

ANONYMOUS 17345 - New submission from Early Years Strategy - Public Submissions

The Early Years Strategy submission from [REDACTED]

Q1. Do you have any comments on the proposed structure of the strategy?

- Please ensure that the structure is easy to follow and accessible, for example, that colours link from the structure to the implementation plan.
- Expectations of educators and teachers must be managed appropriately so that experienced staff don't leave.
- Be careful identifying the outcomes. They must not **just** reflect education and care services. They must also include outcomes for other early childhood services such as health, legal, schools and support services.
- The rhetoric is the same as it has been for over 30 years. It is hard to imagine that the practices will ever match the proven research. Children must be seen as citizens with a right to services, education, play, and decision making.
- Children should always come before the parents returning to work/study. One diagram which put work before children and this needs to change to have children first.
- Schools have the ability to identify isolated and vulnerable families, however, they do not have a clear pathway to work alongside other agencies and services like ECE.
- The structure of the strategy should include the stakeholders responsible including the action plans as well.
- It is great that evidence is underpinning the outcomes of the strategy.
- Will there be budget allocations indicated in the action plans?

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

Please amend the question to reflect that children are the "youngest **citizens**".

All children have the right to education, care and access all services required to thrive. Begin with the antenatal period.

The vision should match the outcomes and actions so when they are implemented will see the vision realised. The vision should seek to measure us against international standards and aspire us to have the best childhood opportunities and outcomes globally.

Q3. What mix of outcomes are the most important to include in the strategy?

All children & families can easily access services (housing, health, education, family support, opportunities for play) no matter where they live.

All children have opportunities to participate in social and community activities, supporting positive sense of identity.

Outcomes need to include:

- Equity of access and delivery of services particularly in regional and remote areas.
- Gap analysis completed of services required or non-existent vs demand (should be undertaken as a priority).
- Children are ready for primary school and vulnerability eradicated.

- Workforce pathways in place and supporting the increased expectation of ECEC placements and meeting workforce demands of the sector.
- Better connections and programs with schools and early learning services to assist transition.
- Integration of paediatric health and allied health support with services to assist early intervention.
- Co-location of support services to work with families in safe and supported settings.

Q4. What specific areas/policy priorities should be included in the strategy and why?

The concept of parenting as “natural” is no longer relevant. The complexities of families have changed. All parents require support to understand the issues around the contemporary society we live in. For example:

- The digital world that children and families are entering.
- Child development -families need to know why they need to stay connected with EC nurses.
- Education and care services have access to, and work alongside allied health workers, social workers, and schools.

Policy should focus on better **support** of quality in the services and systems of participation in ECEC rather than demand standards without ability to achieve well. Additionally consistency and simplicity of funding and engagement processes across services for families

Policy should seek to improve workforce perceptions and professionalism of ECEC work and workers and strive to increase the percentages of male workers in the sector. Parity of pay for similar work in education sectors is a priority. Also focus on Aboriginal worker increase.

Policy should seek to integrate services or ensure easy integration or access to ensure child safety and wellbeing.

Policy should support and incentivise parental education on quality parenting and the critical role they play.

Interconnections between parents/families and organisations/ professionals who can provide information about development, parenting, and parents’ power as their child’s first teacher are normalised and not just developed in response to a crisis. E.g – through maternal and child health, **playgroups**, and early childhood services. Our Shire provides supported playgroups and parents with a new baby groups, showing great potential for replication in other areas. They are delivered by qualified educators and have allied health, family support, schools, and other services joining the groups routinely. This provides potential for parents and caregivers to reach out, gather new information, feel supported and make new connections in their community.

Q5. What could the government do to improve outcomes for children – particularly those who are born or raised in more vulnerable and /or disadvantaged circumstances?

Firstly, see all children as a valuable, capable citizens having the right to education and resources that will help them thrive.

Value childhood as critical and significant time in a person’s life.

Get rid of the word childcare. Not every parent needs care for their child, but every child needs opportunities to learn – education.

Importance of engaging with families (mum & dad or both partners) during the prenatal and antenatal period.

Address the fear and ongoing bias for vulnerable indigenous families, and other minority groups. Provide positive early intervention and access to free supports/ education that is inclusive and non-threatening. START EARLY.

Families who do not vaccinate their children are currently excluded from education and care services. This isolates and disadvantages these children.

Anyone who works with children must be trained in trauma and have access to services – interagency connectivity.

Provide sufficient services to rural and remote areas.

Supported playgroups, parents and new babies groups, support for families to access services as well as education and care services could be set up around areas of particular vulnerability or additional complexity. The focus of providing access to early childhood services for these groups should be highest priority and not linked to “women returning to work”.

Q6. What areas do you think the commonwealth could focus on to improve coordination and collaboration in developing policies for children and families.

The focus on children as being a women’s issue is so out of date and backward looking. It sends the wrong message. Returning to work is not just a woman’s issue. We must use language that is inclusive to all parents. “parental leave”, “shared parental roles”, “families returning to work”.

There needs to be a focus on the child as a citizen and having rights and responsibilities as their own entity.

Have regular review and input from stakeholders

In education and qualifications for the workforce, universities, and vocational education need to collaborate with service providers to support and explore innovation in workforce development.

Q7. What principles should be included in the strategy?

Bronfenbrenner’s theory is a great place to start. This is something that could be used as an educational tool for families. If used correctly vulnerable families may feel supported instead of targeted and threatened. It could also reinforce and support collaboration with Aboriginal communities and other cultural groups who value the extended family and community concept.

Listen to the services that work with the families and have to navigate all of the systems and requirements to suit the demands of the government as well as families.

Equity of access – we have so many waiting lists across our shire – its no wonder we are in crisis. We need to meet demand in a considered way that everyone has access to ECEC.

Look at innovation and new perspectives as a principle.

Q8. Are there gaps in existing frameworks?

Parenting plans and the family law system is impossible for non-legal services to follow and assist families. It is a challenge for educators and staff to explain them and support families to follow them. Who monitors them. Are children safe? Is this the best we can do?

All in scope education and care services follow the same laws, regulations and national standards, yet some, such as Family Day Care and Out Of School Hours Services are not valued as equal players in children's education. This needs to change as EC teachers working in these service types are providing very high-quality programs and our sector is at great risk of losing them.

There are private schools that operate preschool type programs ("prep") and after school activities that are not aligned with the Education and Care National Quality Framework. These types of services should be included in the National Quality Framework.