

# Nurse Practitioner/Registered Nurse led universal children's health and developmental checks: Delivering mobile primary health care

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Initiative of  
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## Background:

- In Australia, the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) collects nationwide data on early childhood development, when children commence their first year of school<sup>1</sup>.
- Since the inception of the AEDC in 2009, the state of South Australia (SA) has demonstrate a slow decline in childhood development, across all socio-economic quintiles, especially those in the 'middleclass'<sup>2</sup>.
- A potential reason for this decline was child developmental checks becoming more targeted, and less universal over time, which resulted in many children in non-targeted groups going unscreened for developmental vulnerabilities, until they commenced school<sup>2, 3</sup>.
- Best outcomes for developmental delays are achieved when they are identified early, hence interventions are needed to address the current limitations<sup>2, 3, 4</sup>.
- Paediatric Nurse Practitioners (NP) and Registered Nurses (RN) are well placed to deliver comprehensive, community-based health and development interventions for children 0-5 years.

## Research Aims:

- Associate Professor Yvonne Parry from Flinders University has partnered with the SA Government's Department of Education, Office of the Early Years, to develop a pilot program aimed at increasing early developmental screens, given the historical issues regarding child development in the state.
- This pilot was developed from Dr Parry's earlier research into child health checks for homeless populations<sup>5, 6</sup>.
- The pilot aims to offer universal health assessments and developmental screening to children in SA across urban, rural and remote areas, to reduce the number of children entering the education system with unidentified developmental delays.

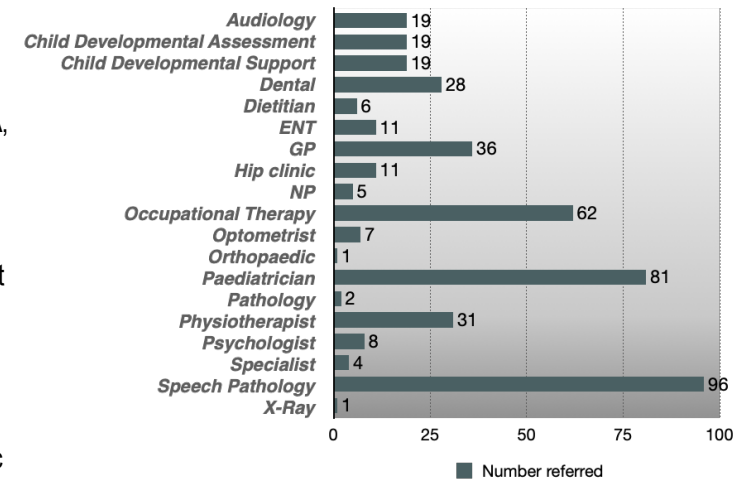


## Methods:

- NP/RN's are being deployed across 20 early learning sites in SA, from Aug 2022 to Dec 2023, to perform health assessments and developmental screens with parent consented children (N= approximately 2000).
- NP/RN's use the Brigance screening tool to assess development in areas such as expressive and receptive language, gross and fine motor skills, cognitive development, and social emotional development<sup>7</sup>.
- The health assessment performed by the NP/RN helps identify additional needs, and makes the review of the child more holistic and universal.
- Parents of children identified as developmentally delayed, or requiring further health care, are contacted by the NP, who provides direct referrals to local health and developmental services, for the parents and children.

## Findings:

- As of the 20<sup>th</sup> of May 2023, **760 children had been screened**. Of these, **241 children required a referral for a health related issue**, with 118 children needing multiple referrals (see **table 1** for type/number).
- Of the 760 children screened, **300 were assessed as 'below average'** in one or more **Brigance domain**, and **required additional developmental supports at home**, to help the child build capacity in the identified area(s).
- The most common development supports were: **Self-help (n=63)**, **Language (n=45)**, and **Fine Motor Skills (n=25)**.



**Table 1 - Outlines the 447 referrals made by the NP/RN, by the type of services the 241 children were referred to.**

## Conclusion:

- This pilot has successfully screened 760 children and helped integrate them into existing health and support services. In addition, it has identified 300 developmentally vulnerable children and intervened to help improve outcomes.