



Commissioner for Children and Young People  
Western Australia

## **Children's Week Forum 2010**

Building brighter futures

### **Opening remarks**

26 October 2010

- Good morning.
- I would like to thank Reverend Garlett for his warm welcome and join Professor Owens in welcoming you all here today to the third annual Children's Week forum.
- Children's Week and this forum in particular provide an important opportunity to reflect and focus on major issues that impact on children's wellbeing. And this year's forum has as its focus the mental health of children and young people.
- Children and young people's mental health is a priority area for me as Commissioner because it is one of the most common concerns that people have raised with me since I was appointed in late 2007.
- Around 30 per cent of adult mental health problems are related to negative early experiences in childhood and an estimated 50 per cent of mental illnesses start before the age of 14.
- Twenty-five per cent of Western Australian parents/carers think their child needs special help for emotional problems.
- Research I commissioned into the Wellbeing of Children and Young People found more than a third of 600 kids felt 'too much stress' and 38 per cent did not talk to anyone about these feelings.

- As Commissioner for Children and Young People, my role means I take a broad view of their mental health and wellbeing.
- This not only includes looking at services for those who are acutely unwell and programs that intervene early in a problem, but also considers what makes – and keeps – children and young people mentally healthy.
- Everywhere I go across the State people have been asking me what more can be done to strengthen the mental health of our children and young people – from birth to adolescence.
- This is what prompted me to establish in July this year an independent inquiry into the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people.
- This inquiry is building a picture of children and young people's mental health across Western Australia.
- Most importantly it will identify ways for us to prevent, reduce and treat mental health problems from infancy to the teenage years, and promote positive health.
- The inquiry's findings will offer a roadmap to guide service and policy planning into the future and provide important information for the wider community about how all of us can contribute to strengthening children's mental health and wellbeing.

- Along with all of the best available evidence and the views of professionals and agencies the Inquiry will critically include the views of children and young people.
- It is vital that we talk with children and young people about how to build resilience and what services they feel most comfortable accessing.
- Children and young people have plenty of good advice to offer when given the opportunity and support.
- My office recently ran a Commissioner for a Day Challenge asking children and young people to tell us what they think is needed to keep kids mentally healthy.
- More than 100 children and young people participated with useful, practical advice about maintaining positive mental health.
- We are also actively pursuing the views of children and young people through the mental health inquiry's submission process.
- Submissions to the inquiry close next week and the inquiry's report will be tabled in Parliament by the middle of next year.
- Similar to the inquiry, this forum was developed in response to community concerns about the full spectrum of children and young people's mental health needs.

- These concerns are not restricted to any specific area of Western Australia – they are shared by people living in regional, remote and metropolitan areas. But there are specific and particular needs for Aboriginal children and their families, for kids living in regional and remote communities, for kids in care, refugee kids and kids with a disability.
- And it is clear from the current national debate that these concerns are echoed across Australia.
- I am pleased to welcome Professor McGorry here today.
- He has been an outstanding advocate for putting young people's mental health needs at the forefront of national conversations about mental health.
- In response to Professor McGorry's address, we will also be hearing from three leaders in the mental health sector in Western Australia.
- Up first is WA's inaugural Mental Health Commissioner, Mr Eddie Bartnik. And I am pleased that the Mental Health Commission is working closely with me and my Inquiry. The establishment of the Mental Health Commission provides us with a unique opportunity to give priority to children and young people and their families.
- He will be followed by two leading experts in children's mental health in Western Australia –
  - Professor Helen Milroy, child psychiatrist and director of UWA's Centre for Aboriginal Medical and Dental Health and

- Dr Caroline Goossens, Chair of the WA Faculty of Child Psychiatry (WA)
  
- I would like to thank all of the speakers for giving their time and expertise not only here today, but also for their work with me as Commissioner to focus on this important issue.
  
- I am looking forward to the discussion that will follow.
  
- The importance of children and young people's mental health and wellbeing cannot be overstated, and I will leave that to the health experts here today to illustrate further.

Thank you