

# Presentation Abstracts

## Theme 4: Collaboration in paediatric allied health

**Mrs Melinda Brilliant, Wimmera Health Care Group**

*Melinda.Brilliant@whcg.org.au*

**Ms Cassandra Kelly, Wimmera Health Care Group**

**Abstract title:** *Targeting toddlers: A rural speech pathology response*

---

**Introduction:** The 2009 Victorian Community Health Priority Tool prioritised the need for active Speech Pathology intervention for “late talkers” – children 30 months and under with expressive language delay.

Prior to this, accepted clinical management of late talkers at the Wimmera Health Care Group Speech Pathology Department was a “watch & wait” approach. This approach was characterised by a low referral rate, variable access and limited application of best practice. The 2009 Priority Tool highlighted a need for urgent service reform.

**Objective:**

- This paper aims to outline how a rural speech pathology clinic responded to government policy and changes in the evidence base for the clinical population.

**Approach:** Implementing change was multifactorial. This included working with all stakeholders to: engage staff and the community effectively, gain support from executive management of the organisation and establish effective collaborative relationships to equip the clinic for service changes.

**Practice Implications:** Evidence indicates that actively targeting late talkers improves long term oral language and literacy outcomes. It follows that providing active early intervention to this population will reduce future burden on health and educational services.

**Conclusion:** The Wimmera Health Care Group Speech Pathology Department has demonstrated how a rural service can respond to government policy directions while improving the service access, and clinical pathway, for young children in the Wimmera region.

### **Biography**

Melinda is a speech pathologist at the Wimmera Health Care Group, Horsham. She has worked in rural health for over 20 years, predominately with paediatric clients in the public hospital setting and private practice. Melinda’s clinical interests include oral language disorders and the role of the speech pathologist in remediation of reading and spelling.

Cassandra is also a speech pathologist at Wimmera Health Care Group (Horsham), specialising in paediatric assessment and therapy. Cassandra has over 18 years experience, working in rural and regional hospitals as well as private practice. Cassandra's clinical interests include motor speech disorders in children.