes using (a) The Nest Wellbeing Framework and related indicators (such as function, participation, developmental trajectories, school readiness, family capacity) to assess results for children and families, and (b) partnership health and productivity measures to assess systems outcomes.
- **Learning Loops:** Implement processes for agency, community and stakeholder feedback, learning and reporting to inform ongoing improvements at regional and state levels.

8. Funding and Resources

Regional Thriving Kids Partnerships would be funded through a total allocation of \$13.65M over two years, through the Bilateral Agreement and Implementation Plan, with:

- \$325K on average allocated per annum per region for two years for 1.5 FTE (with a weighting for remote, rural and regional communities; and allowing for CHQ's catchment and statewide role)
- \$500K per annum for innovation labs and demonstration projects
- \$250K per annum dedicated to a statewide Qld Thriving Kids Learning Network.
- \$350K per annum for Statewide coordination
- \$500K allocated over two years for data and related support.

The regional resources will be allocated to an appropriate agency or NFP organisation as 'host entity' - such as an existing place-based initiative - to support partnership facilitation, parent and community engagement, data collection, and capacity building, and to leverage existing initiatives and assets.

QKP proposes a statewide Learning Network be co-convened by the Department of Families, Seniors, Disability Services and Child Safety.

Additional resources, including in-kind commitments, would be committed from the existing budgets of the key agencies with joint responsibilities – the Departments of Families, Education and Health - to support engagement, data, planning, and learning.

Existing forums would re-purposed and used wherever possible. Other participating organisations would be expected to meet their own costs. Subsidies would be provided to support parent and community engagement.

Additional funding for innovative demonstration initiatives would be sourced from state agencies and philanthropic organisations. Additional resources for further local level activities may also be leveraged from community sources and other grant sources.

9. Conclusion

The Regional Thriving Kids Partnerships initiative aims to create a supportive, data-informed framework for ensuring Thriving Kids is fit for both purpose and context to best assist children with developmental delays and autism in Queensland's diverse regions.

By prioritising family engagement, support and feedback, the Regional Thriving Kids Partnerships initiative aims to empower parents and caregivers as active participants in systems design, decision-making and learning processes. This approach not only enhances the effectiveness of services but also fosters a sense of community and shared responsibility for the well-being of children with developmental delays and autism.

By leveraging links and collaboration among key organisations, educators and practitioners, this initiative seeks to maximise the value and impact of existing and new resources, and create a sustainable framework that supports the national Thriving Kids Initiative.

QKP proposes that the Queensland Government:

- build the commitment to 'Regional Thriving Kids Partnerships' into the Queensland Thriving Kids bilateral agreement and implementation plan
- convene a second Ministerial roundtable to facilitate further co-design of the Thriving Kids implementation approach, including this initiative, and
- call for expressions of interest from interested agencies / entities to support the RTKPs and a co-host for the Statewide Learning Network.

Contact Information:

Michael Hogan, Executive Convenor, QKP michael.hogan@aracy.org.au

Sophie Morson, Principal Partnership Officer, QKP, sophie.morson@aracy.org.au

Alisha Chand, Principal Partnership Officer, QKP alisha.chand@aracy.org.au

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