

SA needs overarching vision for children and young people's health says Commissioner

This **World Health Day (WHD) Sunday 7 April**, Helen Connolly, South Australia's Commissioner for Children and Young People, is calling on the State government to provide leadership in relation to children and young people's health by providing an overarching vision and plan that focuses specifically on their needs.

The Commissioner wants decision makers to set a clear vision that will enable a joined-up approach to health care currently being provided to South Australia's 374,400* children and young people that is focused specifically on their health needs, which are very different from those of adults.

The theme of this year's WHD is 'My health, my right' with the World Health Organisation emphasising the need for governments to reduce health inequities by focusing on improving the conditions in which children and young people live. Meeting the State's obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child to which Australia is a signatory, requires consideration of the underlying determinants of children and young people's health.

A range of policies, datasets and services cover different aspects of children's and young people's health in South Australia, each providing part of the picture of how children and young people are faring. However, without an overarching vision and strategy, there is no overall oversight or measure of children and young people's health at the population level.

South Australian data shows that inequities start early in life and compound as children age, leading to adverse long-term health, education, and employment outcomes. We need a vision to understand how children and young people are faring, and whether current investments in their health are working and if children and young people have access to healthy food, reliable and safe transport, opportunities to participate in sport and other activities, and access to quality healthcare from birth.

Without systemic accountability for measuring equity across the health system and health networks, we limit our understanding of who is missing out. We can't see valuable insights about the groups of children hidden or overrepresented and we miss patterns around the same children who are missing out across multiple indicators. Such insights are critical to planning policy and the shaping and delivery of services.

Quotes attributable to Commissioner Helen Connolly:

Currently the state lacks an overarching or unifying vision for children and young people's health, and therefore a way of aligning cross government and community efforts to a common set of goals and actions. Our future depends on investing in healthy children, families, and communities, and that starts with an overarching vision that can ensure policy and decision making prioritises investment in children and young people with a plan that builds on existing evidence, policy and partnerships, to repeat, enhance and expand on what we know is working, and to remedy and reform what isn't.

Although there are significant strategies and service providers in place throughout SA, including the state's ten local health networks, the siloed and fragmented nature of these services means we have a system that is inefficient, with competing agendas and priority areas, and with policy design commonly separated from policy implementation. The experience for children and young people and their families attempting to navigate these separated service systems across different agencies and levels of government, is ultimately frustrating and unsatisfying, and one which often does not deliver on the health solutions children and young people are seeking or should be able to expect.

Download the Commissioner's Policy Position here:

[Why we need an overarching vision for children and young people's health in South Australia.](#)

*Source: <https://childrensa.sa.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/How-are-they-faring-SAs-2023-Report-Card-FINAL-2024-01-25.pdf>

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