

Submission to the Early Years Strategy Consultation

Social Ventures Australia

May 2023

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About SVA and our expertise

Social Ventures Australia (SVA) is a not-for-profit organisation with the mission to alleviate disadvantage, towards an Australia where all people and communities thrive. We influence systems to deliver better social outcomes for people by learning what works in communities, helping organisations be more effective, sharing our perspectives, advocating for change and influencing systems.

SVA recognises that the best chance to change lifelong outcomes for children is to change what happens in early childhood. SVA has supported a number of initiatives designed to support better outcomes for young children and particularly for children experiencing disadvantage. We have a breadth and depth of experience and insights around addressing early childhood developmental vulnerability. We are also experts in systems change. We understand that there are valuable roles for government, business, the not-for-profit sector, philanthropy and for communities and families themselves in creating an Australia that gives children the best start in life.

Our expertise in the early years includes:

- SVA's **Young Children Thriving** program, through which we are orchestrating several ambitious initiatives together with our partners:
 - **Nurture Together:** Mobilising integrated child and family centres (ICFCs) so that children can transcend their experiences of disadvantage. We support children experiencing vulnerability to have timely access to the wraparound supports they need so they can start school ready. We do this by building the evidence, strengthening sector capability and improving the funding and policy environment for ICFCs across Australia.
 - **THRYVE:** Transforming Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander access to quality early learning. The evidence is clear that First Nations children who participate in high quality, culturally appropriate early learning have a better chance to thrive. We have partnered with SNAICC to grow and expand a strong network of culturally safe and accessible early years services for First Nations children. The project is increasing reach and strengthening service delivery and sustainability for the First Nations early years sector through three statewide backbone support teams that sit as a division of SNAICC.
 - **Early Years Catalyst:** Redressing the root causes and system forces that drive disadvantage in the early years. We are part of a bold national collaboration that is working to disrupt and transform the early years landscape. Our goal is to redesign the system and redress entrenched mindsets to drive better outcomes for children experiencing disadvantage.
- **Restacking the Odds** (*Restacking*) is a collaboration between Bain & Company, the Murdoch Children's Research Institute (Centre for Community Child Health) and SVA. *Restacking* aims to tackle intergenerational disadvantage and drive equitable outcomes by ensuring that children and families can access a combination of five high-quality, evidence-informed, community-based services. The initiative's unique approach uses data and evidence-based indicators to focus on how to work differently to improve outcomes for children, families and communities.
- **Evidence for Learning** (E4L) is a non-profit education venture incubated by SVA. It helps great practice become common practice in education by helping educators in schools and early learning settings to build, share and use evidence on what works to improve outcomes for children and young people. It has been enthusiastically supported by early childhood educators and leaders, who have indicated that E4L has empowered them to lead their own learning and become more

effective as professionals, in an efficient way. Established in 2015, E4L seeks to improve the quality, availability and use of evidence in education by collaborating with education researchers, policy makers, systems leaders, educators, professional learning providers, philanthropists and the wider community. E4L holds the exclusive Australian licence to education research, assets and tools produced by the United Kingdom's Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) and localises these for Australian educators. E4L has over 18,000 users, most of whom are educators, frequently accessing free materials via the E4L website.

- The **Newpin Social Benefit Bond**, launched in 2017, was the first social impact bond (SIB) in Australia. The Newpin program supports the families of some of the most at-risk young children in our society, with a goal of addressing trauma, building practical skills and enabling parents to provide a safe home environment so that children can remain in their home or avoid being removed. SVA played a critical role in the development and management of that SIB with Uniting NSW ACT and the NSW Government, and in the two successor Newpin bonds in Queensland and South Australia. SVA also supported the development of the follow-on outcomes-based contract for the Newpin program in NSW.
- Member of the **Goodstart Syndicate**: SVA is one of four community sector organisations responsible for the establishment of Goodstart Early Learning – together with Benevolent Society, Mission Australia and the Brotherhood of Saint Laurence. The Syndicate identified that the collapse of ABC Learning in late 2008 provided a once-in-a-generation opportunity to transform early learning in Australia. The syndicate stepped in to provide a viable and accessible alternative to ABC Learning that was focused on quality outcomes for children, not profit, with a specific emphasis on lifting the quality of early learning, particularly for children experiencing vulnerabilities who would benefit the most.
- **The Connection** is a strategic network of Australian Educators designed and convened by SVA with the vision that every young person deserves access to an education which supports them to thrive in life and community. The Connection works to flip the narrative about educational inequity and the influence of practitioner leadership to an opportunity. Practitioner leaders facing similar challenges across and within states and territories are intentionally convened and connected to collaborate to improve the learning outcomes of their learner cohorts together. The Connection provides practitioner leaders opportunities to amplify their capability collectively to lead and contribute to systemic educational change. Since 2013, 80 schools, over 4000 leaders across three states have participated in the network, impacting 75,000 students. The Connection initiative has expanded in strategic partnership in 2023, to support the collaboration to build best practices to support early years education – enabling successful transitions from early years to primary settings.
- Working with a diversity of social sector organisations through **SVA Consulting**, one of Australia's leading social purpose consultancies. We help our clients develop and implement clearer strategies, find solutions to partner and collaborate to increase their social impact. We also guide them to better measure and evaluate their work. In the past year we have worked with close to 140 clients across the social sector, which gives us a deep understanding of the interrelated drivers of outcomes in the early years. This has included working directly with many organisations within the early years sector, including Goodstart Early Learning, Gowrie, and SNAICC.

Summary

Currently much is left to chance in the early years of a child's life. The systems and services that provide supports to families are fragmented. While some thrive, others fall through the cracks.

One in five children start school developmentally vulnerable. Children in the poorest areas of Australia are three times more likely to be developmentally vulnerable than children in the wealthiest areas. These inequities have not shifted in over a decade.

The complexity in the current systems and services makes it difficult even for governments to know enough about what happens to children between birth and starting school.

There is a growing evidence base about what's important for young children to thrive, but this isn't consistently put into place. There is limited accountability to deliver supports and services that will improve early childhood outcomes. And yet, the evidence is conclusive that investment in the early years creates more social and economic dividend than many other initiatives.

Addressing these challenges requires a fundamental rethink of the approach to support for children and families in the early years. We need a national commitment to every child that they will get the support they need to thrive.

We recommend the Commonwealth Government begin by promising that every young child receives the support they need to get the best start in life.

For the Commonwealth Government this means taking a national leadership role. We propose three focus areas:

- A commitment to all children and families being able to access the services and supports they need to thrive – including a combination of high-quality evidence-informed universal services with targeted support building from these universal platforms for children and families with additional needs.
- Accountability mechanisms to deliver on that commitment – including deploying national standards, ensuring quality in delivery, tracking progress, and ensuring equitable service delivery.
- Stewarding the system for successful implementation of the Early Years Strategy including through new funding approaches, investment in organisational and workforce capability and enhanced use of evidence.

There is a critical window of opportunity for the Commonwealth Government to act now. There is significant momentum behind early years reforms. We have also conducted research into community attitudes to investment in early childhood development and identified broad based support for doing more to help children, parents and families in the early years of a child's life. These findings are discussed further on p.24 of this submission.

Our submission responds to questions 2-8 in the discussion paper in turn, with particular emphasis on three key recommendations in response to questions 4, 5 and 6 on the specific policy priorities and opportunities for the Commonwealth to improve outcomes for children through the Strategy.

Recommendations

Recommendations

That the Commonwealth Government:

1. Make a **national commitment** to Australia's young children being able to access the services and supports they need to thrive. This includes:
 - 1.1. Opportunities to address social determinants of health
 - 1.2. Establishing an early years guarantee – through legislation and national agreements, that:
 - incorporates a combination of high-quality evidence informed services; and
 - is delivered through service models that are integrated, responsive to local need and culturally appropriate.
2. **Establish accountability mechanisms** for the Early Years Strategy, including:
 - 2.1. A mechanism for regular review of the impact of government policy on children
 - 2.2. A national leadership role for the Commonwealth government in establishing standards and frameworks that enable quality early years services
 - 2.3. Embedding a common framework at a service and community level to define and measure progress against a guarantee and achieve equitable service delivery, incorporating quantitative measures of quantity, quality and participation.
3. **Invest in systems and infrastructure** for successful implementation of the Early Years Strategy, including:
 - 3.1. Adoption of funding and commissioning approaches that incentivise a focus on achieving equitable early childhood development outcomes and on collaboration to meet the needs of local communities and families. This may include dedicated funding for integrated child and family services and for services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
 - 3.2. Investment in organisational and practitioner capability to improve effectiveness and engagement with children and families, for example:
 - Dedicated funding for the 'glue' that enables integration of support for families, particularly those with more complex needs.
 - Investment in data and learning systems at a service and community level (including place-based initiatives) to embed a culture of continuous improvement.
 - Funding charities contracted to deliver early years services for the full costs of achieving the outcomes required, including the indirect costs.
 - 3.3. Invest in the evidence ecosystem so that practice continually improves over time and ensure the most effective initiatives are expanded and less effective programs retired.

Vision and Outcomes

What vision should our nation have for Australia's youngest children? [Q2]

SVA wants to see an Early Years Strategy that establishes a vision for an Australia in which all children thrive. Supporting children and families experiencing disadvantage and vulnerability needs to be a priority, given the significant disparities in early childhood development outcomes. It is important for the vision to include reference to our First Nations children and families and the commitment to self-determination and equity in outcomes for these children.

We want to live in a society that prioritises the lifelong wellbeing of all children, where strong communities support strong families.

What mix of outcomes are the most important to include in the Strategy? [Q3]

SVA has investigated the drivers of better outcomes in the early years of life and identified that certain conditions and actions are more effective than others in moving towards an Australia in which all children thrive. We developed a driver tree, drawing on research and existing frameworks in the early years – see Appendix.

Our driver tree considers the child's life within their context, identifying drivers of outcomes regarding parent/carer relationships; the home environment; the community; the local area and the wider 'system'. This structure has the benefit of cutting across some of the potential silos in considering early childhood outcomes.

Research commissioned by SVA identified the need to be focusing much more on improving the core care conditions under which families are raising young children, in addition to investments in high-quality, evidence-based early years services.¹ The conditions include:

- the child's needs, such as secure relationships with primary caregivers and opportunities to mix with other children;
- the parent/caregiver's needs, for example social support networks and access to universal services; and
- shared child and family needs including secure and affordable housing, financial security and a healthy physical environment.

Outcomes measures for children need to be supplemented with measures that reflect these wider needs.

¹ TG Moore, *Developing holistic integrated early learning services for young children and families experiencing socio-economic vulnerability, prepared for Social Ventures Australia*, Centre for Community Child Health at The Royal Children's Hospital and the Murdoch Children's Research Institute, 2021, accessed 6 March 2023.

Priorities for the Strategy

What specific areas/policy priorities should be included in the Strategy and why? [Q4]

What could the Commonwealth do to improve outcomes for children—particularly those who are born or raised in more vulnerable and/or disadvantaged circumstances? [Q5]

What areas do you think the Commonwealth could focus on to improve coordination and collaboration in developing policies for children and families? [Q6]

1. National Commitment

There is significant community and sector support to create an early years' system that gives every child an opportunity to thrive. We also have a growing evidence base on effective interventions and services to support children and families, including those experiencing disadvantage.

There is a crucial role for government to create a more cohesive system and ensure that core needs of children and families are met. This requires a fundamental rethink of the approach to support for children and families in the early years. We need the Commonwealth Government to use its leadership position to make a national commitment to every child that they will get the support they need for the best start in life, embedded through legislation, national agreements and the delivery of quality services and supports.

Investment in a child's earliest years provides the foundation for lifelong health, development and wellbeing and the highest rate of return for early childhood development outcomes².

While a breadth of services and supports is available in the early years, the absence of an overarching vision and the division of responsibility between different levels of government has created systems and services that are complex and fragmented. The availability, accessibility and nature of the service offering varies significantly by geography. The onus is on parents to know what's available and valuable for themselves and their children and to seek appropriate services and supports. Attempting to navigate this complex landscape can leave families experiencing vulnerability feeling humiliated and disempowered.³ Evidence demonstrates that children and families with the greatest need are least likely to access services or receive the comprehensive support they need.⁴

² C Molloy, T Moore, M O'Connor, K Villanueva, S West, and S Goldfeld, *A Novel 3-Part Approach to Tackle the Problem of Health Inequities in Early Childhood*, *Academic Pediatrics*, 21(2), 236–243, 2021

³ McLoughlin, S Newman and F McKenzie, *Why Our Place? Evidence behind the approach*, *Our Place*, 2020 accessed 10 March 2023

⁴ S Fox, A Southwell, N Stafford, R Goodhue, D Jackson and C Smith, *Better systems, better chances: a review of research and practice for prevention and early intervention*, Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY), 2015, accessed 10 march 2023.

Recommendations

The Commonwealth Government should:

1. Make a **national commitment** to Australia's young children being able to access the services and supports they need to thrive. This includes:
 - 1.1. Opportunities to address social determinants of health
 - 1.2. Establishing an early years guarantee – through legislation and national agreements, that:
 - 1.2.1. incorporates a combination of high-quality evidence informed services
 - 1.2.2. Is delivered through service models that are integrated, responsive to local need and culturally appropriate.

1.1. Address social determinants of health

Early childhood development outcomes (and subsequent outcomes across the life course) are inextricably linked to the social determinants of health - the material, social, political and cultural conditions that children are exposed to from pre-conception/birth through their first 2,000 days and beyond.

A national commitment to Australia's young children must encompass opportunities to address the social determinants of health. The Commonwealth's role in supporting the conditions that are required for children to thrive including safe, stable and affordable housing; adequate nutrition and sufficient financial resources could be a particular focus.

1.2. Early years guarantee

SVA supports the Early Years Strategy giving effect to a national commitment to every child in Australia in the form of an early years' guarantee. This would build on Australia's existing social deal that already offers highly valued guarantees to all citizens – including the guarantee of free health care and of free quality schooling through to the end of year 12.⁵

Embedding the guarantee through legislation, national agreements between the Commonwealth and states and territories, and reporting obligations will be needed to build it into the social fabric and ensure its longevity. As has been outlined later in our submission, embedding accountability mechanisms will also be crucial to ensure that the implementation of the Early Years Guarantee, and the early years strategy more broadly, are effective and can endure.

The Centre for Policy Development's work on a potential Early Years Guarantee provides a useful framework for the Government to consider.⁶

1.2.1. Core of high quality, evidence-based services and supports

An early years' guarantee is not only about services. However, there is need for it to include an essential core of services that are accessible to families where and when they are and for those services to be of high quality, according to the evidence.

There is no single solution to the complex challenges faced by many children, families and communities. The evidence, including from *Restacking*, shows that combining or '**stacking**' multiple effective evidence-based strategies across the early years (0-8 years) can boost health development and wellbeing and redress inequity. The 'stack' of services should be available concurrently and

⁵ Centre for Policy Development (CPD), *Starting better: A guarantee for young children and families*, CPD, November 2021, accessed 20 April 2023.

⁶ CPD, *Starting better: A guarantee for young children and families*

continuously during the early years⁷. This is crucial to moving from the current fragmented early years system towards an early years' system that supports all children to thrive.

A combination of services is therefore needed within the guarantee. This should include universal services that support children and families in the early years, as well as the targeted supports for children and families with additional needs that are easily accessed to build off the universal platforms with increasing intensity according to the level of need.

We propose that the following evidence-based early years services are included within a guarantee. This is not an exhaustive list – it reflects SVA’s involvement in research and review of evidence. All services must be of high quality.

- Antenatal care, with improved models of care.
- Early childhood education and care. Early childhood education and care should be available and accessible for 15 hours a week or more for all children for 2 years before starting formal schooling, with additional provision for children experiencing disadvantage.
- Maternal and child health services including sustained nurse home visiting programs for children and parents with additional needs, comprising at least 25 visits up to 2 years of age.
- Evidence-informed parenting programs, including programs targeted to families of children with behavioural problems.

The rationale and evidence base for inclusion of these services is provided in Table 1.

Table 1 Core services for inclusion in an early years' guarantee

Component of Guarantee	Rationale and evidence
Combination of services	The combination of services proposed is informed by <i>Restacking</i> . These services are demonstrated to improve early childhood outcomes, they operate across early childhood, focus on both the children and the parents, can be targeted to those who need them most and are typically already available and delivered in some form in many communities across Australia.
Early Childhood Education and Care	Evidence for Learning’s Early Childhood Education (ECE) <i>Toolkit</i> and our work on <i>Restacking</i> has found that two years of high-quality early years’ education before starting school has a high impact and is particularly positive for children from low-income families ⁸ . <i>Restacking</i> proposes that Early Childhood Education and Care is available for 3 years before school for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The evidence strongly emphasises that early learning needs to be high quality if it is to have the intended impact ⁹ . Targeted programs for children and families experiencing disadvantage – such as the Queensland Government’s KindyLinQ facilitated playgroup program as evaluated by Evidence for Learning and the University of Queensland ¹⁰ – demonstrate promising findings for engaging families from diverse backgrounds and supporting pathways to kindergarten.

⁷ C Molloy, *A Novel 3-Part Approach to Tackle the Problem of Health Inequities in Early Childhood*
⁸ Evidence for Learning, *Early Childhood Education Toolkit*, [website]; C Molloy, P Quinn, C Harrop, N Perini, S Goldfeld, *Early childhood education and care: An evidence based review of indicators to assess quality, quantity and participation: Technical report*, 2020
⁹ C Molloy et al., *Early childhood education and care: An evidence based review of indicators to assess quality, quantity and participation: Technical report*
¹⁰ S Staton, C Pattinson, S Houen, L Coles, E Westwood, E Cooke, B Searle, O Halen, A Srinivasan, R Menner, Z Zheng and K Thorpe, *KindyLinQ Program Pilot: Pilot Evaluation Report*, commissioned by Evidence for Learning and the Queensland Department of Education, 2022.

Sustained Nurse Home Visiting: Nurse home visiting programs have multiple benefits, spanning child health and development outcomes, improved parenting, and maternal life course. Programs with positive outcomes tend to have a greater number of visits and be delivered over a longer duration, hence *Restacking the Odds* has focused on *sustained* Nurse Home Visiting programs. While many states offer at least one home visit from a Maternal Child Health nurse in the early weeks of life, only a handful of locations in Australia currently offer an evidence-based sustained nurse home visiting program for families with additional needs.

Parenting programs

Parenting and family supports aim to strengthen relationships, support families, improve wellbeing of children and young people, reduce the cost of family breakdown, and strengthen family and community functioning. These supports range from the universal – such as playgroups and online parenting resources – to the highly targeted, such as early intervention and prevention services for children at risk of abuse or neglect and intensive family support¹¹.

Research has established the strong association between parenting quality and young children’s behaviour and development. Parenting practices and styles (e.g. parental hostility, parenting consistency, or spontaneous praise) are well-recognised factors that influence a child’s developmental outcomes such as cognitive skills, academic performance and behaviour¹².

In our work on *Restacking*, we have identified parenting programs focused on improving child behaviour as having a strong evidence base for improving equitable child development outcomes. Systematic reviews have demonstrated the effectiveness of these parenting programs on children’s literacy, behavioural, and emotional outcomes¹³.

1.2.2 Services delivered for the children and families who will most benefit

Ensuring that all children and families can access and engage with the services at the core of the guarantee requires service models that are integrated, tailored to the needs of communities and culturally appropriate. There is a crucial role for:

- **Integrated child and family centres (ICFCs)**, as a promising vehicle for delivering the combination of services that are essential for children and families in the early years, while providing a safe space and seamless support for families. Further detail on the role of ICFCs and future potential is outlined in Box 1.
- **Community controlled integrated early years services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander children** to support self-determination and address the cultural and social determinants of wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

¹¹ F McKenzie, E Millar and A Mudford, *A ‘Landscape Atlas’ of the structural elements of the ECD system in Australia – A rapid compilation*. Prepared by Orange Compass for the Early Years Catalyst, 2023. For access, contact SVA.

¹² See review of the evidence in C Molloy, C Macmillan, N Perini, C Harrop, S Goldfeld, [Restacking the Odds – Technical Report: Parenting programs: An evidence-based review of the measures to assess quality, quantity, and participation](#). Melbourne, Australia, 2019.

¹³ C Molloy et al., [Restacking the Odds – Technical Report: Parenting programs](#)

Box 1: Integrated Child and Family Centres

ICFCs are a service and social hub where children and families can access key services and connect with other families. Usually taking the form of a centre that provides a range of child and family services, they provide crucial programs – such as early learning programs, maternal and child health and family support programs intended to improve child development and wellbeing. ICFCs provide access to a range of tiered services to support families with broader challenges they may be facing and also serve as a “navigator” function. They provide a space where families can come together to socialise and build social networks.

Recent research from the National Child and Family Hubs Network found growing evidence on the impact of integrated service delivery for children and families, in a range of service settings, although robustness of this is variable¹⁴. Emerging evidence of the impact of integrated service models includes improved¹⁵:

- school readiness and parental knowledge and confidence in integrated models focused on early learning
- academic outcomes for children in co-located early years/primary school settings
- identification of developmental vulnerability and increased service access for in community-based hub models
- engagement of families, better coordinated supports and improved child health outcome in integrated community health models.

Although integrated early years models could benefit all children and families, the evidence around the impact of disadvantage on children’s development and wellbeing suggests ICFC prioritisation for families experiencing disadvantage. ICFCs tend to be located in communities with high levels of disadvantage that demonstrate readiness and need for the service. The impact of ICFCs can be strengthened when they are situated within a broader place-based initiative and are able to leverage existing networks and community engagement.

There are approximately 209 ICFCs across the country. This includes 6 state-funded ICFC models currently being delivered at scale in Tasmania, Queensland, Northern Territory, Western Australia, South Australia and ACT. There are also approximately 75 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander integrated early years centres operating nationally, funded through the Child Care Package and other supplementary funding streams.

The current ICFC landscape in Australia is patchy, with diverse models of variable scale and capacity, major gaps in coverage and no national approach to delivery. ICFCs operate under a range of funding mechanisms and operating models. Currently, there is no overall leadership or responsibility for outcomes. Quality is essential for ICFC outcomes, yet there is no overarching approach to measuring or assessing quality. A national approach to ICFCs could see significantly more children in Australia thriving in the early years.

SVA has been exploring ways to increase the impact of integrated early years supports in shaping happy, healthy and thriving children. Recent work includes:

- A discussion paper in which we examine Australia’s current ICFC models¹⁶.
- A report by Deloitte Access Economics that explores a national approach to scaling ICFCs, including analysis of need and options for how ICFCs could be funded¹⁷.

¹⁴ S Honisett, R Cahill, N Callard, V Eapen, J Eastwood, R Goodhue, C Graham, L Heery, H Hiscock, M Hodgins, A Hollonds, K Jose, D Newcombe, G O’Loughlin, K Ostojic, E Sydenham, S Tayton, S Woolfenden and S Goldfeld, *Child and family hubs: an important ‘front door’ for equitable support for families across Australia*, National Child and Family Hubs Network, 2023, doi:10.25374/MCRI.22031951.

¹⁵ Honisett et al, *Child and family hubs: an important ‘front door’ for equitable support for families across Australia*.

¹⁶ Social Ventures Australia, [Happy, healthy and thriving: enhancing the impact of our Integrated Child and Family Centres in Australia](#), 2023.

¹⁷ Deloitte Access Economics, *Exploring need and funding for integrated child and family centres*, February 2023. Prepared for Social Ventures Australia and the Centre for Community Child Health. For access, contact SVA.

2. Enhanced accountability

Committing to ensuring all children have the opportunities to thrive is crucial. Establishing the right accountability mechanisms is equally important so we know if we are meeting those goals, to keep all stakeholders on track, that services are being delivered where and when they're needed and at a quality that will ensure they achieve their impact and that the children who need the most support are receiving it. The Commonwealth Government can use its leadership role to establish clear expectations for quality and access to early years services – and the accountability mechanisms to deliver these expectations.

The challenge

Currently, the children and families who would most benefit from early years services are least likely to attend and are more likely to experience a poor-quality service. There are often significant gaps in the information available on coverage, reach and quality of existing services – and an associated lack of accountability for delivering quality services to those who need them. For some services and supports, it is unclear what good looks like, or who can most benefit. For others, standards are much clearer (including in ECEC through the National Quality Framework and in some health services, such as antenatal care) but more could be done to empower practitioners with data and insights for learning and improvement. And nationally there is no process for assessing how outcomes for children are impacted by programs and policies which are essential for them to thrive.

Where there are good programs that have high levels of established evidence, there are not good systems in place to ensure these are readily adopted and scaled where appropriate to do so or where the learning could be shared more widely.

Recommendations

That the Commonwealth Government

2. **Establish accountability mechanisms** for the Early Years Strategy, including:
 - 2.1. A mechanism for regular review of the impact of government policy on children
 - 2.2. A national leadership role for the Commonwealth government in establishing standards and frameworks that enable quality in early years services
 - 2.3. Embedding a common framework at a service and community level to define and measure progress against a guarantee and achieve equitable service delivery, incorporating quantitative measures of quantity, quality and participation.

2.1. Review impact of government policy on children

Achieving the ambition for the Early Years Strategy requires the Commonwealth Government to hold responsibility for a holistic and coordinated approach across all jurisdictions and levels of government as well as across government portfolios and departments¹⁸. This will be supported by establishing an accountability mechanism that looks across the whole. This includes assessing new policy and legislation for its contribution to improved early years outcomes and regular, independent reporting to examine the impact of government policy, programs and legislation on outcomes for children, with a particular focus on social determinants of health.

¹⁸ F McKenzie and E Millar, *Mapping the systems that influence early childhood development outcomes*. Prepared by Orange Compass for the Early Years Catalyst, 2022, accessed 27 April 2023.

2.2. Implement national standards where these are lacking

To deliver effective services, it is important to clarify what those services are trying to achieve and to define the desired outcomes. This allows for improved understanding of what's working and what isn't. Deploying national frameworks within sectors sets benchmarks for delivering services at a standard that the evidence says is required to have the desired impact. For example, the National Quality Standard (NQS) sets a national benchmark for early childhood education and care services and promotes the safety, health and wellbeing of children.

We have identified two high priority opportunities for deploying national standards and frameworks for quality:

- Integrated child and family centres
- Parenting programs

While these services may be funded by all levels of government and should be responsive to local need, establishing national frameworks is a unique and critical role for the Commonwealth that can raise standards and equity across Australia and help to drive further improvements over time.

2.2.1. Establishing new standards for integrated child and family centres

There is no national approach to delivery, and no overall leadership or responsibility for outcomes in integrated child and family centres. While quality is essential for outcomes, there is currently no overarching approach to measuring or assessing the quality of integrated child and family centres. Centres that include long day care or preschool will be assessed under the National Quality Framework (NQF) but the rating is only applicable to the formal ECEC services and does not consider any other elements of an integrated centre.

There is a critical national leadership role for the federal government in providing an umbrella for ICFCs to be recognised, defined and supported as a sector. We recommend that tools are developed to support identification and delivery of high quality supports and services within child and family centres. This may include:

- A **consistent, national outcomes framework** to identify and measure the effectiveness of integrated child and family centres. This should reflect the capacity of these centres to improve holistic life-long health, development and wellbeing for children, their families, and the communities in which they live. It should also recognise that some ICFCs are more focused on early learning and development outcomes, whereas others, such as the NSW Aboriginal Child and Family Centres, are focused on early intervention and link outcomes to Closing the Gap targets.
- A **nationally consistent quality framework** for child and family centres **and quality frameworks at a centre level**. Examples include the *Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Wellbeing Scale* used by Goodstart Early Learning¹⁹ and quality improvement frameworks for ICFCs currently being implemented by the Tasmanian Government and Queensland Government. To support both individual service quality and the processes that enable integrated practice and holistic service delivery, it is important that quality frameworks apply to everyone working at an ICFC, including child and health nurses and other health supports.

2.2.2. National strategy and quality framework for parenting programs

Parenting is one of the most profound influences on the wellbeing of children. Yet the Early Years Catalyst's *Systems Landscape Atlas* identifies that there is no systemic oversight or accountability for family and parenting supports because they do not operate as a standalone system but operate within other early years systems²⁰. This means there is no overarching strategy, design and quality

¹⁹ I Siraj, D Kingston and E Melhuish, *Assessing Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care: Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Well-being (SSTEW) Scale for 2-5-year-olds*, Provision. London, 2015

²⁰ F McKenzie et al., *A 'Landscape Atlas' of the structural elements of the ECD system in Australia – A rapid compilation*.

framework. Restacking the Odds' work in selected Australian communities also found wide-ranging gaps in the delivery of parenting programs²¹, including that:

- Few programs align to the evidence-base
- Availability is patchy and inadequate and limited data is available on quantity and participation
- Few of the families who need support attend – although around 8% of Australian families enrol in a parenting program, we estimate that fewer than 1% of families with a child at risk of behavioural or social-emotional issues received a high quality parenting program.

The Early Years Strategy is an opportunity for a fundamental rethink to align parenting programs to evidence and better reach the families who would benefit – including through deployment a national evidence-based strategy and quality framework for parenting programs.

2.3. Improve use of data to drive equitable service delivery

For an Early Years Guarantee to drive meaningful change across early years systems and tackle inequity, it needs to be supported by a measurement framework that defines and measures how services are actually being delivered.

We recommend embedding a common three-part framework to define and measure progress against a guarantee and achieve equitable service delivery. This framework should use quantitative, evidence-based lead indicators to measure three simple things at a local level:

- that the key early years services are available locally in sufficient quantity;
- that the services are being delivered at a standard that the evidence says is required (quality); and
- that the children and families who would benefit are receiving the services (participation).

Lead indicators allow service providers and other stakeholders to regularly assess performance and progress, and course-correct when required. While outcome data is the ultimate arbiter of success, lead indicators about what families and children are actually experiencing allow practitioners and service providers to make adjustments and accumulate learning regularly, rather than waiting years to see outcomes. We cannot hope that Australia's early years systems will reliably improve until those involved in designing and delivering the fundamental early years services have and are equipped to act on the leading indicator data.

Restacking identified that lead indicator data is typically difficult to access and is rarely used to improve service delivery. Identifying and collecting data for practical, evidence-based lead indicators of quantity, quality and participation and collecting data equips service providers and communities with tailored, timely and actionable knowledge to identify and address gaps and opportunities for improvement.

The evidence-based lead indicators identified by *Restacking* are available in the *Restacking the Odds Indicator Guide*²².

²¹ C Malloy, S Goldfeld, C Harrop, and N Perini, *Parenting programs: A study of barriers, facilitators, & strategies to improve participation* [PDF], Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne, January 2022, accessed 20 April 2023.

²² CCCH at MCRI, SVA and Bain & Company, *The Restacking the Odds Indicator Guide: Quality, quantity and participation indicators across early years services and why they're important* [PDF], Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne, January 2023.

3. System stewardship

There is significant potential for the Strategy to address some of the structural barriers to improving early childhood development outcomes, including the existing siloed approach to policy development, program design and service delivery across portfolios, departments and social service systems.

The accountability mechanisms outlined above are fundamental. However, the systems need to support not impede the achievement of those outcomes and the practitioners work in the system. Drawing on our work and the Early Years Catalyst’s analysis²³, Government needs to be willing to:

- intervene and ameliorate ‘market failures’ to ensure all children have equitable access to services, supports and opportunities;
- adopt funding and commissioning approaches that incentivise collaboration and coordination between service providers and ensure service delivery meets the needs of local communities and families;
- support and facilitate local community-level/place-based service planning to enable families and communities to be partners in service planning, design and delivery;
- amplify the voices of children, families and local communities in policy, program and service design and delivery and recognise families and those with lived experience as ‘experts’;
- establish feedback loops to enable families and communities to provide feedback to government and service providers on their needs and experiences as service users;
- improve the cycles of evidence so that new evidence is regularly being generated, translated and can be used to empower practitioners to improve practice over time; and
- invest in training, development and paying for the skilled workforce needed to deliver the programs, services and supports required.

SVA propose specific action in relation to funding models and settings, workforce capability and evidence ecosystems.

Recommendations – System stewardship

That the Commonwealth Government:

3. **Invest in systems and infrastructure** for successful implementation of the Early Years Strategy, including:
 - 3.1. Adoption of funding and commissioning approaches that incentivise a focus on achieving equitable early childhood development outcomes and on collaboration to meet the needs of local communities and families. This may include unique funding models for integrated child and family services and for services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
 - 3.2. Investment in organisational and practitioner capability to improve effectiveness and engagement with children and families, for example:
 - Dedicated funding for the ‘glue’ that enables integration of support for families, particularly those with more complex needs.
 - Investment in data and learning systems at a service and community level (including place-based initiatives) to embed a culture of continuous improvement.
 - Funding charities contracted to deliver early years services for the full costs of achieving the outcomes required, including the indirect costs.
 - 3.3. Invest in the evidence ecosystem so that practice continually improves over time and ensure the most effective initiatives are expanded and less effective programs retired

²³ See Early Years Catalyst Submission to the Early Years Strategy

3.1. Design funding and commissioning for equitable outcomes

Current funding and commissioning approaches do not support all children to have equitable access to services, supports and opportunities. Short term funding cycles do not align with the long-term commitments required to address complex social needs. Market-driven approaches, such as in early childhood education and care, create service ‘deserts’ in areas with thin markets and do not adequately incentivise equitable service provision.

We encourage the government to use funding and commissioning approaches that incentivise a focus on early childhood development outcomes and on collaboration to meet the needs of local communities and families.

This may include:

- **Funding models that support service integration**, with flexibility to respond to local need. For example:
 - Designing and operationalising a funding model specifically for integrated child and family centres that recognises the unique features of these services to respond to children and families with complex needs. This can draw on the report SVA commissioned from Deloitte Access Economics²⁴, which unpacks options for how ICFCs could be funded under a national approach. Deloitte found that ICFCs require flexible, secure funding that supports the breadth of an ICFC’s operations and a child and family centred approach.
 - Providing one-off grants to support expansion of the network of integrated child and family centres. The establishment of 300 additional centres would support approximately 24,000 children, ensuring access for at least 25% of the young children who are most struggling across the country. Funding could be proportionately matched by state and territory contribution. Additional integrated services should build on existing early childhood service and infrastructure and be tailored to the needs of local communities²⁵.
 - Introducing a unique funding model to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander integrated early years centres, which privileges Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The funding model needs to be tailored to recognise and support their vision, operations and structures, allowing these services to make autonomous decisions about how best to support and meet the needs of their community.
- **Outcomes-based commissioning approaches** that can support better allocation of funds and generate accountability for outcomes. These approaches can also be effective tools for cross-government commissioning, breaking down traditional government funding siloes to help target cross-government problems. Our experience with the Newpin Social Impact Bond found the approach shifted the focus from an emphasis on costs to the benefits and potential long-term savings while delivering significantly better outcomes for families and children

3.2. Invest in critical capabilities and ‘the glue’

Early years funding is often directed to a narrowly-defined set of activities within each sector or service type. Limited funding is available for investment in the critical capabilities of practitioners and organisations to support effectiveness, efficiency and a more integrated and cohesive experience for families.

More investment is needed in building organisational and practitioner capability. This is sometimes referred to as the ‘glue’ that enables coordination and integration of supports for children and families both *within* services (which helps to ensure effective delivery and for many organisations which have multiple funding sources that the ‘client’ is at the centre of the service delivery model) and *between*

²⁴ Deloitte Access Economics, *Exploring need and funding for integrated child and family centres*

²⁵ Deloitte Access Economics, *Exploring need and funding for integrated child and family centres*

services The “glue” incorporates a range of elements that can be broadly grouped into business oversight, staff supports, family and community outreach; technology and data; and learning systems.

- Business oversight: including governance, finance, auditing, HR, risk and compliance that enables a service provider to operate successfully.
- Staff supports: including practice frameworks, learning and development, professional supervision, and other business and operational supports that staff need to perform their jobs properly.
- Family and community outreach: including the resources required to support families to attend services or participate in a broader range of supports. This includes resources such as additional staff, vehicles and brokerage of client supports such as emergency housing. It also includes establishing and supporting networks and referrals with other relevant services.
- technology and data: refers to the necessary hardware, software and data capability, including a data capture system, data sharing capability between services and supports to build data collection and analysis capabilities.
- Learning systems: monitoring and evaluation, business intelligence and systems for continuous learning and quality improvement²⁶.

Table 2 gives examples of the crucial role of ‘glue’ funding in support services for young children and families and current gaps in dedicated funding for these capabilities.

Table 2 Examples of the need to fund critical capabilities (the ‘glue’)

Setting	Issue
Integrated Child and Family Centres	<p>The glue is core to the ICFC operating model. It describes the leadership, structures, practices and infrastructure that brings the individual services and staff together to create an integrated, holistic service model²⁷. It also includes outreach and the networks that centres have with other services and the way in which a centre can support a family to navigate the complex and fragmented early childhood development system.</p> <p>The glue components of some existing ICFCs are not as well financed (if at all), leading to undue administrative complexity and eventual unsustainability of the centres. Dedicated ‘glue’ funding is required²⁸.</p>
Data and learning systems within services	<p>Empowering practitioners and communities with data to improve service delivery requires capability to interpret and act on insights from data, as well as that data being readily available. Currently resources for both collection and interpretation of data are typically limited.</p> <p>To drive sustainable change, <i>Restacking’s</i> research has identified that a new learning system is needed systems to collect, track and act on lead indicator data²⁹. The learning system has three core components:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Technology platform</i> – to collect, measure, interpret and visualise data. 2. <i>Improvement support program</i> – to build data literacy and embed a model for continuous improvement in services and communities to respond, innovate and act on data. 3. <i>Community of practice</i> – to share learnings, experiences, knowledge and resources across participating organisations and the sector more broadly.

²⁶ Adapted from Deloitte Access Economics, *Exploring need and funding for integrated child and family centres*
²⁷ Social Ventures Australia (2023), *Happy, healthy and thriving: enhancing the impact of our Integrated Child and Family Centres in Australia*.
²⁸ Deloitte Access Economics, *Exploring need and funding for integrated child and family centres*
²⁹ See Restacking the Odds submission to the Early Years Strategy, April 2023 for further information.

	<p>This is a crucial to support effective coordination and collaboration at a service level, community level and a systems level to embed a culture of continuous improvement.</p>
Place-based initiatives	<p>Place-based approaches shift power, authority and decision-making to communities and citizens. This requires investment in the 'glue' to engage across the community and identify and implement connected solutions to local issues.</p> <p>Our work with several Stronger Places, Stronger People and Connected Beginnings communities on <i>Restacking</i> has identified gaps in resources for using data, engaging with service providers, and embedding learning systems for continuous improvement. Without investment in these critical functions, place-based initiatives are limited in their ability to identify and implement the most effective actions to drive improvements locally.</p>
Fund not-for-profit service providers for the full costs of running programsn	<p>SVA and the Centre for Social Impact's <i>Paying What It Takes</i> report³⁰ found that not-for-profit organisations across Australia are, in general, not funded for the actual cost of what they do. This holds charities back from operating effectively and delivering better outcomes in the community.</p> <p>Despite research showing that not-for-profits that invest more in their indirect costs can be more effective than those that do not, many not-for-profits find themselves with limited funds that can be spent on core costs, such as measurement and evaluation, IT and human resources. Even when funders do not put explicit restrictions, there is a widespread trend of not-for-profits under-reporting their true indirect costs due to persistent beliefs about what funders are 'willing' to pay. This has led chronic under investment in essential infrastructure and increased organisational vulnerability. These issues were exacerbated through the COVID-19 pandemic, with SVA and the Centre for Social Impact's <i>Partners in Recovery</i> work identifying the need to support strategic and operational transformation in the not-for-profit sector including: strengthened collaboration; leadership and workforce capability; technology and cyber security; and outcomes measurement and data analytics capability³¹.</p> <p>Government funding for early years services delivered by not-for-profits needs to be adequate to cover the full costs, including investment in critical 'glue' capability. Not-for-profits supporting children and families could also benefit from one-off investments to build capability, following the model of a Resilient Charities Fund proposed in <i>Vital support: building resilient charities to support Australia's wellbeing</i>³².</p>

3.3 Invest in the evidence ecosystem

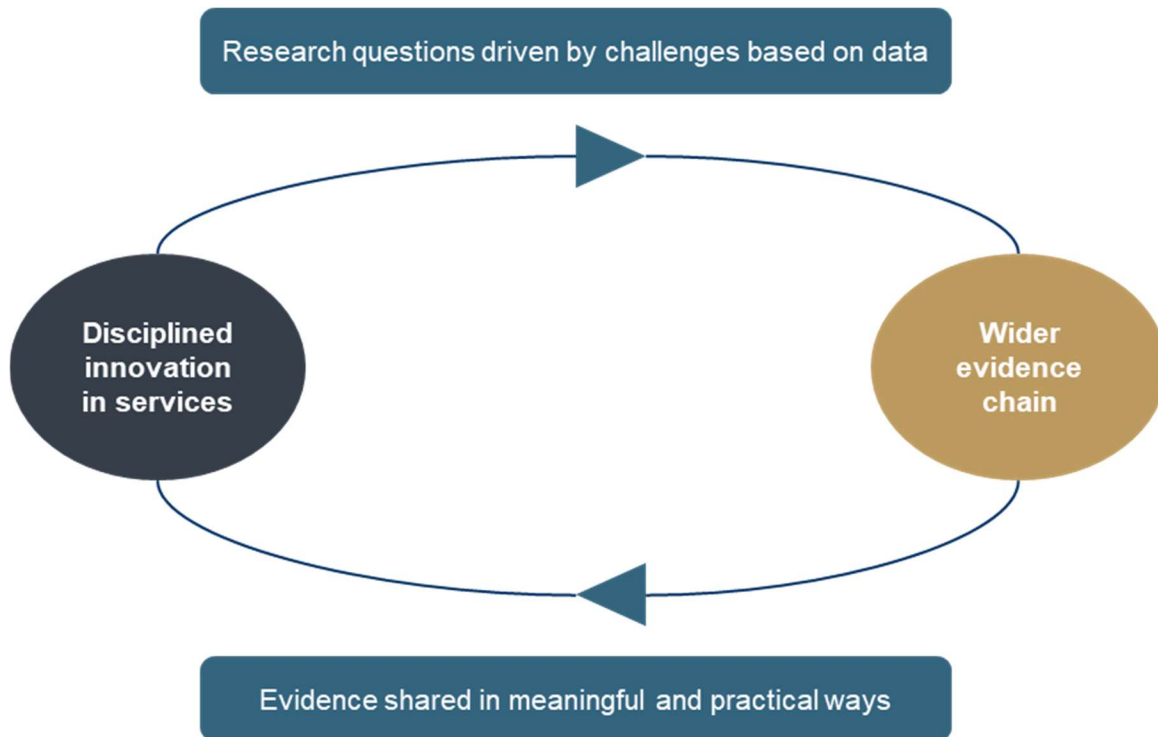
To improve early childhood outcomes, we need an environment that helps all in the system to learn continuously: researchers, policy makers, practitioners and the wider community. This is not just understanding what can make things better or worse but developing the know-how necessary to change practice to actually make things better. We see this as the 'evidence ecosystem'. It has two important cycles that are intimately connected and reinforcing as shown in Figure 1.

³⁰ Social Ventures Australia (SVA) and Centre for Social Impact (CSI), *Paying what it takes: funding indirect costs to create long-term impact*, SVA and CSI, March 2022, accessed 15 September 2022.

³¹ Social Ventures Australia (SVA) and Centre for Social Impact (CSI), *Vital support: building resilient charities to support Australia's wellbeing*, SVA, May 2021, accessed 27 April 2023.

³² SVA and CSI, *Vital support: building resilient charities to support Australia's wellbeing*

Figure 1: Evidence Ecosystem



This is informed by three principles:

- To effect change in practice, we need to understand how research will be used by practitioners.
- Placing frontline professionals at the heart of the work requires updates to thinking about their role in research and evidence. They cannot be seen as passive recipients of knowledge 'built elsewhere' but as active generators of new knowledge through the evaluation of impact in their own context.
- The relationship between frontline professionals engaging in disciplined innovation and the actors in the wider evidence chain must be seen as one of mutual dependence in the shared endeavour to improve outcomes.

Better research evidence; better use of this research evidence; and improved access to and use of data about children, their needs and development progress can help:

- Early childhood providers to make better decisions in their settings on where to focus and what programs to implement
- Early childhood funders to direct their spending and build the case for more funding of programs they support
- Governments (as the largest public funders of early childhood) to move their spending and support behind approaches with better outcomes, and
- Society and the economy to have more productive early years systems and avoided personal and social costs of individuals not having a good start to life and therefore relying more upon welfare.

In the ECEC context, establishing a thriving evidence ecosystem requires:

- Investment in more rigorous research, such as randomised control trials, to build a better evidence base in early childhood education in Australia - the rigorous evidence base in early childhood education is 5-10 times smaller than that of school education.
- Funding and supporting multiple organisations throughout the ecosystem to generate, translate and support the use of evidence – from policymakers to leaders to educators.

- Being responsive to the needs of practitioners and efficiently discontinuing practices that have been shown to be less effective.

Supporting ECEC practitioners to access the evidence

Of particular importance is supporting ECEC practitioners to access, understand and then put the latest evidence into practice. We have good evidence about what's important for quality in early learning from international evidence bases such as Evidence for Learning's Early Childhood Education Toolkit³³. Professional learning and other capability-building resources, tools and supports are needed for practitioners to act on this evidence to improve practice.

We also know that Australian early childhood educators identify challenging behaviours as a major impediment to workplace wellbeing and educational effectiveness, and a key practice area for which they seek support³⁴. Providing educators with evidence-based resources and professional development in this area is important to improve workforce retention and support children's learning and development.

Supporting practitioners to engage with other practitioners

There is an untapped opportunity for professional learning that comes from leveraging the knowledge and expertise that already exists within and across systems. Exceptional practitioners, educators and leaders are already implementing evidence informed practices in pockets across and within early childhood settings but are isolated and hampered by a lack of connection and infrastructure to further grow, refine and share their practice. We need exceptional practice to connect, align and spread rather than remain stubbornly isolated in pockets.

The principles of Social Network Theory (SNT) are an opportunity to leverage the untapped expertise of exceptional early years educators within current practice and systems, to interrupt the cycle of disadvantage. An example in practice might be how to solve for best practice literacy support for children from transient family backgrounds. *The Connection* initiative developed by SVA implements network methodology to find the best practitioners leading work on literacy support. It determines how best to connect them, support them and enable them to accelerate their influence across the mapped ecosystems of practice. This approach activates and connects the existing expertise that sits within our systems to accelerate impact and efficiencies.

³³ Evidence for Learning, *Early Childhood Education Toolkit*

³⁴ K Thorpe, N Panthi, S Houen, M Horwood and S Staton, *Support to stay and thrive: mapping challenges faced by Australia's early years educators to the national workforce strategy 2022–2031*. The Australian Educational Researcher, 1–25, 2023.

Principles

What principles should be included in the Strategy? [Q7]

SVA recommends/proposes the following principles be included in the Strategy:

- **Equity-focused:** this means the resourcing and delivering of universal services at a scale and intensity proportion to the degree of need (proportionate universalism) and targeted services and supports for children and families experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage.
- **Child-centred:** child voice should inform design of services for children and positive child outcomes should be a focus. This includes greater responsiveness to child and family need and support for positive parent and carer relationships, not simply to the needs of service delivery organisations.
- **Provide self-determination for First Nations children and families:** First Nations communities need to be empowered to take the lead and make decisions, this means having First Nations-led services and supports for First Nations children and families and providing support to build capacity of First Nations sector.
- **Improve conditions in which children are born and live:** recognise that children's health and development is strongly shaped by the social, economic and environmental conditions in which families are raising young children and the social and fiscal gains from reducing poverty. Social determinants of health need to be addressed i.e. stable housing; employment; access to transport; food; the absence of discrimination; the impact of intergenerational trauma; income support.
- **Give voice and increased decision making to local communities:** communities have a say in local approaches; early years supports are inclusive and culturally appropriate for that community.
- **Place-based approach to design and delivery of initiatives:** services are accessible to families in their local community and have adequate places to meet demand; support for local coordination and integration of services.
- **Adequate and supported workforce:** Adequate pay and conditions; investment in professional development and workforce capacity and capability – including to respond to children and families with complex needs and other priority cohorts (e.g. culturally and linguistically diverse families, children with disability).
- **Data and evidence-driven:** Build from evidence-based programs and practice; enhance guidance about 'what works' for practitioners. Identify and describe what quality looks like and implement systems to measure and monitor it. Establish mechanisms to expand evidence base.
- **Designed for impact at scale** – plan to scale effective strategies including programs and practice; drive systemic change; scale impact via capability-building, leadership, thoughtful regulation and funding mechanisms.

Frameworks, research, evidence

Are there gaps in existing frameworks or other research or evidence that need to be considered for the development of the Strategy? [Q8]

We have provided further detail here on some key pieces of research, evidence and frameworks we have been involved in at SVA. These have informed our submission and provide valuable resources in the development of the Early Years Strategy.

Core Care Conditions for Children and Families Framework

The framework was developed by the Centre for Community Child Health at Murdoch Children's Research Institute³⁵. It is divided into three sections: children's needs, parental/caregiver needs, and shared child and family needs. This framework (see Figure 2) can be used to assess whether the current early years system is meeting the needs of children and families.

³⁵ Moore, *Core care conditions for children and families: implications for integrated child and family services*

Figure 2: Core Care Conditions for Children and Families Framework

Children's needs	Parental / caregiver needs	Shared child and family needs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure relationships with primary caregivers able to provide the responsive caregiving needed to build secure attachments • Support for developing emotional and self-regulation skills • Positive early learning environments, in the home as well as in ECEC and community settings • Opportunities to mix with other children of different ages, and to build social skills • Adequate and appropriate nutrition from conception onwards • Support to establish regular sleep patterns • Physical opportunities to play and explore • Protection from relationship stresses – abuse and neglect by caregivers, exposure to family or community violence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure time to build relationships with the newborn (paid maternity/paternity leave) • Positive social support networks (including support from family, friends, fellow parents and neighbours) • Safe and easily accessible places to meet other families • Access to relationally-based family-centred services • Access to universal services during antenatal / perinatal / postnatal periods • Access to specialist support services to address additional personal needs (e.g. mental health issues, relational violence) • Information about childcare and development, and support for managing the challenges of parenting • Availability of learning opportunities to build personal capabilities • Inclusiveness of the immediate social environment – absence of racism or discrimination • Employment opportunities and family-friendly employment conditions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure and affordable housing • Financial / employment security • Healthy physical environment (clean air and water, freedom and environmental toxins, green spaces) • Safe and easily navigable built environments • Ready access to family-friendly recreational and other facilities (libraries, swimming pools, sporting facilities, playgrounds) • Healthy food environments that provide access to fresh food outlets • Access to support services to address exceptional family needs (e.g. financial counselling, housing services) • Inclusiveness of the wider society – absence of racism or discrimination

Evidence for Learning – evidence for educators

Through Evidence for Learning (E4L), we have aggregated and synthesised a significant amount of the evidence of what improves learning outcomes for children which can be drawn upon and inform the Early Years Strategy as it relates to Early Childhood Education and Care.

In particular, we know that communication and language approaches are a well-evidenced, high impact (an additional 7 months learning progress on average in a year) and low-cost strategy to support young children's learning and development. These strategies – that often involve multiple practices to build vocabulary, language, talk and social communication skills and investments in staff professional development -- have slightly larger impacts for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.³⁶

The National Early Language and Literacy Strategy, of which E4L is a member of the Coalition, is one important way to help improve the implementation of communication and language approaches across the board. There is evidence from the UK that communication and language interventions, such as the Nuffield Early Learning Intervention, can be rolled out at scale to improve learning outcomes for children at a national level.³⁷

SVA would be happy to provide the Government with further detail on the global and local evidence (both its strength and efficacy) of a range of other approaches to ECEC if this is of particular interest.

Restacking the Odds

Restacking the Odds focuses on five fundamental strategies, outlined in Figure 1. The *Restacking* framework uses lead indicators to measure:

- that the key early years services are available locally in sufficient **quantity**;
- that the services are being delivered at a standard that the evidence says is required (**quality**); and
- that the children and families who would benefit are receiving the services (**participation**).

Further details of the research and evidence developed by *Restacking* is available on the website: https://www.rch.org.au/ccch/Restacking_the_Odds/

³⁶ Evidence for Learning, [ECE Toolkit](#)

³⁷ S Dimova, S Ilie, E R Brown, M Broeks, A Culora, A Sutherland, [The Nuffield Early Language Intervention: Evaluation Report](#), RAND Europe for the Education Endowment Foundation, 2020.

Figure 1: Five Fundamental Strategies

FIVE FUNDAMENTAL STRATEGIES			
Antenatal	Early childhood		School years
	Birth to 2 years	2-5 years	
<p>1 Antenatal support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Targeted at parents Centre-based <i>Outcomes:</i> healthy birth weight, good brain health, appropriate care, "adequate parenting" 	<p>3 Early childhood education and care</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Targeted at all children (in groups) High quality for all children Delivered out of home in a "pseudo-home-learning environment" <i>Outcomes:</i> children on optimal developmental pathway (cognitive and social-emotional), school readiness 	<p>5 Early years of school</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Targeted at all children School-based <i>Outcomes:</i> children on optimal learning pathway by Year 3 	
<p>2 Sustained nurse home visiting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Targeted at disadvantaged parents Health and development support Home-based <i>Outcomes:</i> parents develop parenting skills 		<p>4 Parenting programs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Targeted at parents whose children have behavioural issues (higher prevalence in disadvantaged families) Centre-based, delivered in groups or 1:1 <i>Outcomes:</i> remedy of specific emerging behavioural issues 	

Community attitudes

As part of our work in early childhood, SVA has also been exploring community attitudes to investment in early childhood development, given that Government's willingness to invest in these areas is also a function of what the community is willing to accept and that our political leaders are prepared to pursue.

There is broad based support for doing more to help children, parents and families by offering universal early childhood education from both 3 and 4 years of age. SVA surveyed a representative sample of the Australian people in October 2022 to ask their views on early childhood education and programs that can help children thrive. Survey participants were presented with pairs of opposing statements and asked to choose the one they agreed with more. Headline findings are summarised in the table below.

Table 3: Findings from SVA survey of community attitudes

A - Statements with high levels of support	B - Opposing statements
<p>7 out of 10 people chose these statements over the opposing statements in column B:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every child should be able to receive quality early childhood education from 3 years old at their local school [68%] • Even though childcare is an essential service Government funding has failed to keep pace, leaving families with huge costs and many unable to find childcare at all. To give every child the best start in life we should move from an ad hoc childcare system to proper early learning for 3 and 4 year olds [68%] • The longer women are out of the workforce the more likely it is they lose the skills, networks and relationships they need to succeed. To help women return to work and to give every child the best start in life government must make childcare affordable / free for every family. [67] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government should not be spending more on childcare, it would cost too much and lead to increased taxes • It should be the responsibility of parents to cover the costs of childcare not taxpayers • It should be the responsibility of parents to cover the costs of childcare not government • Government should not be spending more on childcare, there are more important priorities • The best care a child can receive in the first years of their life is from their mum and dad. Parents should be encouraged to stay home and care for their children • People should be free to choose whether or not they go back to work, not incentivised one way or the other with childcare subsidies • A parent should not miss out on government support because they choose to stay home with their child
<p>7 in 10 supported this statement over the statement in column B:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good early education helps put a child on the path to success in school and beyond. All children should be able to go to preschool even if their parents aren't working so they can begin their learning [70%] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Government should not be paying for children to go to preschool if their parents are not working or studying and can look after them themselves
<p>7 in 10 supported this over opposing statements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To make sure every child is happy and healthy and off to a great start in life every child should receive regular check ups from a nurse in the first years of their life. [72%] <p>And 6 in 10 supported this statement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every child needs parents who have the support they need to be great parents. Government should offer classes where parents learn practical parenting skills, like dealing with difficult behaviour or how to best support a child's learning [63%] 	<p>Opposing statements included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government should not waste more money on new programs and leave parents alone unless they ask for help • It's not government's role to tell parents how they should be raising their children

These results should give policymakers some confidence that not only are the policy recommendations put forward based on extensive evidence and experience, that these kinds of reforms are supported by the community.

Appendix: SVA Early Years Driver Tree

