

Media release

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Evaluation shows Kismatter a success

Kismatter, the first national mental health initiative developed specifically for children in Australian primary schools, has improved children's social and emotional wellbeing, placed mental health on schools' agenda and increased the knowledge and capacity of teachers and parents to support children's mental health, according to an independent evaluation report launched in Melbourne today.

The success of the program - a joint project between the Australian Psychological Society (APS), the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, *beyondblue*, Principals Australia, Early Childhood Australia and the Australian Rotary Health Research Fund - is being acknowledged with a funding boost. The Hon. Nicola Roxon is announcing a further \$18.7 million over three years to support the expansion of the KidsMatter Primary initiative and the pilot of the KidsMatter Early Childhood initiative.

Professor Lyn Littlefield, APS Executive Director, said "What the evaluation shows is that not only does the programme improve the mental health outcomes for those children most at risk, it also has flow on effects to the whole school community, including parents and families. Critically, the initiative increases the mental health capacity of schools and upskills teachers so it is an investment with an ongoing return as it changes the culture of the school and benefits the long term health and wellbeing of children."

Professor Littlefield said these programs cannot run without health and education sector support and additional funding from the Australian Government's Department of Health and Ageing.

Research shows that signs of mental health problems can be identified in children at an early age. However, only about a quarter of these children access mental health services. Children's mental health problems can have far reaching negative effects on their learning, social relationships and future ability to cope with and enjoy life.

The Australian Psychological Society has contributed to the project by developing the Kismatter framework and developing a range of resources for primary school staff, parents and carers on 21 different topics relating to children's mental health. New resources focusing on children aged birth to 5 years will be developed under the new KidsMatter Early Childhood initiative. The resources are freely available on the KidsMatter website, www.kidsmatter.edu.au.

"The support of the Federal Government, *beyondblue* and from government, Catholic and Independent education and health sectors in each jurisdiction will be critical to ensuring that more children can benefit from this important initiative," Professor Lyn Littlefield said. "The Kismatter Early Childhood initiative is very important as the earlier we can intervene where problems are identified and build resilience, the healthier our society will be."

The evaluation report is available at <http://www.kidsmatter.edu.au/evaluation>

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The APS is the largest professional association for psychologists in Australia, representing more than 17,500 members. The APS is committed to advancing psychology as a discipline and profession. It spreads the message that psychologists make a difference to peoples' lives, through improving psychological knowledge and community wellbeing.