

Key findings from the Targeted Earlier Intervention Evaluation

Snapshot

- The Targeted Earlier Intervention (TEI) program has a positive impact on safety outcomes for individual clients.
- The TEI program as a whole is found to be effective in reducing contact with child protection and reducing the likelihood of children remaining in out of home care (OOHC), for individual clients whose data could be linked. TEI is also as effective for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children and families.
- Provider feedback suggested that TEI influences a wide range of outcomes, particularly related to sense of belonging in the community, participation in community, empowerment and self-determination, and the health of children and young people.
- Participation in TEI leads to increased referrals to key service areas, such as housing, which shows that TEI services are connecting clients to services they need.
- TEI is reaching clients with higher needs than originally planned.
- The TEI evaluation showed encouraging results at the overall program level, but there are limited insights on which specific programs/services are effective and which clients they are effective with. Results mainly reflect participation in the Wellbeing and Safety stream services where more people are individual clients, and outcome data is available.
- There has been progress towards implementing most TEI reforms, including need-based commissioning, as well as review of funding allocations and greater investment in Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation service delivery.
- While the economic analysis indicates a cost benefit ratio of less than a dollar, the evaluation is supportive of TEI program impacts given potential benefits that could not be accounted for with the available data including the likelihood of future avoided costs to government. Concrete downstream improvements in outcomes for early intervention services are often difficult to establish. The fact that safety benefits were quantifiable is significant.

Introduction

The Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) commissioned Taylor Fry (TF), Social Ventures Australia (SVA) and Gamarada Universal Indigenous Resources Pty Ltd (GUIR) to conduct the first comprehensive evaluation of the Targeted Earlier Intervention (TEI) program. The TEI program is DCJ's key early intervention program aimed at strengthening families and communities across NSW. The program supports children, young people and families who are experiencing, or at risk of, vulnerabilities and aims to prevent the escalation of risks associated with child abuse and neglect to ensure that issues are addressed early. It is a flexible program with diverse activities delivered under two streams – Community Strengthening and Wellbeing and Safety – and is delivered by almost 500 service providers.



The evaluators conducted a comprehensive evaluation that included a process, outcome and economic component. This was only possible because of improved data collection by service providers through the Data Exchange (DEX). The purpose of the evaluation was to:

- assess the overall impact of the TEI program
- build the evidence base to inform the evolution of the TEI program and the 2025 commissioning process
- provide evidence of the efficacy of programs under each stream of TEI to support funding decisions
- identify areas and strategies for program improvement.

This Evidence to Action Note provides an overview of the key findings and recommendations from this evaluation. More information can be found in the full report, [NSW Department of Communities and Justice Targeted Earlier Intervention Program Evaluation: Final Report](#) and the [Interim Report](#).

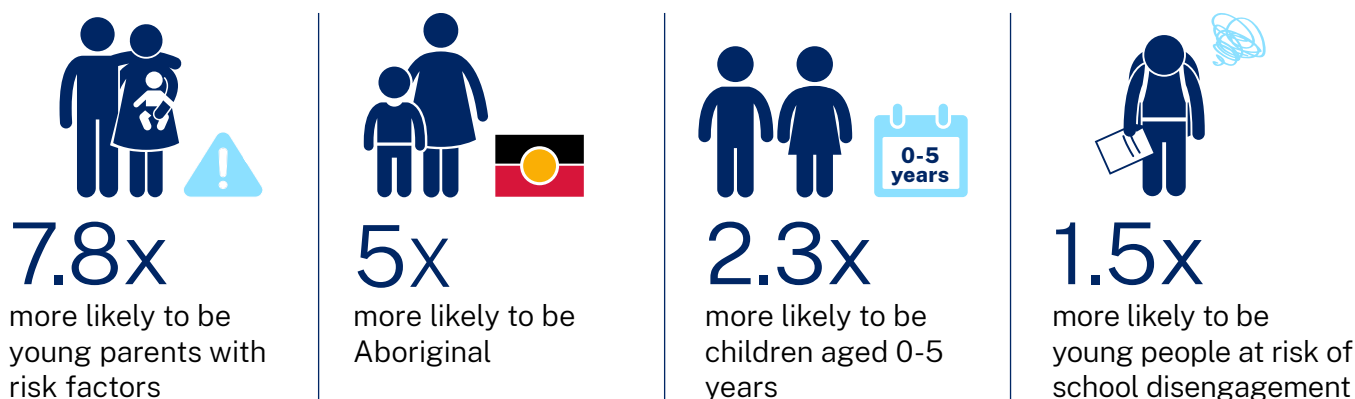
What did the evaluation find?

The TEI program prioritises supports to four key groups of clients:

- children aged 0-5 years old
- young parents with known vulnerabilities or who are experiencing a number of hardships
- children and young people at risk of disengagement from school, family and community
- Aboriginal children, young people, families and communities
- The evaluation found that service providers have successfully targeted the four priority groups for entry into the TEI program. Around 45% of TEI individual clients, whose data was able to be linked, were from the priority groups. Targeting seemed to be most effective for the young parents with risk factors and Aboriginal priority groups.



Compared with the general population, TEI individual clients were:



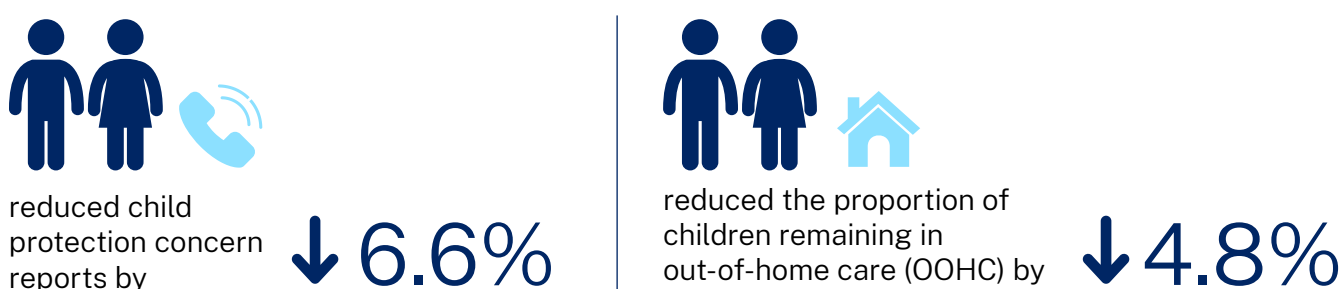
There has been progress in implementing most TEI reforms

The evaluation found there has been progress towards implementing most TEI reforms, including need-based commissioning however, there is a need for a review of funding allocations and greater investment in ACCO-led service delivery to meet funding targets. The evaluation also found that there are areas of relatively lower reach and funding.

There were improvements in child protection outcomes following TEI support

Overall, TEI had positive effects on individual client outcomes. The analyses assessed the effectiveness of all TEI services grouped together and only for individual clients whose data could be linked with outcomes¹.

The evaluation found that between 16 and 18 months after entering the program, TEI:



This means that for every 100 children who would have ended up with a concern report in a quarter, there were 7 children who avoided having it due to participation in TEI.

While the measured reduction in Risk of Significant Harm (ROSH) of 5% was not statistically significant, the evaluators believe that it is more likely that this is due to not having a sufficiently large sample size for analysis, rather than TEI genuinely having no impact on reducing Risk of Significant Harm.

¹ For this reason, the results of the evaluation need to be considered on their level of aggregation which does not allow conclusions on which specific service types are effective for specific clients. However, there is some initial evidence indicating that Counselling services and Specialist Support services have improved outcomes for clients in higher risk situations (the volume of data is still low for the evidence to be conclusive).

The evaluation also found that:

- TEI was as effective for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children and families. The proportion of Aboriginal people who have received services from Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) has increased over time, as has relevant referrals for Aboriginal people.
- While funding targets for investment in ACCO service delivery have not been met, DCJ has renewed its commitment to this investment. ACCOs also emphasised that current TEI data does not include the attainment of cultural outcomes, critical pre-requisites for Aboriginal people and communities in achieving TEI outcomes such as safety and empowerment.
- Provider feedback suggested that TEI influences a wide range of outcomes, particularly related to sense of belonging in the community, participation in community, empowerment and self-determination, and the health of children and young people.
- Providers believed that delivering flexible and adaptable services, based on strong relationships and connections with clients and community, is key to achieving outcomes.
- Participation in TEI leads to increased referrals to key service areas, such as housing, which shows that TEI services are connecting clients to services they need. There appears to be a dosage effect, with the TEI program being more effective in reducing child protection interactions for children receiving more sessions.
- The program appears to be more effective for children with prior contact with the child protection system.

Additional qualitative and quantitative evidence indicates that TEI seems to be reaching a higher risk population than intended.

The evaluators support SCORE as a useful tool to track improvements

SCORE (Standard Client/Community Outcomes Reporting) is a TEI program framework used to measure and report on client and community outcomes. The three types of SCOREs collected for individual clients are circumstances (measures changes in client circumstances), goals (measures progress in achieving specific goals), and satisfaction (measures client satisfaction). Analysis of the circumstances and goals SCOREs shows that they are correlated with client outcomes, suggesting it can be a useful tool for monitoring purposes and for outcomes tracking.

Clients were positive about services provided in the TEI program

Overall, clients were optimistic about the impact of the TEI program on safety outcomes. Aboriginal clients also provided positive feedback about safety outcomes for Aboriginal children and families, and high satisfaction with, Aboriginal service delivery. Around 77% of service providers and 85% of ACCO providers indicated that they believed TEI was either moderately effective, very effective or extremely effective in improving safety outcomes.

Clients were generally satisfied with TEI services they received, and believed that providers have listened to their needs and helped them to better deal with issues they sought help with.

“My life was in chaos. It meant a lot to me to receive [provider’s TEI] support – to go from where we were. We hit rock bottom. I was suicidal. I couldn’t say where I would be without them. I probably wouldn’t have my kids. I would have had to give them up” (mother)

The economic evaluation is supportive of the TEI program impacts

The economic analysis provided a cost-benefit analysis at the aggregate TEI program level, with all costs and benefits being averaged across providers, streams, clients and activities at the same time. The analysis found an estimated quantifiable benefit of \$92 million compared to a total cost of \$181 million or 51 cents of quantifiable safety benefit for every dollar invested in the TEI program in 2022–23. It is likely that there are economic benefits achieved by the TEI program but which are not quantified and not included. When only considering funding to individual sessions in TEI, 66 cents of safety benefit was found for each dollar spent.

While these findings indicate that the costs of the program outweigh its benefits, the evaluation is supportive of TEI program impacts as the evaluators noted:

- They adopted a conservative methodology, only recognising benefits where robust evidence exists through statistical analysis, where outcomes are well-reflected in administrative service datasets, and that there is a relatively simple translation of service usage to outcomes.
- Concrete downstream improvement in outcomes are often difficult to establish for early intervention services, so the fact that safety benefits were quantifiable is significant, especially where they focus on future avoided cost to government.
- Their ability to assess outcomes is strongest for individually identified clients which tends towards the Wellbeing and Safety stream services where 59% of clients are individually identified, with potentially unknown benefits for approximately 40% of the program delivered through the Community Strengthening stream.
- Benefits from other areas where TEI may have an impact have not been quantified at this stage. There are likely additional economic benefits which could not be quantified through the data, for example related to: domestic violence victimisation; group clients receiving services through the Community Strengthening stream; and navigation and service access.



What are the limitations of the evaluation?

The report identifies a number of limitations that should be taken into account when considering the findings:

- The overall TEI program was evaluated, which includes two different streams, multiple target populations, and activities, delivered by almost 500 providers. While overall program outcomes are assessed using the Human Services Dataset (HSDS) and program data, these outcomes are likely to vary by activity, service and provider. The available data is not sufficient to draw meaningful conclusions at that level of detail.
- Results mainly reflect participation in the Wellbeing and Safety stream services where more people are individually identified (and, thus, could be linked to the HSDS).
- Although the qualitative data collection was extensive, it may not be representative of all TEI programs and service providers given TEI is a large program which is expected to vary by factors including service and activity.
- The outcome analysis assessed overall program outcomes, not individual service types.
- There are coverage and quality issues related to the DEX data, particularly early in the program with reporting in the first year impacted by COVID and natural disasters.
- While the HSDS is a rich data source covering a broad range of key government services, there remains many elements of wellbeing and vulnerabilities that are not included in the data asset. This affected the evaluations risk adjustment and outcomes measurement.

What did the evaluation recommend?

The TEI evaluation report makes seven recommendations:

- Increase funding and capacity of ACCOs to deliver TEI services. To support the achievement of its stated investment targets, DCJ will also need to invest in building the capacity of new and emerging ACCOs.
- Focus on increasing TEI access in high population-growth and remote areas.
- Greater opportunity for interim contract and funding reviews during a contract period, and in response to changing circumstances.
- Increased flexibility in service provision and provider awareness. Simplification of the program design, with fewer service types and greater allowance for providers to deliver a wider range of activities within a district and adapt the target cohorts based on local need.
- Support for community engagement and partnership development. DCJ should look to provide sufficient facilitation or funding for providers to participate in local forums and to undertake outreach to build partnerships in their local communities.
- Update outcomes measurement approaches, in particular, to reflect cultural outcomes and consider principles of Indigenous Data Sovereignty.
- Define the focus of future evaluations. It would be useful for future evaluations to focus on understanding what service provision factors led to kinds of outcomes.

About the Targeted Earlier Intervention Evaluation

The evaluation used a mixed methods approach that included process, outcome, and economic components:

- The process component of the evaluation used qualitative analyses to explore the question: How well has the TEI program been implemented? Data sources included: interviews with peak bodies, DCJ and program staff; an in-depth online service provider survey; 47 client interviews; case studies with staff and clients of 5 service providers; TEI program data collected through the Data Exchange; and use of the HSDS.
- The outcome component of the evaluation used quantitative analyses to explore the question: Is the TEI program making a difference? Data sources included the TEI program data collected through the Data Exchange and use of the HSDS.
- A cost-benefit analysis explored the program's value for money. Data sources included the HSDS and Targeted Earlier Intervention funding data.

The evaluation included an external Aboriginal Reference Group and an internal Aboriginal Advisory Group. Ethics approval was obtained through the Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council.

Produced by

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