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Conference Abstract

## Increased service integration paves the way for better mental health outcomes for school aged children and young people in schools

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### Abstract

**Introduction:** In February 2014, ConNetica was contracted by Queensland Mental Health Commission (QMHC) to undertake an evaluation of the Queensland Ed-LinQ Initiative. The Ed-LinQ Initiative is a statewide initiative that is funded through the Queensland Plan for Mental Health (2007-2017) and administered by Queensland Health. Ed-LinQ works strategically at a state and district level to improve linkages between the education sector, the primary care sector and the mental health sector. The program aims to support these sectors to work collaboratively to enhance the early detection and treatment of mental illness affecting school-aged children and young people.

**Approach:** The evaluation took an iterative and formative approach to enable the project evaluation team to consult with the QMHC Project Manager and the Evaluation Working Group (EWG) to reflect on the findings as the project developed and take appropriate agreed actions to adjust or 'pivot' if necessary. Data was collected throughout the project from the Ed-LinQ Coordinators, Child and Youth Mental Health Service (CYMHS) staff, the Evaluation Working Group members, school personnel, national and international thought leaders in child and youth mental health, and other stakeholders via face-to-face interviews, phone interviews, focus groups and on line surveys. A total of 339 individuals have contributed to the data in this report.

**Target Audience:** The Ed-LinQ program seeks to improve mental health outcomes for school aged children and young people.

**Program Overview:** The range of services provided by the Ed-LinQ team relate to strengthening relationships between schools, CYMHS and other relevant services, building cross sector workforce capability in the area of mental health, streamlining referral processes between schools and CYMHS, supporting schools with their management of student mental health issues and communicating and or providing a range of mental health resources.

**Program Findings:** The findings from the qualitative and quantitative research are complimentary and highlight the positive and highly valued impact of the Ed-LinQ initiative for a significant number of schools across Queensland. The impact has been greatest in areas where schools have 'brought-in' to the Ed-LinQ Initiative recognising the need to partner with Child and Youth Mental Health Services (CYMHS) rather than 'off-load' mental health issues to CYMHS or have limited engagement.

The findings showed that the Ed-LinQ Initiative has gone a long way to realising the stated objectives of forming strategic partnerships, building capacity, and providing clinical guidance. Schools where Ed-LinQ has had a high impact have reported improved referral pathways and access to specialist support, cross agency communication, enhanced workforce capability, more comprehensive school mental health promotion and prevention, better selection and use of available resources and a greater capacity to address the mental health needs of students. There is some evidence to suggest that Ed-LinQ has enhanced young people's mental health, teachers' well being and that it has had a culture change effect on CYMHS.

**Conclusion:** This presentation will detail the range of key performance criteria that underpin improved integration between education and health providers to enable improved mental health services to school aged children and young people.

## **Keywords**

**service integration; schools; community mental health services; evaluation**

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## **PowerPoint presentation**

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