

New hub to help parents, carers, and school staff with school attendance problems



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The Brian M. Davis Charitable Foundation is co-funding a web-based knowledge hub for parents and school staff to help address the challenging problem of school refusal and non-attendance.

Deakin University will host the 'one-stop shop' resource, which will provide integrated and easily accessible information.

Within one year of the launch, the initiative – which is the first of its type in Australia - aims to engage 5,500 parents and train 4,000 school staff.

The Foundation is committing \$190,000 over three years, while co-funder The Ross Trust is committing \$187,738 over the same period.



Deakin University's Associate Professor Glenn Melvin, an internationally recognised researcher and clinician who specialises in school attendance problems, will lead the initiative.

He said that school attendance rates declined to unprecedented levels after the pandemic and 38% of students from Victorian government schools were chronically absent.

"This is alarming given absenteeism is associated with negative impacts on student learning, engagement, and wellbeing outcomes, as well as early school leaving," A/Prof Melvin said.

"Resources on school refusal and attendance are scattered in websites on other topics, such as mental health. This project will be the first in Australia to create a centre of knowledge that provides attendance-specific information, resources, and practices for families and schools alike."

The hub, which will also include video and animated information, will have a strong focus on prevention of school attendance problems.

The web resource will feature:

- co-designed training for school staff
- information and resources for parents based on current best-practice parenting guidelines developed by the Deakin University team.

A project leadership team made up of academics from Deakin University, University of Melbourne and Monash University will deliver the initiative, while consumer advisors and representatives from Victorian Parents Council and Parents Victoria will provide expert input. ▶

A social media campaign will promote the web resource to parents of school-aged children and staff at all Victorian schools, as well as through youth, health and mental health services.

“We also plan to work closely with Victorian Parents Council and Parents Victoria to hold events such as webinars for parents on topics including school refusal and promoting positive attendance in early schooling,” A/Prof Melvin said.

Brian M. Davis Charitable Foundation CEO Anita Hopkins said that the impact of school refusal was extreme and led to an Australian Government Senate Inquiry in 2023 that received 170 submissions. None of the 14 recommendations of the inquiry have yet been implemented, however the Senate report noted the lack of a digital ‘one-stop-shop’ for families and schools with information, support and training on school attendance and absenteeism.

Anita said the grant would support staffing costs related to the development of the resources, co-design training for schools and teachers, and guidelines. Funds will also provide reimbursement to lived-experience participants. ■