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## **Inquiry into the Mental Health and Wellbeing of Children and Young People (WA) November 2010**

### **1. Introduction**

The Australian Council on Children and the Media (ACCM) is a peak not-for-profit national community organisation whose mission is to support families, industry and decision makers in building and maintaining a media environment that fosters the health, safety and wellbeing of Australian children.

ACCM's core activities include the collection and review of research and information about the impact of media on children's development and wellbeing, and advocacy for the needs and interests of children in relation to the media.

More information about us can be found at Appendix 1.

### **2. Summary comment**

ACCM takes a particular interest in issues related to the impact of media experiences on children's mental health and wellbeing, especially in the early years. There is good evidence for significant risks of harm to children's mental health from some media experiences. These risks have been recognised in recent years by sections of the child health and welfare community, but are not widely known nor understood by parents and caregivers.

There is a critical need for more support and information to be supplied to parents and caregivers so that they are enabled to make media choices for their children that support rather than hinder their healthy development.

### **3. Comment relevant to Inquiry Terms of reference 3,4,5.**

#### *3.1 Media-related risks to mental health and wellbeing*

ACCM's ongoing reviews of worldwide research related to children and young people's experiences with media, provide evidence that the risks to mental health and wellbeing include:

- unnecessary development of fears and anxieties about the world and themselves
- attention difficulties
- distortion of normal sexual development, and depression, related to exposure to sexualised images
- increased use of violence to solve conflict
- early development of dependence on screens for entertainment
- other psychological difficulties including dissatisfaction with body image and eating disorders

### 3.2 These risks have been substantiated

These reviews have been supported in recent years by a range of Australian and overseas health and welfare authorities. For eg, in 2009 a policy paper jointly issued by the Centre for Community Child Health at the Royal Melbourne Children's Hospital and the Murdoch Children's Research Institute said that TV needs to be regarded "unequivocally as a health and wellbeing issue for young children". Further relevant references can be found at Attachment 2.

### 3.3 Who is working to reduce the risks?

ACCM has been almost alone in providing information and support to parents nationally, about how to manage these risks. ACCM provides information to parents via

- its website,
- its national freecall Children and Media helpline
- its child-focussed media review service *Know before you go*,
- parent seminars,
- other publications.

For example in 2008 ACCM launched the DVD kit (*Choosing fright-free, fight-free media: an intervention for parents of under7s*) designed as an early intervention tool to encourage parents to choose healthy viewing. In 2009-10 we ran a series of very well attended seminars for parents in WA, Victoria, and SA on the early sexualisation of children in and by the media.

ACCM has an ongoing battle to obtain funds to continue this vital role. We could do so much more if the risks were more widely recognised and accepted at government level, and funding were forthcoming to support increased collaboration with child and parent focussed organisations.



Barbara Biggins OAM,  
Hon CEO

## **Attachment 1: ABOUT THE AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL ON CHILDREN AND THE MEDIA**

**The ACCM** is a peak not-for-profit national community organisation whose mission is to support families, industry and decision makers in building and maintaining a media environment that fosters the health, safety and wellbeing of Australian children.

Its patrons are Baroness Susan Greenfield and Steve Biddulph.

ACCM has a national Board representing the states and territories of Australia, and a comprehensive membership of organisations and individuals who support its mission

**ACCM membership** includes ECA (Early Childhood Australia), ACSSO (Australian Council of State Schools Organisations), AHISA (Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia), AEU (Australian Education Union), Junior School Heads Association of Australia, Infant Mental health Association of Australia, Parenting Research Centre, Enough is Enough: anti-violence movement, SAPPA (South Australian Primary Principals Association), Federation of NSW P&C (Parents & Citizens), and the Council of Mothers' Union in Australia.

**ACCM's core activities** include the collection and review of research and information about the impact of media on children's development, and advocacy for the needs and interests of children in relation to the media.

**ACCM's core services** include:

- the national freecall 24/7 Children and Media Helpline (1800 700 357);
- the ACCM website [www.childrenandmedia.au](http://www.childrenandmedia.au) containing evidence based information about media and children (attracting over 1000 visits per day);
- the award-winning, popular *Know before you go* child-friendly movie review service (now with more than 520 movie reviews);
- the development of parent media awareness materials,
- making submissions and participating in media interviews related to media regulation.

**ACCM's current issues** include the early sexualisation of children in and by the media; the impacts of media violence; the marketing of violent entertainment and junk foods to the young; management of screen time and content by the very young.

**ACCM's programs** are lead by a team of expert volunteers, supported by a small paid staff. Its programs are supported by project grants and much volunteer input.

**ACCM's awards** include National Community Crime Prevention awards 2009, 2006; 2001; National Child Protection 2005.

**The ACCM is a structured as a company limited by guarantee.** Its ABN is 16 005 214 531. The organisation is registered for GST, has DGR and ITEC status,

## Attachment 2: RELEVANT REFERENCES

Australia. Parliament. House. The House Standing Committee on Family Community Housing and Youth (2010)

*The Committee reported on the need for greater protection for youth from exposure to media violence (Rec 10) and for access for parents, children and youth to evidence-based information to support informed choices about media (Rec 11). See at p130-134*

<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/fchy/youthviolence/report/Chapter%205.pdf>

Australian Council on Children and the Media (2008) *Choosing fright-free, fight-free viewing: an intervention for parents of under 7s.*

[http://www.youngmedia.org.au/mediachildren/11\\_reel\\_real\\_index.htm](http://www.youngmedia.org.au/mediachildren/11_reel_real_index.htm)

Australian Council on Children and the Media (2009) *Too sexy too soon: the sexualisation of children in the media.* [http://www.youngmedia.org.au/mediachildren/03\\_15\\_tooSexy\\_index.htm](http://www.youngmedia.org.au/mediachildren/03_15_tooSexy_index.htm)

Australian Psychological Society (2000) *Media Representations and Responsibilities.* Australian Psychological Society

Buizjen, M. & Valkenburg, P. (2003) The effects of television advertising on materialism, parent-child conflict and unhappiness: A review of research. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 24, 4, 437-456.

Chakroff, J. (2007) *Parental mediation of advertising & consumer communication: The effectiveness of parental intervention on young children's materialistic attitudes.* Dissertation for Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

Martin, G. (2007) Editorial: On the impact of television on young people. *Australian e-Journal for the Advancement of Mental Health*, Vol. 6, No. 2

Murray, JP & Murray, AD (2008) "Television in infancy & early childhood" *Encyclopedia of Infancy & Early Childhood* Oxford: Elsevier Publishers

Page, Angie (2010) "Children's Screen Viewing is Related to Psychological Difficulties Irrespective of Physical Activity" Published online October 11, 2010 *Pediatrics* (doi:10.1542/peds.2010-1154d) *The odds of significant psychological difficulties were about 60% higher for children who spent more than two hours of screen time a day compared with kids who watched less television and played fewer video games.*

Royal Melbourne Childrens Hospital and Murdoch Children's Research Institute (2009) *Television and early childhood development: Policy brief 16.*

[http://www.rch.org.au/emplibrary/ccch/PB\\_16\\_template\\_final\\_web.pdf](http://www.rch.org.au/emplibrary/ccch/PB_16_template_final_web.pdf)

*"The paper says that media use is an important issue as it affects child development (including brain development) ...and the ways in which children see and understand the world (including social norms and values) and their place in it."*

Royal Australian College of Physicians (RACP) (2004) *Children and the media: Advocating for the future: Paediatric policy* ([www.racp.edu.au/hpu/paed/index.htm](http://www.racp.edu.au/hpu/paed/index.htm))

Tanimura, M; Okuma, K; Kyoshima, K (2007) Television viewing, reduced parental utterance & delayed speech development in infants and young children. *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, Vol. 161, No. 6, Pp 618-619

US. National Wildlife Federation (2010) *Whole child: developing mind, body and spirit through outdoor play.* [www.beoutthere.org](http://www.beoutthere.org)

*This physician-reviewed report reveals that when children have free time they are increasingly plugged in with media. There are important links between outdoor time and better mental health.*