



The Royal Australasian  
College of Physicians

Paediatrics & Child Health Division

## Statement on Research for Children and Young People

Research for children and young people has a special place in improving life-long health. From pre-conception through childhood and to adolescents and young adult years developmental trajectories are established that have fundamental and profound impacts on health and social well-being. This is recognised in the Australian national research priority 'a healthy start to life' and the New Zealand national science challenge 'a better start'. Numerous chronic diseases and mental health disorders have origins in this period.

Research for children and young people needs to recognise that their realities are very different from those of adults and take into account and respect their unique concerns, needs and value systems.

Research for children and young people has key targets that include:

- a need for systems to acquire and analyse high quality data on health outcomes, such as perinatal and childhood deaths, congenital malformations, health morbidities, as well as social and educational outcomes;
- the provision of a safe environment;
- health and social policies that enhance the physical/mental well-being and resilience of children, young people and their family / whanau;
- recognition of the specific needs of disadvantaged groups and the potential for large gains in health and well-being for well-targeted research investment;
- environmental impacts on developmental trajectories. The environment spans a wide range of influences on child development, including nutrition, media, as well as social, educational and employment policy;
- the integration of national research capacity into national or international networks and alliances;
- recognition by the pharmaceutical industry and regulatory bodies of the special biology of children and young people and their need for specific studies of pharmaceuticals;
- recognition and prevention of early life factors leading to chronic life diseases in later life (developmental origins of health and disease – DOHaD); and
- immunisation strategies to improve health.

Research for children and young people can be complex, daunting and ethically challenging and researchers require the appropriate skills and methodological tools to do justice to the challenges. This research should be child and young people-centric, ethically sound and responsive to the changing landscape of the rights of children and young people.

The RACP is in a unique position, through its role in specialist medical training and its role in delivery of health services to children and young people to contribute to research to improve health outcomes. The RACP has the capacity to focus on health, nutrition, early cognitive and social development, child protection and safe environment and to integrate these factors with the complex and intertwined factors that determine health outcomes such as poverty, equity, social and family support.

The RACP supports more research for children and young people, to generate new evidence in support of best clinical practice and to guide the decisions and actions of governments and others who can impact on the well-being of children, young people and their families / whanau.