

KEY MESSAGES

Family support programs: ensuring a healthy start to life

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Policy context

The Australian Government is taking a whole of government approach to improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health with the ultimate goal of achieving health outcomes for Indigenous Australians that are at least as good as that of the general Australian community. Family support and parenting education programs are recognized as a means of improving child and maternal health outcomes, and the Australian Government has invested in a number of programs including the Australian Family Nurse Partnership Program. But, resource constraints limit the spread of such programs and therefore identification and exploration of alternative programs can assist in developing a range of programs that ensure that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families receive the appropriate level of parenting education and support to maximize the health and psychosocial well-being of children, young people, and their families.

Key messages

- > **Progressive universalism:** Provision of high quality early childhood services to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and provision of higher levels of support to those families most in need has the potential to improve child and maternal health outcomes, and maximise long term health and social wellbeing.
- > **Antenatal and Postnatal Promotional Interviews** are an evidence based, proactive and non-stigmatising approach to promoting the early psychological development of babies and young people, and assisting the transition to parenthood that could be used as a screening tool for all families as part of the implementation of “progressive universalism”.
- > **Evidence based parenting support programs:** Evidence based, culturally safe and locally appropriate interventions of varying levels of intensity that aim to increase participants’ parenting skills and improve health and development outcomes need to be developed, trialled and evaluated to ensure that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families are provided with the appropriate and necessary level of support.
- > **Intensive Home Visiting Parenting Support Programs:** Critical success factors of intensive home visiting support programs include well trained and supported staff who deliver a culturally safe, structured, programmatic, consistent program that, ideally, is integrated with primary health care and community services to enable delivery of a therapeutic intervention in addition to parental support and mentoring to enable, support and reinforce parental behaviour change.

For more details, please go the three page report