

Building mental health confidence and capacity in family day care educators

Everymind researchers are increasing the confidence and capacity of family day care educators to support the mental health and wellbeing of the 107,670 Australian children in their care.

Children who are supported in their wellbeing in early childhood have a strong foundation for developing the skills, values and behaviours they need for positive physical and mental health as adults.

The need to support educators

Despite caring for over 107,000 children every year, **Everymind** has developed a first of its kind comprehensive online learning mental health program targeted at family day care educators in Australia. The need for a targeted program for family day care educators was identified as part of an evaluation of *Connections* – a resource developed by Everymind for early childhood educators in 2014.

A tailored online program for family day care educators

The primary aim of the program is to increase the confidence and capacity of family day care educators to support children's mental health and wellbeing. A secondary objective is to investigate the mental health and wellbeing of family day care educators and how this affects their capacity to promote the children's mental health and wellbeing in their care.

These aims are being achieved through the trial of the online learning program developed specifically for family day care educators. Funded by the Australian Government Department of Health, this program has been developed in consultation with family day care educators, peak bodies and leading professionals in early childhood education.

Online learning allows those in the family day care sector to access professional development when it suits them. The self-paced program enables educators to set aside shorter periods for further education during their working day. It also gives rural and remote educators a chance to access professional development without travel costs and time.

The online learning program includes:

- Fact sheets and planning tools
- Videos and podcasts from real-life educators and leading academics
- Case studies and reflective questions.

The online program equips family day care educators with the necessary skills to maintain key partnerships with families and other professionals; create positive environments; support children's social and emotional wellbeing, and develop early intervention strategies to support mental ill-health.

Following successful testing of the online program in 2019, a randomised control trial was conducted between March and September 2020 to test the efficacy of the program. 258 educators completed the pre-program survey and were randomised to either the program or waitlist condition.

Want to be involved in the next phase of the online program for family day care educators? Join the [mailing list](#).



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Engaging with stakeholders

A reference group of key stakeholders in the family day care and early childhood sector was formed to guide the project. Australian family day care educators were engaged in consultation in 2019. Analysis of a survey and focus-groups with educators revealed difficulties they encounter supporting children and families, and the barriers they face in maintaining their own mental health and wellbeing.

Relationships formed with local family day care coordination units helped recruit educators to participate in program testing and the national trial. The group also supported program development, with educators and coordinators from the Hunter region featuring in videos embedded in the program, which was funded by a University of Newcastle, Faculty of Health and Medicine Pilot Grant.

Feedback from educators

"It's been most informative, reaffirming and helpful to me."

"I enjoyed the course very much, thank you for the opportunity."

"I think many educators could get a lot out of it from beginning educators to confident professionals."

Outcomes from the trial

Results from the trial showed a significant increase in educators' self-efficacy and confidence in the program condition. These increases were maintained at three months. These findings show the program is an effective resource for educators in supporting children's mental health and wellbeing.

Analysis was supported by the University of Newcastle Priority Research Centre for Brain and Mental Health through the provision of a Clinical Research Design, Information Technology and Statistical Support Grant.

Next steps

An implementation and evaluation framework will be developed that enables the program to be integrated into existing coordination units across Australia. The program will then be evaluated at scale, within a real-world setting, with an effectiveness trial involving family day care educators across Australia. Economic evaluation will identify the cost of implementing the program.

Project Reference Group

- Family Day Care Australia
- Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority
- Early Childhood Australia
- Emerging Minds
- Australian Psychological Society
- Murdoch Children's Research Institute
- Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth

