

RESTACKING THE ODDS

INCREASING ACCESS TO PARENTING PROGRAMS



Key messages

- High-quality parenting programs support child development and parent wellbeing
- Families face a range of barriers to accessing high-quality parenting programs
- Multiple strategies and policy supports are needed to increase access

Increasing access to high-quality parenting programs is a powerful way to support child development and parent wellbeing.

Access to high-quality parenting programs for reducing child social, emotional and behavioural difficulties can significantly improve parent wellbeing and child development.¹⁻⁴ However, in Australia, many families who would benefit from these programs miss out.⁵ Priority groups* tend to miss out more.

Families face a range of barriers to taking part in high-quality parenting programs, including difficulties with transport and competing responsibilities. By understanding these barriers, practitioners, service managers and policymakers are better placed to address them and optimise supports for all families. Increasing access to parenting programs would have substantial and lasting benefits for children, families and society.¹

What was our aim?

Our study aimed to identify:

- barriers that make it difficult for families to take part in parenting programs
- facilitators that make it easier for families to take part in parenting programs
- whether families and providers perceive similar or different barriers and facilitators.

What did we do?

In a mixed-methods study, we asked parents and providers about barriers to enrolling in and attending parenting programs. Surveys were completed by 37 parents and 27 service providers, and interviews conducted with 25 parents and 23 service providers. Parents and providers were from 3 local government areas in Victoria, Australia, including 2 metropolitan and one regional area. All 3 areas have high rates of socioeconomic disadvantage.

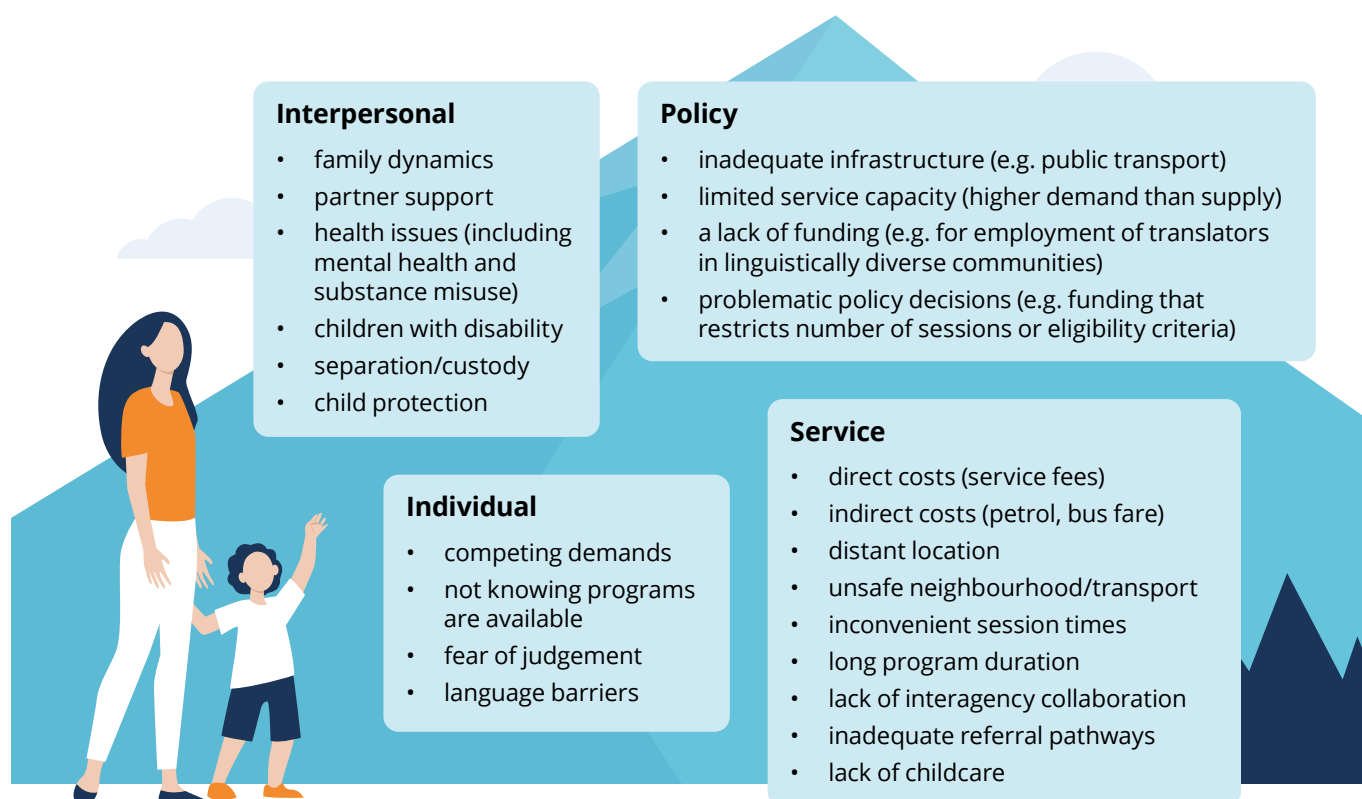


Figure 1: Barriers to participation in parenting programs

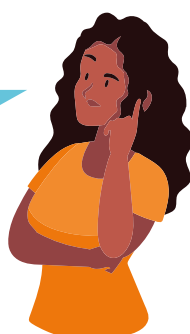
* Families disproportionately impacted by inequity due to factors including education, employment, income and ethnicity.

What did we find?

Our study found that:

- families often face multiple barriers to enrolling in and attending parenting programs (Figure 1)
- parents and providers generally agree on the main barriers and facilitators
- more flexible program scheduling and the need for childminding are critical to enable participation in on-site programs
- information about program effectiveness, relevance to one's family and direct costs are very important facilitators for families
- several facilitators were rated as important by more parents than providers, namely: having information about program effectiveness, staff qualifications and digital delivery options.

I wonder if there's any evidence this program even works?



Implications for policy and practice

To ensure families can access parenting programs that support them to thrive, service providers and policymakers must tackle the barriers to participation.

Findings from our study suggest services could implement several strategies to increase parenting program enrolment and attendance. For example: advertising through multi-channel promotion and interagency collaboration, providing compelling evidence of program effectiveness, scheduling programs so parents can participate either during or outside traditional business hours, facilitating childcare and offering digital program delivery.

However, providers cannot overcome the barriers alone. Policy support is needed to ensure families can safely get to on-site programs, close to home, at suitable times and low cost.

Policy support is also needed to ensure that alternatives to on-site participation (e.g. online programs) are adequately researched and able to meet high-quality standards.

In addition, services and communities could benefit from lead indicator (timely, easily actionable) data⁶ showing whether:

- enough parenting program services are available to meet community needs (quantity)
- families are enrolling in and attending programs (participation)
- services are providing high-quality (evidence-informed) programs (quality).

Access to lead indicator data will provide critical insights into which families are missing out or receiving poorer quality programs—enabling parenting program providers, service managers and policymakers to develop tailored local strategies to overcome barriers to participation.

Implications for research

To better serve communities, research could:

- explore barriers affecting specific priority groups (e.g., culturally diverse families, children with additional needs) and geographic areas
- understand which barriers and facilitators impact different aspects of participation (e.g. enrolment, attendance, program completion and quality of engagement)
- test and evaluate strategies at multiple levels (service, community and system) to understand what supports sustained participation and improved outcomes.

By building research into ongoing improvement processes, we can better understand what gets in the way of families participating and what helps. Using data to plan, act and review in a continuous way will support more families to access high-quality parenting programs.

For further information

Molloy, C., Beatson, R., Fehlberg, Z., Macmillan, C., Harrop, C., Perini, N., & Goldfeld, S. (2025). Parenting program participation: A mixed methods study of barriers and facilitators in three Australian communities. *Children and Youth Services Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chidyouth.2025.108610>

Suggested citation

Restacking the Odds (2025). *Increasing access to parenting programs*. Research snapshot. The Centre for Community Child Health at The Royal Children's Hospital and Murdoch Children's Research Institute Parkville, Australia. [doi:10.25374/MCRI.30423907](https://doi.org/10.25374/MCRI.30423907)

References

1. Kato, N., et al., *Prevalence of Children's Mental Health Problems and the Effectiveness of Population-Level Family Interventions*. *Journal of Epidemiology*, 2015. 25(8): p. 507-16. [doi: 10.1007/s10567-008-0033-0](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10567-008-0033-0).
2. Mingebach, T., et al., *Meta-meta-analysis on the effectiveness of parent-based interventions for the treatment of child externalizing behavior problems*. *PLoS One*, 2018. 13(9): p. e0202855. [doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0202855](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0202855).
3. Yap, M., et al., *Parents in prevention: A meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials of parenting interventions to prevent internalizing problems in children from birth to age 18*. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 2016. 50: p. 138-158. [doi: 10.1016/j.cpr.2016.10.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2016.10.003).
4. Nowak, C. and N. Heinrichs, *A comprehensive meta-analysis of Triple P-Positive Parenting Program using hierarchical linear modeling: effectiveness and moderating variables*. *Clinical Child & Family Psychology Review*, 2008. 11(3): p. 114-44. [doi: 10.1007/s10567-008-0033-0](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10567-008-0033-0).
5. Molloy, C., et al., Potential of 'stacking' early childhood interventions to reduce inequities in learning outcomes. *J Epidemiol Community Health*, 2019. 73(12): p. 1078-1086. [doi: 10.1136/jech-2019-212282](https://doi.org/10.1136/jech-2019-212282).
6. Molloy, C., et al., *Evidence-based Lead Indicators to Drive Equitable Early Years Services: Findings from the Restacking the Odds Study*. *Child Indicators Research*, 2025. 18(2): p. 789-823. [doi: 10.1007/s12187-025-10215-z](https://doi.org/10.1007/s12187-025-10215-z)

RESTACKING THE ODDS

RSTO is a collaboration between the Centre for Community Child Health at the Murdoch Children's Research Institute, Bain & Company, and Social Ventures Australia.

For information about the study or RSTO

Email: restackingtheodds@mcri.edu.au
Visit: www.rsto.org.au

The Centre for Community Child Health

The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne
50 Flemington Road
Parkville 3052 VIC, Australia

LinkedIn: [CCCH](https://www.linkedin.com/company/ccch)
[ccch.org.au](https://www.ccch.org.au)

The Centre for Community Child Health is a department of The Royal Children's Hospital and a research group of the Murdoch Children's Research Institute.

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which we work and pay our respect to Elders past, present and emerging.