



MEDIA RELEASE

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“CHILD MALTREATMENT AND POOR MENTAL HEALTH ARE TWO SIDES OF THE SAME TRAGIC COIN” – MORE NSW INVESTMENT NEEDED

A new study from the University of Sydney's Matilda Centre found [childhood maltreatment accounts for between 21 to 41 percent of common mental health conditions in Australia](#).

The study also found childhood maltreatment accounted for 41 percent of suicide attempts in Australia, 35 percent for cases of self-harm and 21 percent of depression.

The study defined childhood maltreatment as including physical, sexual, or emotional abuse; emotional or physical neglect; and domestic violence before the age of 18.

Fams, the peak body for NSW family and children's services, says it's time for the NSW Government to urgently invest in children's early intervention and prevention services.

“This new study shows the short-term safety and long-term mental health of children in NSW is put at risk when they are exposed to maltreatment”, Fams CEO Susan Watson said.

“Child maltreatment and poor mental health outcomes are two side of the same tragic coin, and the NSW Government needs to invest to make sure the lives of kids are not derailed.

“Investing in the prevention, early identification and intervention of child maltreatment is one of the best, most concrete things the NSW Government can do, not just for the sake of the kids, but to drive down the spiralling rates of mental illness in our community.

“As it stands – the current NSW Government spends only 10 cents in every child protection dollar in early intervention services including those which prevent child maltreatment.

"This is unjust by any financial, policy or moral definition. Maltreatment creates significant ongoing financial costs to the NSW community, and costs many of the kids involved for life.

“As the peak body for family and children's services, we are calling on the Minns Government to increase funding by 25 per cent across early intervention and prevention.”

Fams says that the NSW Government's per capita spending on early intervention and prevention should reflect the community's determination to protect children, and stave off a lifetime of consequences as a result of maltreatment.

“If you've grown up experiencing family violence, you may not have had the same chances to learn how to be a loving and safe parent yourself,” Ms Watson said.

“We need to fund and provide the early intervention supports that we know keep at risk kids safe.” She said those include getting support from professionals who can:

- Guide people in early parenthood.
- Support them with their mental health challenges.
- Connect them with supports like housing and financial assistance.
- Find peers with similar life experiences to reduce isolation.

“With the right support we can set at risk families up for success, drive down the chance of maltreatment and improve the mental health chances of young children,” she said.

“The evidence is clear in the child protection system. Prevention works and there are already innovative, effective programs that do it: supporting families early, connecting them with their communities to prevent harm occurring.”

The study was generated from 34 studies and 54 646, participants, and applied to prevalence estimates of childhood maltreatment generated from 8503 Australians.

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