Executive summary

Background and aims
The Australian Psychological Society (APS), in consultation with the Principals Australia Institute (PAI) and Early Childhood Australia (ECA), developed a Health and Community Survey of primary schools (schools), early childhood education and care (ECEC) services, and health and community services. Its aim was to determine the resources and services that currently exist or would be useful to these groups in forming partnerships, and to gain a greater understanding of how cross-sectoral partnerships are being developed.

The results will be used to inform the development of resources for schools, ECEC services and health and community services to facilitate partnerships between these sectors to further support children’s mental health and wellbeing. The specific aims were:

1. To determine the types of online resources that would be useful in aiding communication and working relationships between schools, ECEC services and health and community agencies.
2. To identify existing resources that support partnership development.
3. To understand how the KidsMatter initiative has assisted with partnership development.
4. To identify the challenges in developing partnerships between health and community services and schools or ECEC services.

Survey participants
• A total of 377 participants took part in the survey.
• The majority of respondents were from Western Australia (34%), followed by Victoria (28%) and NSW (22%).
• School staff were the most common respondents (32%), followed by psychologists in private practice (17%) and those working in non-government organisations (14%).
• A total of 26% of health and community service respondents were working with a KidsMatter school or ECEC service. A total of 24% of the school and ECEC respondents were currently participating in KidsMatter.
• Respondents from schools and ECEC services reported regular engagement with a range of services. Private allied health practitioners were the most common services engaged (70%), followed by paediatricians (58%) and private psychologists (42%). Thirty-one percent of respondents regularly engaged with ‘other’ services which could be categorised into government allied health professionals, adolescent mental health services, or allied health professionals within schools.
• The majority of participants from health and community services reported regularly engaging with schools (83%), and also with preschools and kindergartens (52%). Fewer services reported regular contact with long day-care centres (31%), out of school hours care (9%), family day care services (13%) and occasional care services (11%).
Key findings

The key findings of the report highlight the role KidsMatter already plays in supporting health and community services to work effectively with local schools / ECEC services and vice versa.

- Of the 24% of the school and ECEC respondents currently participating in KidsMatter, 66% found the initiative had increased their awareness of the health and community services in their local area and 55% found that KidsMatter helped them work more effectively with health and community services.

- Of the 26% of respondents from health and community services currently involved in working with a KidsMatter school or ECEC service, 66% reported that KidsMatter had increased their ability to work more effectively with their local schools and ECEC services. Staff working in community services valued more information about schools and ECEC services to further promote these partnerships.

- Participants from schools and ECEC services identified resources they would find most helpful in promoting partnerships, such as:
  - more information about their local services that support children and families and the associated referral processes
  - information about the services that provide professional learning or support for mental health
  - information about Medicare or government-funded services
  - directories of health and community services
  - KidsMatter resources that can be shared with health and community services
  - information for health and community services about how schools and ECECs work
  - tips on making appropriate referrals
  - case studies of successful partnership models between health and community services and schools / ECEC services.

- The benefits of schools / ECEC services and health and community services forming partnerships were thought to include supporting better outcomes for children and families, consistency and continuity of care, collaboration, and holistic service delivery.

- The perceived challenges to forming these partnerships included time constraint, isolation/communication, followed by staffing issues.

- Respondents identified a range of existing services and resources that facilitate partnerships between schools, ECEC services, and health and community services. These included KidsMatter resources and training, family-centred services and resources, secondary consultation services, mental health-specific resources, directories, and partnership evaluation tools.

- Participants identified various topics that would translate into useful resources for professionals and families, such as: childhood mental health and wellbeing; the impact of parental issues on children; managing challenging behaviour in children; resilience; cross-cultural issues; and school-related issues, such as bullying.

Outcomes

The key findings of the report will be used to inform the development of new KidsMatter resources and tools for schools, ECEC services and health and community agencies. These resources will be made available progressively on the KidsMatter website, www.kidsmatter.edu.au.