



## Submission of feedback on the National Early Years Strategy

Provided by the Australian Research Alliance  
for Children and Youth

**ARACY**

ARACY thanks the Department of Social Services for the opportunity to provide feedback for the Early Years Strategy. ARACY has a long history of providing expert advice and participating in research for early childhood wellbeing, education and care.

## Who We Are

ARACY - Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth seeks to catalyse change by bringing people and knowledge together for the benefit of children and young people in Australia. *We believe that all children and young people should have the opportunity to thrive.* We strive to achieve this by advocating for evidence-based policy and practice, focusing on prevention and early intervention. Our consultations with over 4000 children and young people, their families, and experts have shown us what wellbeing means to them: to be loved, valued, and safe; to have material basics; to be physically and mentally healthy; to be learning; to be participating; and to have a positive sense of identity and culture. These six domains are reflected in Australia's wellbeing framework for children and young people – [the Nest](#).

We have been operating within this framework since 2013 and have progressed our work including publication of trackable indicators in our 5-year Report Cards and our most recent ARACY-UNICEF report *The Wellbeing of Australia's Children*, which incorporates both internationally comparable and Australian-specific indicators.

ARACY is a well-established collaborator in identifying needs and pathways of reform for early childhood development, education policy and systems. ARACY is a partner of the Thrive by Five campaign and auspices the Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership, two initiatives striving to collaboratively address the needs of children and families in the early years. ARACY facilitates the Early Childhood Impact Alliance (ECIA), a group of philanthropic funders that invest in the early years. ECIA drives strategic investment, collective advocacy, and greater collaboration in the early years sector to develop pathways and projects to improve young children's wellbeing. In March 2020, ARACY hosted a National Early Years Summit, bringing together leading thinkers and change-makers to consider what a blueprint for young children's wellbeing would look like.

### *Key recommendation priorities for the Early Year's Strategy*

ARACY believes all Australian children should be loved and thriving regardless of background or circumstance.

To achieve this through the Early Years strategy, ARACY advocates for:

- meeting holistic wellbeing needs for children by integrated service provision
- adopting evidence-based frameworks and practices such as the Nest and Common Approach
- taking action to repair child development inequities
- inclusion and accessibility of ECEC for Australia's most vulnerable and disadvantaged children
- improving ECEC workers pay and conditions and prioritising child-centred policies by including children's voices.

## Table of Contents

Who We Are .....	1
Proposed structure of the Strategy .....	4
Recommendations 1.1: .....	4
<b>Recommendation 1.2:</b> .....	4
<b>Recommendation 1.3:</b> .....	5
What vision should our nation have for Australia’s youngest children? .....	5
Recommendation 2.1: .....	5
What mix of outcomes are the most important to include in the Strategy?.....	6
Recommendation 3.1 .....	6
What specific areas/policy priorities should be included in the Strategy and why .....	7
Recommendation 4.1: .....	7
Recommendation 4.2: .....	8
Recommendation 4.3: .....	9
Recommendation 4.4: .....	10
Recommendation 4.5: .....	10
Recommendation 4.6: .....	11
Recommendation 4.7: .....	12
Recommendation 4.8: .....	13
Recommendation 4.9: .....	13
What could the Commonwealth do to improve outcomes for children—particularly those who are born or raised in more vulnerable and/or disadvantaged circumstances? .....	14
Recommendation 5.1 : .....	14
Recommendation 5.2 .....	14
Recommendation 5.3: .....	16
Recommendation 5.4: .....	16
Recommendation 5.5: .....	17
Recommendation 5.6: .....	17
6. What areas do you think the Commonwealth could focus on to improve coordination and collaboration in developing policies for children and families? .....	18
Recommendation 6.1: .....	19
Recommendation 6.2: .....	20
What principles should be included in the Strategy?.....	20

Recommendation 7.1 .....	20
8. Are there gaps in existing frameworks or other research or evidence that need to be considered for the development of the Strategy? .....	21
Recommendation 8.1: .....	21
Recommendation 8.2 .....	22
References .....	24
Attachment A: .....	28
.....	28
Attachment B: .....	29
The Nest <i>and</i> the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child .....	29
How does the Nest correspond to the UNCRC? .....	29
In short, the Nest covers <b>what</b> a child needs to thrive. The UNCRC also considers what a child needs, then goes further to prescribe <b>who</b> should be involved in providing for a child's needs and to some extent <b>how</b> this should be done. ....	29
UNCRC Article.....	29
Corresponding Nest domain OR general principle/administrative responsibility .....	29
Attachment C: .....	33
The Nest and the OECD Children's Wellbeing Framework.....	33
<b>OECD Children's Wellbeing Framework Levels</b> .....	34
<b>ARACY's Nest corresponding sections</b> .....	34
.....	34

## Proposed structure of the Strategy

The Early Years Strategy holds an aspiration to break down silos and work across portfolios and levels of government. The diagrammatic representation of the strategy must reflect this aspiration. The outcomes and policy priorities, and later the targeted action plans, can be connected through the use of the addition of bidirectional arrows, recognising the essential connections that they will require to have with each other. It is also noted the recent Federal ECEC Vision submission deadlines closed before the Early Years Strategy. The Early Years Strategy should be the first over-arching document, with the ECEC vision sitting under this after the strategy has been established.

### Recommendations 1.1:

#### *Early Years Strategy uses the Nest as it's guiding framework*

Using the framework of the Nest as an overarching guide to the Strategy and its action plans makes the holistic nature of child wellbeing and the interdependencies of the individual domains explicit and visual. It acts to remind all actors of their role within the wider early childhood development system, and the ways in which they connect and interact with other roles and actors.

### Recommendation 1.2:

#### *The Outcomes and Evaluation Framework is designed to capture indicators of short, medium and long term progress*

The Early Years Strategy should recognise the importance of taking a systemic approach to it's work, and reflect in its outcomes and Evaluation Framework indicators of short, medium and long term progress in changing the conditions that hold the current system in place.

In terms of outcomes and indicators, the Early Years Strategy will require to capture both outcomes for children and families, and for the early childhood development system itself. Both these outcome areas will require a combination of long term aspirations – the end picture of “what success looks like” – and intermediary outcomes that demonstrate changes to ways of working, power dynamics, mental models, and other conditions that hold the current system in place. The Outcomes and Evaluation Framework must be designed to capture short, medium and long term progress on these systemic changes as well as long term improvements in outcomes for children (which at a population level may not show up for years).

## Recommendation 1.3:

*The Early Years Strategy is explicit about the role/s of the Commonwealth in changing the early childhood development system*

The Strategy should seek to be clear about the value it adds as a Commonwealth strategy in a system in which, as acknowledged, many of the levers for change rest with States and Territories. The “inherent value” of the “national overlay” referred to should be made explicit. What role/s will the Commonwealth play in achieving the aims and vision of this Strategy? How will these be different to the roles it currently plays?

For example, the Commonwealth could potentially take the leading role in long term workforce planning to ensure the early childhood system has the capacity and capability it needs to achieve and sustain the aims of this Strategy. It could continue to support thin markets for early childhood services, including but not limited to ECEC, to ensure equitable access for all children. It could, as philanthropy often does, take a lead in catalysing innovation and testing new ideas and creative ways of working to support children and families. There are existing mechanisms and examples, including joint and matched funding models, which could be leveraged to support this. This could also be connected to other strategies and programs of work, such as place-based models and First Nations-led and controlled initiatives and services.

## What vision should our nation have for Australia’s youngest children?

### Recommendation 2.1:

*Use the Nest Wellbeing Framework in the vision for Australia’s youngest children.*

The Early Years Strategy should place child wellbeing as the highest priority for its vision for Australia’s youngest children. Australia’s Wellbeing Framework for Children and Young People – the Nest provides accessible language across six wellbeing domains to include in a vision statement about holistic child wellbeing.

The below statements from the Nest should be qualified with an equity statement which declares all Australian children have the right to holistic wellbeing, regardless of their background, socio-economic status, where they live and their abilities. These wellbeing statements include:

- Children are valued, loved, and safe

- Children have access to material basics
- Children have their physical, mental and emotional needs met
- Children have access to learning within their early childhood education and care setting, home and community
- Children participate and have a voice in decisions that affect them in the family and community
- Children have a positive sense of identity and culture.

## What mix of outcomes are the most important to include in the Strategy?

### Recommendation 3.1

*Use the Nest wellbeing statements as outcomes for the strategy and align measurements with the six Nest wellbeing outcome domains*

The Early Years strategy should measure outcomes that align with the Nest wellbeing statements to cover holistic wellbeing, for example:

<i>NEST Wellbeing statement</i>	<i>Outcome/measurement</i> <i>Indicators adapted from the Australian Children's Wellbeing Index by UNICEF Australia and ARACY, 2023</i>
<i>Children are valued, loved, and safe</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children living in out of home care reduced</li> <li>• Numbers of child protection notifications reduced</li> <li>• Child and infant mental health is prioritised</li> </ul>
<i>Children have access to material basics</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rates of child poverty decreased</li> <li>• Parents and carers are able to afford appropriate food and clothes, enough money for necessities</li> </ul>
<i>Children have their physical, mental and emotional needs met</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children and families can access physical, mental and emotional health services when they need them</li> <li>• Health at birth increased</li> <li>• Chronic conditions decreased</li> <li>• Percentage of children meeting minimum recommended consumption of fruit and vegetables increased</li> <li>• Percentage of children with mental health disorders decrease</li> <li>• Percentage of children meeting minimum recommended physical activity requirements increased</li> </ul>

*Children have access to learning within the classroom, home and community*

*Children participate and have a voice in decisions that affect them in the family and community*

*Children have a positive sense of identity and culture.*

- AEDC developmental vulnerability decreased
- All children attend preschool for two years prior to formal school commencing
- All children can access and attend high quality early childhood education and care
- All parents have the knowledge, skills, resources and support to provide enriching home-learning environments
- All children have library cards and are regular library users
- Children are developmentally on track when commencing school according to their individual circumstances and abilities
- Community spaces are accessible for families and young children to use and feel comfortable in
- Children have a voice in decisions that affect them
- All children have their identity and culture reflected in the services and community they engage with
- All children's identity and culture is valued

In addition, measurements of success for these outcomes should be based on equity. We know Australia's most vulnerable and disadvantaged children are more likely to be developmentally vulnerable, have less access to high quality early childhood education and care, and less likely to be developmentally on track when starting school (Sollis, 2019, ABS, 2016, Edwards & Baxter 2013, AEDC, 2021, Heckman, 2022, The Front Project, 2022). If positive outcomes are mainly applying to children from cities, high SES areas or other homogenised groups, the outcomes have not been achieved successfully.

The recent work of the Productivity Commission (2022) regarding [the National School Reform Agreement](#) provided a coherent summary of the evidence for focusing on student wellbeing, including the voices of children and young people themselves. The central understanding of wellbeing for the benefit of children can be extrapolated into the early years.

## What specific areas/policy priorities should be included in the Strategy and why

### Recommendation 4.1:

*Develop integrated child and family hubs*



Integrated Child and Family Hub provides a ‘one stop shop’ where families can access a range of supports that improve child development as well as child and family health and wellbeing (Honisett et al. 2023). Integrated Child and Family hubs have two critical roles:

- A service hub - improving access to a range of health, education, and social services using a family centred approach; and
- A social hub - providing opportunities to build parental capacity and for families to create social connections (Honisett et al. 2023, 4). (Moore 2021a). (Moore 2021b).

Integrated Child and Family Hubs can be located in early years centres, primary schools, primary health care, Aboriginal Community Controlled Health organisations, community/non-government organisation and virtual settings. The location of these hubs should be chosen based on the unique context of the community. Place-based approaches are well evidenced forms of social change that can reduce intergenerational disadvantage, and can be tailored, localised and collaborated within the local context (Harris et al. 2023, Harris et al. 2023). Many integrated child and family centres in Australia are funded by a mix of state, territory, Commonwealth Government and philanthropic funders and use existing resources and services (DSS, 2023).

As discussed in the National Child & Family Hubs Network Submission (2021), in an **early years setting**, the evidence demonstrates that integrated care and supports are associated with improved school readiness, parental knowledge, and confidence. When comparing non-integrated models of care and support with co-located and integrated models of care in early years and primary school settings there is a trend toward improved child academic outcomes in the latter settings. An evaluation of NSW Aboriginal Child and Family Centres demonstrated improvements in health checks and immunisation rates among children as well as first time engagement with early childhood education and care services for ‘hard to reach’ families.

## Recommendation 4.2:

### ***Removal of the activity test for childcare subsidy to early childhood education and care.***

ARACY advocates the Childcare Subsidy Activity Test be removed to increase access to ECEC for all children, noting the significant benefits of ECEC to child development and wellbeing. Currently, children whose parents are not in the workforce have limited access to subsidised care. The Child Subsidy Activity Test puts the adult at the centre of accessibility rather than the child. This affects our most vulnerable children’s access to quality education and care that could greatly improve their developmental outcomes (Dundas & Depers, 2023; Centre for Policy Development, 2021). In Australia, 1 in 5 children start school developmentally vulnerable, and for children who do not receive early childhood education and care, this figure is two in five (Centre for Policy Development, 2021). Families not participating in the workforce are among the most vulnerable and financially strained community members, whose children would benefit the most from high quality ECEC (Dundas & Depers, 2023; Melhuish et al, 2015; The Front Project 2021).

Impact Economics and Policy paper *Child Care Subsidy Activity Test: Undermining Child Development and Parental Participation* (2022) clearly illustrates how the activity test most adversely affects the families and children most in need:

*A number of vulnerable family groups, when compared to families earning over \$200,000 per year, are more likely to be subject to the activity test that limits access to subsidised care:*

- *Single parent families are over three times more likely to be limited to one day of subsidised childcare per week;*
- *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families are over five times more likely to be limited to one day of subsidised childcare per week;*
- *Non-English speaking families are over six times more likely to be limited to one day of subsidised child care per week; and*
- *Low-income families earning between \$50,000 and \$100,000 are over six times more likely to be limited to one day of subsidised childcare per week.*

There also benefits to the economy and workforce from abolishing the Activity Test. Low-income parents are currently dissuaded from finding more work due to the uncertainty created by the activity test and risks of incurring debts with Centrelink (Impact Economics and Policy, 2022). If our most vulnerable children had increased access to more high-quality days at ECEC (enabled by removing the activity test), international evidence has shown this would have tremendous benefits to their IQ, developmental vulnerabilities and overall-life outcomes and earning capacities (Impact Economics and Policy, 2022). In addition, it could reduce expenditure on intergenerational disadvantage, welfare payments and incarceration.

It is also important to note some families actively choose not to participate in the workforce during their child's earliest years, for cultural, wellbeing, philosophical or study reasons, and this choice should be equally valued.

### Recommendation 4.3:

*Embed the Nest Wellbeing Framework and Common Approach practice in all early childhood settings*

The Nest Wellbeing Framework and Common Approach are evidence based, best practice guides for supporting child and youth wellbeing.

The Common Approach is a way of working that embeds the six Nest domains in informal conversations with children and young people to get a holistic picture of their wellbeing, identify strengths, needs and next steps.

The Nest and Common Approach are ideally placed to support the Early Years Strategy as they are designed to be used universally by anyone working with children and young people, place children at the centre, prioritise holistic wellbeing, are rooted in evidence-based best practice, incorporate children's voices, and are already used by governments and organisations across Australia.

In Australia, the New South Wales Government's Strategic Plan for Children and Young People and the Tasmanian Government's Child and Youth Wellbeing strategy 'It Takes a Tasmanian Village' are both built on the Nest as their organising framework. The Northern Territory Government uses the Nest to produce the biennial 'Story of our children and young people', presenting wellbeing data from over 100 wellbeing measures. The Queensland Government will be using the Nest in reviews of their child and family programs.

The Common Approach is embedded across major departments in NSW and Victoria, and in organisations and agencies across the country. Internationally, the New Zealand Government's Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy is informed by the domains of the Nest, while the Common Approach has been adopted in Helsinki, Finland.

## Recommendation 4.4:

### *Develop a coordinated approach to improving the parental awareness about the importance of the first 1000 days*

Evidence based recommendations emphasise the need for policy and program initiatives to promote parenting knowledge, and that parents need a basic understanding of infant and child developmental milestones, norms and parenting practices to optimise children's development (Breiner et. al, 2016).

Parental knowledge of child development is positively associated with quality parent-child interactions and the likelihood of parents' engagement in practices that promote their children's healthy development (Breiner et. al, 2016). However, there is tremendous variation in parent's knowledge about child development (Breiner et. al, 2016), with some studies suggesting that parents with a higher education level tend to have more knowledge about child development. Research also indicates parents with knowledge of evidence-based parenting practices, especially those related to promoting children's physical health and safety, are more likely than those without such knowledge to engage in those practices. (Breiner et. al, 2016).

All parents and carers and the wider community should understand the significant brain development occurring in the first 1000 days and the Early Years Strategy can embed this nationally by incorporating or supporting current Australian-based awareness campaigns such as [Thrive by Five](#), [Deadly Brains](#), [Better Beginnings](#), [First Five Forever](#), [Words Grow Minds](#).

## Recommendation 4.5:

### *Coordinate a digital platform of information and services to support parents to have a rich home-learning environment*

Current digital platforms already exist in Australia to support parents to have rich home-learning environments for optimal child development. The Early Years Strategy should coordinate and promote quality information about early childhood development and and service provision, such as:

- [Bright Beginnings](#) created by Thrive by Five, an app which helps parents have ‘brain building’ moments each day with suggested activities adjusted to children’s age and accessible throughout daily routines regardless of socio-economic status or background. Activities are based on [The Harvard Centre for the Developing Child app Vroom](#), which provide ‘brainy background’ explanations for each activity suggestion, and how evidence has shown these interactions impact brain development. Bright Beginnings bring these activities into an Australian context and include national parenting resources and services.
- [Raising Children Network](#) created in collaboration with the Department of Social Services, Parenting Research Centre, Murdoch Children’s Research Institute and the Royal Children’s Hospital for Community Child Health. Raising Children Network is an Australian parenting website that provides ad-free parenting videos, articles and apps backed by Australian experts for children and young people from conception to 24, and in a variety of community languages.

## Recommendation 4.6:

### *Increase ECEC workers pay and conditions to achieve universally accessible and quality ECEC*

The Early Years Strategy should prioritise investment to boost wages, retain existing ECEC staff, attract new staff and reduce the wage gap between ECEC educators and primary school educators.

The delivery of quality ECEC requires a capable and valued professional workforce (OECD, 2020). Yet the ECEC workforce in Australia is in crisis, with attrition and vacancy rates running much higher than they were pre-pandemic.

ARACY is very pleased to see the Australian Government’s measures to support the ECEC workforce, specifically the professional development subsidy, paid practicum subsidy, practicum exchange and prioritisation of servicing First Nations and rural and remote services with these measures first. This is an excellent first step and opens the dialogue for more reform to be done.

The last time there was significant national reform in early childhood led by the Council of Australian Governments, there was a funded [10-year workforce strategy](#) informed by a detailed examination of workforce needs by the Productivity Commission.<sup>1</sup> This type of long-term investment and planning is needed again.

The 2021 strategy, [Shaping our Future](#), was developed when the workforce issues were less pressing than they are now, and was not backed with significant new funding commitments from the Commonwealth to the States to support the workforce .

To address the workforce crisis, the following actions are proposed and advocated by Good Start Early Learning:

1. Government to fund a substantial wage rise for early childhood educators.

---

<sup>1</sup> See the 2015 Productivity Commission Report <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/education-workforce-early-childhood/report>, and Government response: [https://web.archive.org/au/awa/20120319023100mp\\_/http://www.deewr.gov.au/Earlychildhood/LatestNews/Documents/AGInterimResponseToPCReport.pdf](https://web.archive.org/au/awa/20120319023100mp_/http://www.deewr.gov.au/Earlychildhood/LatestNews/Documents/AGInterimResponseToPCReport.pdf)

2. Longer term, wages and conditions should be brought up to be comparable with rates payable in the rest of the education sector (i.e. schools) as part of the new policy and funding instruments flowing from the Productivity Commission Inquiry into ECEC.
3. Alongside addressing wages, the pipeline for new educators should be addressed by:
  - a. Free TAFE courses and additional funding for traineeships for educators;
  - b. Expand the pool of early childhood teachers by
    - i. Expanding places in ECT ITE courses at universities supported by scholarships;
    - ii. Developing accelerated pathways for experienced Diploma qualified educators to progress to ECT qualifications within 1-2 months, supported by funding arrangements and mentoring support to cover up to 80 days of practicum teaching placements.
  - c. Include early childhood teachers and educators on migration priority lists and address unnecessary hurdles and delays on visa applications:
4. Longer term, enhance the professional recognition and support for early childhood teachers and educators with more emphasis on the importance of pedagogy and learning, building on the actions in the 2021 National ECEC Workforce Strategy.

## Recommendation 4.7:

### *Use evidence to build high quality early childhood education and care*

Early learning needs to be high quality if it's going to have an impact. Specifying quality ECEC as a fundamental outcome and right of all children is vital. Evidence shows poor quality ECEC can have negative developmental impacts, specifically on children from vulnerable backgrounds (Melhuish et al, 2015) and there are currently concerning trends in Australia linking lower quality ECECs with lower-socio-economic regions (Hurley, Matthews & Pennicuik, 2022). 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 (Melhuish et.al, 2013).

'Quality' means policy and practice needs to be neuro-informed within ECEC. This translates into educators, all ECEC staff, policy makers, and decision makers understanding the relevant neuroscience. This includes understanding the biological, social and environmental core story of brain development and how this can be used to support children and families. It encompasses understanding the impacts of stress, adverse childhood experiences and trauma on the developing brain and how children can be supported to recover. It also considers the development of children's executive functioning and how they can be supported to demonstrate the skills that will hold them in good stead for the rest of their lives.<sup>2</sup>

ARACY calls on the Early Years Strategy to use the best quality evidence to define a vision of what quality ECEC looks like. This evidence must be rigorous, regularly reviewed and context specific, and importantly, easy to understand by service providers. International bases such as Evidence for Learning's [Early Childhood Education Toolkit](#) provide robust indicators of what

---

<sup>2</sup> This information has been synthesized from the Thriving Queensland Kids and ARACY partnership to develop and deliver the 'Understanding Brain Development' course through Emerging Minds due to be launched end of June, 2023.

constitutes quality early learning, but that evidence needs to be put into practice across the system.

Supporting practitioners to access, understand and then put the latest evidence into practice through professional learning and other capability-building resources, tools and supports is important to improving practice and thus learning and development outcomes for children.

The Early Years Strategy should also refine the implementation of the National Quality Framework for ECEC; shifting the focus from compliance and enforcement to mentor and critical friend, that will allow services to further develop their practices which will in turn improve their quality.

## Recommendation 4.8:

### *Include children's voices in the Early Years Strategy.*

Participation is a core component of wellbeing (ARACY, 2023). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states children have a right to be active participants in all matters affecting their lives. ARACY recommends the Early Years Strategy incorporate opportunities for consultation with children to have a say about what is important for the early years. Young children are competent and capable of making meaning about their lives when supported by developmentally appropriate questions and response options (Sparks, 2020; Harris & Manatakis, 2013; Lansdown, 2005; MacNaughton et al 2003). This is consistent with the National Quality Standard Quality Area 1, Supporting agency: involving children in decision-making, and with the Early Years Learning Framework (ACECQA, 2018).

## Recommendation 4.9:

### *Endorse and integrate the National Early Language and Literacy Strategy into the Early Years Strategy*

The Proposed National Early Language and Literacy Strategy (National Early Language and Literacy Coalition, 2021) has four priorities with one aim; to provide children with the best opportunities to develop early language and literacy skills before starting school. It was created in partnership with state and territory governments and expert peak body and research organisations in speech pathology, literacy and libraries due to the strong evidence linking educational, health, social, emotional and lifelong career outcomes with early language and literacy capabilities. Similar to the Early Years Strategy discussion paper, it highlights the holistic nature of service provision needed in the early years to produce optimal outcomes, by integrating family support within communities, early education and transitions, specialist supports and knowledge production. Specifically, the National Early Language and Literacy Strategy advocates for all Australian children to participate in at least two years of high-quality early childhood education and care with evidence-based pedagogies for developing language and literacy, easily accessible support and allied health specialist services, and community awareness and understand about the importance of the first 1000 days and particularly how to nurture language and literacy development.

ARACY recommends this strategy be referenced and used within the Early Years Strategy as a pathway to support implementation of high quality ECEC and community understand of brain and language and literacy development in the first 1000 days.

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

### Recommendation 5.1 :

#### *Fund place-based integrated service family hubs in areas of disadvantage*

Creating a universal platform of services for infants, toddlers and pre-schoolers, comprising early intervention services, playgroups, maternal nurse home visiting and free, quality early childhood care will best support the sector to address holistic wellbeing and remove silos. Community navigators (as proposed in [Starting Better - A guarantee for young children and families](#)) support families experiencing vulnerability to access ECEC, subsidies, health systems and provision of materials in a variety of languages. They can provide culturally appropriate additional support and are essential enablers for vulnerable families to access services that could support their child's development.

Robust evidence has supported this type of systems-change as an effective intervention and prevention for intersectional disadvantage (Fox et al, 2015; ARACY, 2023). ARACY encourages the Department to reference place-based change in Early Years Strategy and adopt locally coordinated approaches to early childhood development in disadvantaged communities as outlined in *Starting Better - A Guarantee for young children and families report* (Centre for Policy Development, 2021).

See [Attachment A](#) for diagrammatic examples from Goldfeld et. al (2013) regarding how the current early childhood service system looks like in Victoria and how an integrated, place-based system can reduce silos, streamline delivery and be more accessible and user-friendly.

### Recommendation 5.2

#### *Address rates of child poverty in Australia*

ACOSS reports 13.6% of the total Australian population live below the poverty line (Davidson et. al, 2022), or approximately 1 in 8 people. However the proportion of children living in



poverty was higher, with 1 in 6 children or 16.6% under the age of 15 living below the poverty line (Davidson et. al, 2022).

Poverty has wide-ranging and long-lasting impacts on children's lives. Multidimensional poverty is a strong predictor of poor health, education, and social outcomes for children that can significantly impact their progression from childhood to adulthood (Bull et al. 2022). The impact of poverty can be direct - poor health in children, or indirect - adverse effects on self-confidence, memory, language; etc. The ongoing stress on parents created by low incomes and joblessness, limiting positive attachment and warmth from family members, reduced cognitive stimulation, increased chances of family violence or substance abuse, social isolation, and community factors such as unsafe neighborhoods and schools, all increase the risk of monetary poverty in children and young adults (ACOSS, 2021). Children living in poverty are at a greater risk of being exposed to more toxins, crime, and traffic (ARACY, 2019).

This “toxic stress” can impact the brain’s neural pathways, hormonal systems, and physiological responses leading to poorly controlled stress responses, either overly active or slow to respond in a child between the ages of 0 - 14 (ARACY, 2019). “Toxic stress” also interferes with a child’s ability to follow instructions, incorporate direct speech, or motivation to do tasks. These stress responses are subsequently passed down to future generations contributing to persisting disadvantages in families and communities (ARACY, 2019).

Adults receiving JobSeeker and/or Youth Allowance are under significant cost of living stress, and this is particularly pronounced for single adults with children. As stated by ACOSS in 2022:

- 96% of JobSeeker and Youth Allowance survey respondents are living in rental stress
- 61% are eating less or skipping meals, with 71% cutting back on meat and fresh fruit and vegetables due to grocery bill rises
- 70% of people who regularly use a car said they have had difficulty travelling to work, medical appointments or other commitments as a result of increased fuel costs.
- 62% have had difficulty getting medication or medical care due to the increased cost of living
- Almost all (96%) said that the inability to cover the cost of living harmed their physical and mental health

Supporting vulnerable or disadvantaged children to have positive early childhood outcomes means supporting children who are living in poverty. The Coronavirus Supplement is an example of a boosted income support which was effective at lifting adults above the poverty line, however, not enough deliberation was made to ensure that single adults with children or couples with children received the most impactful benefits (Davidson et. al, 2022). The lack of a child supplement also diminished its impact on poverty among larger families. Current cost of living pressures and inflation continue to rise, therefore, ARACY calls on the Commonwealth to consider boosted income support for families with children aged 0-5 with the supplement sitting with the child, rather than the adult.

ARACY endorses ACOSS’s Key Recommendations from their September 2022 report *How JobSeeker and other income support payments are falling behind the cost of living*, in particular, the recommendation for the Federal Government to establish a single parent supplement that recognises the additional costs of single parenthood, which increases as children get older due to the increased costs of children as they age.



This would help improve living standards for Australian families on the lowest income, and in turn, support child development outcomes at this crucial time of brain and body development.

### Recommendation 5.3:

#### *Implement block funding and programmatic funding for areas of disadvantage*

ARACY recommends the Commonwealth bolster thin markets such as child care deserts (Hurley, Matthews & Pennicuik, 2022) through block funding to providers, and reinstate block funding for Aboriginal-controlled ECEC services, as per the previous Budget Based Funding program.

Proposals advocated by SNAICC include calls for:

- Investing in local workforce attraction, retention and qualification, particularly in regional rural and remote areas by:
  - a. Funding the co-design, with ECEC services, of education and training models which support ACCO ECEC to train local Aboriginal people on country.
  - b. Subsidising or covering the cost of wage increases for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC staff.
  - c. Expanding the number of Aboriginal community-controlled integrated early years services to address gaps in service availability.

### Recommendation 5.4:

#### *Increase funding for evidenced intensive individual support plans for families with additional needs*

ARACY commends the government's recent decision to conduct an independent review of the Community Child Care Fund restricted grant to examine if it is improving early childhood outcomes for vulnerable and disadvantaged children and increasing workforce participation of vulnerable and disadvantaged families.

ARACY recommends the Department develop and fund evidenced-outcomes based programs to support families at risk similar to Goodstart's Intensive Individual Support Plans (IISPs). This program assigns a dedicated educator with additional training in trauma-informed and attachment-based practices to work one-on-one with a child under the guidance of a family practitioner. This educator is not included in the centre's educator ratios, allowing fully dedicated one-on-one time with the child.

The University of Adelaide's evaluation in 2019 demonstrates impressive outcomes for child development and inclusion (Karpetsis, 2020). Please refer to the [University of South Australia's recent evaluations of the IISPs](#) for further evidence of their effectiveness in addressing inclusion, access and child development outcomes.

## Recommendation 5.5:

*Incentivise ECEC centres to establish in rural or remote areas, and for ECEC workers to work in rural or remote areas.*

ARACY is thrilled to see the new Commonwealth Community Grants for Childcare Subsidy approved ECEC providers to establish new Centre Based or Family Day Care services in disadvantaged regional and remote areas, or areas where no or limited services exist. This is an excellent first step towards equitable accessibility.

There is a growing gap between the quality and accessibility of services in the most and least disadvantaged areas of Australia as illustrated by *Deserts and Oases: How accessible is childcare?* (Hurley, Matthews & Pennicuik, 2022). Outer regional Australia and Remote/Very Remote Australia have conditions known as ‘childcare deserts’ where there can be more than three children for each individual child care placement. More than 60% of outer regional, remote and very remote Australia are in childcare deserts where there is extremely limited supply of childcare. Approximately one million Australians have no access to childcare at all (Hurley, Matthews & Pennicuik, 2022). ARACY encourages the Department to include an incentivising financial enabler such as programmatic funding (The Front Project, 2023) for ECEC staff to work in outer regional, remote and very remote Australia similar to incentives for teachers to work in these locations. We also encourage the Department to continue to support the financial establishment of extra ECECs in childcare deserts through block funding (The Front Project, 2023)

## Recommendation 5.6:

*Incentivise ECECs to enrol children from vulnerable groups for example First Nations, children with disabilities, children involved with the child protection system, children from low socio-economic backgrounds*

Major cities generally have childcare ‘oases’ with many services for families to choose from. However even within major cities, there are suburbs with fewer childcare options and lower quality rated services. These suburbs generally have a greater relative disadvantage or higher proportion of culturally and linguistically diverse populations (Hurley, Matthews & Pennicuik, 2022). There are concerning correlations between childcare access and socio-economic status. Areas with the highest general childcare fees also have the highest level of childcare accessibility and places available, which may incentivise more centres to start up in already-established childcare ‘oases’ and more ECEC staff to work at these centres if there is correlating higher pay (Hurley, Matthews & Pennicuik, 2022).

ARACY recommends the Strategy include outcome or needs based funding for early childhood education and care centres as an incentive to enrol children from vulnerable

groups as outlined in the [Front Project's funding models and levers](#) (The Front Project, 2023)

## Recommendation 5.7

### *Invest in Sustained Nurse Home Visiting*

ARACY recommends investing in Sustained Nurse Home Visiting as an effective preventative form of prevention for families at risk of being involved in the child protection system. Sustained home visiting is where a trainer provider, usually a nurse, works with families at risk of or experiencing complex life challenges over a baby's early years, from pre-birth to the age of 2. There is extensive research demonstrating the effectiveness of Sustained Nurse Home Visits programs in supporting health child development (Moore et. al 2012, McDonald et. al 2012, Moore et. al 2013). Right@home is a focused version of sustained nurse home visiting, developed and researched in the Australian context that has been proven to be an effective strategy in enhancing vulnerable mother's' ability to care for their children during a critical time of development.

For example at the completion of the program, researchers found strong evidence that the program benefits mother's mental health, parenting skills, and their child's literacy (Moore et. al 2012, McDonald et. al 2012, Moore et. al 2013).

Mothers in the right@home program:

- Showed warmer and more responsive parenting (linked to healthy attachment and brain development)
- Provided safer homes
- Had homes more supportive of learning
- Had more regular bedtimes and routines (again linked to healthy attachment and development)
- Felt more confident in caring for themselves and their children

Through ongoing interviews until the child turned 6 years old (4 years after the program ended), researchers examined the longer-term effectiveness of right@home (Moore et. al 2012, McDonald et. al 2012, Moore et. al 2013). Between the ages of 2 and 6 in comparison to usual care:

- Children showed a tendency towards improved mental health, behaviour, and language
- Mothers continued to practice warmer and more responsive parenting
- Mothers continued to feel more confident in caring for their children
- Mothers had improved mental health and wellbeing
- Mothers were less likely to experience partner emotional abuse
- Mothers felt much more satisfied with the right@home program

Right@home is being used in Queensland and the Northern Territory, where it has been adapted for delivery by Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations. It addresses many of the typical barriers vulnerable families experience in accessing support services. In supporting mothers to provide warm and responsive parenting and safe and stimulating homes,

while improving their own mental health, wellbeing, and parenting confidence, we are breaking the cycle of intergenerational disadvantage and providing children with the early opportunities they need to thrive.

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

### Recommendation 6.1:

#### *Adopt Systems Leadership for Child and Youth Wellbeing*

ARACY encourages the architects of the Early Years Strategy to refer to the [Systems Leadership for Child and Youth Well-being](#) (Hogan et. al., 2021) document outlining the six essential change domains needed for systems leadership to improve child and youth wellbeing.

The following six essential change domains should be embedded into the government's stewardship levers, based on Every Child's *Systems Leadership for Child and Youth Wellbeing* (Hogan et al, 2021):

- **Concerted leadership:**
  - For example, the current work of setting a shared vision and priorities for the early years.
- **Smarter investment**
  - For example, coordinate all the different national and state strategies and look at different funding models that can strengthen community ownership and local solutions
- **Engaged public:**
  - For example, see recommendation 4.4 and 4.5 regarding coordinating parental and community awareness about the first 1000 days
- **Stronger workforces**
  - For example, see recommendation 4.6 Increase ECEC workers pay and conditions
- **Integrated delivery**
  - For example, see recommendation 4.1, 5.1 and 6.2 regarding child and family hubs with integrated service delivery across all aspects of early years and place-based engagement

- **Putting data and learning to work**
  - For example, taking a lead role in data coordination and fill the gaps in data collection.

These levers ensure that there is a streamlined access point, holistic service delivery, and sharing of collected evidence.

## Recommendation 6.2:

### *Develop integrated child and family hubs*

As discussed in recommendation 2.1 and 5.6, ARACY affirms the Early Year's Strategy Discussion Paper's emphasis on integrated delivery and breaking down silos. It is widely recognised that less fragmented, better integrated support for children and families will improve their quality of life. This support needs to cross multiple sectors and respond to the six primary areas of wellbeing outlined in the Nest framework. A strengths-based approach, connection building and caring should be the core of systems, services and practice. A focus on improving parent and care-giver support, transforming early learning and care nationally, and enhancing early detection and responses to early-life adversity and trauma is a key feature of this approach. (Hogan, et al., 2021), and to 'invert the triangle' of intervention resources on tertiary interventions to preventative measures.

## What principles should be included in the Strategy?

### Recommendation 7.1

*Include the principles of strengths-based, child-centred, holistic wellbeing, working in partnership, children's voice, equity, diversity, inclusion and evidence-informed approaches.*

ARACY affirms the Early Years Discussion paper principles of being strengths based and child and family centred. This aligns with the practices of ARACY's Common Approach, an evidenced, best-practise way of working that uses the Nest Framework's six domains to have conversations about holistic wellbeing. In addition, we advocate for the Early Years Strategy principles to include holistic wellbeing, collaborating/working in partnership between services and with families, and emphasising children's voices. These are key evidence-based practices informing the Common Approach the Nest.

A commitment to the principles of equity, diversity and inclusion will support the developmental outcomes of all children in Australia, particularly vulnerable groups or areas of disadvantage.

As discussed in Recommendation 4.7, evidence-informed policies, approaches and decision making is also key to building integrity in the early years systems.

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

### Recommendation 8.1:

*Adopt the Nest Framework as central framework and port of research and evidence to build the strategy.*

The Nest is perfectly placed to be adopted as a framework for the Early Years Strategy. It has been created with children's voices, families, professionals and experts from Australia describing what it means to them to have a 'good life'. It is the first Australian developed and Australian implemented early childhood wellbeing framework. The Nest has aided the development of state and council level children and wellbeing strategies, monitoring and evaluating children's wellbeing outcomes and tracking wellbeing in real-time through student-led app responses (Goodhue, Dakin & Noble, 2021). The Nest and its practice offshoot, The Common Approach, has informed work by governments in NSW, Victoria, Queensland, the Northern Territory and Tasmania, and by education, health and community organisations and agencies across Australia. In addition the City of Helsinki, Finland, approached ARACY to adopt the Nest and Common Approach across its entire district after researching for high quality, evidence-based, holistic and universal child and youth wellbeing frameworks and practices world-wide. It has been in use across the Helsinki since 2021 with 700 practitioners trained to date.

The Nest provides service providers and the community with a shared understanding of child wellbeing literacy and a framework to assess and evaluate children's wellbeing. At a population level, the Nest provides a comprehensive picture of Australia's children, as shown in ARACY and UNICEF Australia's data compendium *The Wellbeing of Australia's Children* (Noble et al, 2023). At a service level, the Nest and its practice offshoot The Common Approach offer a practical way for service providers to understand and track the holistic wellbeing of their children and families over time.

### *The Nest and the OECD Child Wellbeing Framework*

The Nest has been compared to the OECD Child Wellbeing Framework which was referenced in the Early Years Strategy Discussion paper ([See Attachment C](#)). This visual comparison highlights the holistic and integrative nature of the Nest and its capability to bolster understanding and engagement with all six domains across the child, family and community level, in easy to

understand and accessible language. The OECD Wellbeing framework covers all Nest domains, however organises outcomes, inputs and broader policy settings into categories that don't visually interrelate. It highlights four core outcomes for individual child wellbeing (physical health, material basics, social emotional and cultural, educational and cognitive) but doesn't explicitly link these four outcomes with public policies, children's setting and environment. During the Nest consultation process, stakeholders gave clear feedback that identity & culture needed to be seen as a specific domain in its own right, rather than clumped with social and emotional wellbeing as reflected by the OECD framework. This was a recommendation particularly given by First Nations participants. The OECD framework lacks visual connectedness, with disjointed aspects such as public policies, children's setting and environment, children's activities and behaviours and outcomes not clearly progressing from the individual child level in the same way the Nest does in specific domains.

Importantly, although the OECD Framework was built compiling current best evidence on child wellbeing measures and impacts, it did not consult children in its development. The domains in the Nest were built through not only a similar evidence review, but also collating the responses from 4000 children, young people, families, and experts across Australia, reflecting Australia's diverse demographics. This makes the Nest the best-placed child wellbeing framework for Australian children - developed with the best evidence, the voices of young people, and within the context of Australia.

### *The Nest and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*

The Nest has also previously been compared to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (see [Attachment B](#)). The Nest and the UNCRC both cover what a child needs to thrive, and similar to the OECD Child Wellbeing Framework, the UNCRC goes further to suggest who should be involved in providing for a child's needs and how this could be done. However, as the UNCRC presents as a list, it is very easy to turn each right into a responsibility for a specific department or policy, further adding to the trend of services acting in silos and considering just one part of child wellbeing. ARACY's Nest wheel makes a clear example of how each domain is interconnected and that wellbeing is holistic, in turn making it a more collaborative message and process of measurement.

## Recommendation 8.2

### *Assess and respond to the findings of The Australia Child Maltreatment Study as discussed in the Families Australia Submission*

ARACY endorses the below recommendations from Families Australia Submission to the Early Years Discussion Paper (April 2023) :

*The Australian Child Maltreatment Study (2023) aims to identify how many Australians in the general population have been exposed to the each of the five types of child abuse and neglect*

*(physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, and exposure to domestic violence). Results of the study released earlier in 2023 are a sobering read and of grave concern. The ACMS examined the associations between child maltreatment and mental health disorders using the Mini International Neuropsychiatric Interview to determine if participants would meet clinically diagnostic criteria for a mental disorder.*

*Child maltreatment is associated with dramatically increased odds of young people having a mental disorder. Child maltreatment is strongly related to mental health in young people (Scott et. al, 2023).*

*Young people (16-24) who experienced child maltreatment are:*

- *2.9 x more likely to have any mental disorder*
- *5.8 x more likely to have PTSD*
- *3.3 x more likely to have generalised anxiety disorder*
- *4.1 x more likely to have server alcohol use disorder and*
- *2.7 x more likely to have had major depressive disorder.*

*The disparity in any mental health disorder in those youth who experienced child maltreatment compared to those who did not 60% vs 29.8%.*

*Alarmingly, the ACMS also found that: (Higgins, et. al 2023)*

- *Parental separation, family mental illness, family substance problems and family economic hardship **doubles** the risk of multi-type maltreatment.*
- *Most children who experience multi-type maltreatment experience exposure to domestic violence.*
- *Two thirds of children who experience maltreatment experience more than one maltreatment type.*
- *Girls are at greater risk for most types of maltreatment across the whole population, and*
- *For 78% of children who experienced Child Sexual Abuse, it happened more than once.*

*The Australian Child Maltreatment study (ACMS) is the first Australian prevalence study of child maltreatment. It is incumbent of the Strategy to assess and respond to the findings of this critical study.*

—ENDS—

May 2023

Submission prepared by [REDACTED]

**For further information please contact**

[REDACTED]



## References

- ACOSS (2022) How JobSeeker and other income support payments are falling behind the cost of living [https://www.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/ACOSS-cost-of-living-report\\_web\\_v02.pdf](https://www.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/ACOSS-cost-of-living-report_web_v02.pdf)
- ARACY (2023) *Place-based Initiatives in Australia: An Overview*. Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth. [Place-based\\_initiatives\\_ARACY\\_report\\_Feb23.pdf](#)
- Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment (2021) Australian Early Development  
 Census National Report 2021: Early Childhood Development in Australia, AEDC  
<https://www.aedc.gov.au/resources/detail/2021-aedc-national-report>
- Edwards, B., & Baxter, J. (2013). *The tyrannies of distance and disadvantage: Factors related to children's development in regional and disadvantaged areas of Australia* (Research Report No. 25). Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.  
[https://aifs.gov.au/sites/default/files/publication-documents/rr25\\_0.pdf](https://aifs.gov.au/sites/default/files/publication-documents/rr25_0.pdf)
- Breiner, H., Ford, M., Gadsden, V.L., National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine; Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education; Board on Children, Youth, and Families; Committee on Supporting the Parents of Young Children (2016) Chapter 2, Parenting Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices. *Parenting Matters: Supporting Parents of Children Ages 0-8*. pp 45-90. National Academies Press (US);  
[https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK402024/pdf/Bookshelf\\_NBK402024.pdf](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK402024/pdf/Bookshelf_NBK402024.pdf)
- Centre for Policy Development (2021) Starting Better - A Guarantee for young children and families  
<https://cpd.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/CPD-Starting-Better-Report.pdf>
- Commonwealth Government (2023). National Centre for Place-Based Collaboration. Department of Social Services <https://www.dss.gov.au/place-based-collaboration>
- Dundas, R., and Depers, L (2023). *Children at the Centre - Insights for development of a national Early Years Strategy*. ARACY. [https://www.aracy.org.au/publications-resources/command/download\\_file/id/494/filename/Children\\_at\\_the\\_Centre\\_ECEC\\_Report.pdf](https://www.aracy.org.au/publications-resources/command/download_file/id/494/filename/Children_at_the_Centre_ECEC_Report.pdf)
- Davidson, P; Bradbury, B; and Wong, M (2022) Poverty in Australia 2022: A snapshot Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) and UNSW Sydney.  
[https://povertyandinequality.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Poverty-in-Australia-2020\\_A-snapshot.pdf](https://povertyandinequality.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Poverty-in-Australia-2020_A-snapshot.pdf)
- Goodhue, R., Dakin, P., Noble, K. (2021) What's in the Nest? Exploring Australia's Wellbeing Framework for Children and Young People. ARACY, Canberra.  
<https://www.aracy.org.au/the-nest-in-action/the-nest-overview>

- Goldfeld, S., Henderson, K., & Leuenberger, M. (2013). Blue Sky Research Project - Shifting Children's Developmental Trajectories Final Report - Phase One. Melbourne: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.
- Heckman, J. (2022) *Invest in Early Childhood Development: Reduce Deficits, Strengthen the Economy*. Heckman Equation Organisation. <https://heckmanequation.org/resource/invest-in-early-childhood-development-reduce-deficits-strengthen-the-economy/>
- Higgins D.J, Mathews B., Pacella R. et al. (2023) The prevalence and nature of multi-type child maltreatment in Australia . *Med J Aust* 2023; 218 (6 Suppl): S19-S25.
- Honisett S., Cahill R., Callard N, Eapen V., Eastwood J., Goodhue R., Graham C, Heery L., Hiscock H., Hodgins M., Hollonds A., Jose K., Newcomb D., O'Loughlin G., Ostojic K., Sydenham E., Tayton S., Woolfenden S. and Goldfeld S. (2023). Child and family hubs: an important 'front door' for equitable support for families across Australia. National Child and Family Hubs Network. <https://doi.org/10.25374/MCRI.22031951>
- Hurley, P., Matthews, H., & Pennicuik, S. (2022). *Deserts and oases: How accessible is childcare?* Mitchell Institute, Victoria University. <https://www.vu.edu.au/sites/default/files/how-accessible-is-childcare-report.pdf>
- Impact Economics and Policy (August, 2022) *Child Care Subsidy Activity Test: Undermining Child Development and Parental Participation*. Impact Economics and Policy <https://www.impacteconomics.com.au/home/education>
- Karpelis, G. (2020) *Evaluation of the effectiveness of the Goodstart Early Learning Intensive Emotional Support Plans*. Adelaide University, Australia. [https://www.aracy.org.au/publications-resources/command/download\\_file/id/468/filename/WAIMH\\_Article\\_GoodStart.pdf](https://www.aracy.org.au/publications-resources/command/download_file/id/468/filename/WAIMH_Article_GoodStart.pdf)
- Lansdown G. (2005) Can you hear me? The right of young children to participate in decisions affecting them. Working Papers in Early Childhood Development 36. Bernard van Leer Foundation, The Hague, The Netherlands [http://lst-iiiep.iiiep-unesco.org/cgi-bin/wwwi32.exe/\[in=epidoc1.in\]?t2000=023480\(100\)](http://lst-iiiep.iiiep-unesco.org/cgi-bin/wwwi32.exe/[in=epidoc1.in]?t2000=023480(100))
- MacNaughton, G., Smith, K. & Laurence, H. (2003) *ACT Children's Strategy Consulting with Children Birth to Eight Years of Age Hearing young children's voices*. Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood Faculty of Education. The University of Melbourne <https://s25924.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/CEIEC-Hearing-Young-Childrens-Voices.pdf>
- McDonald, M., Moore, T., & Goldfeld, S. (2012). Sustained nurse home visiting for families and children: A review of effective programs. Prepared for Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth. Parkville, Victoria: The Royal Children's Hospital Centre for Community Child Health, Murdoch Childrens Research Institute.
- Melhuish, Edward & Ereky-Stevens, Katharina & Petrogiannis, Konstantinos & Ariescu, A. & Penderi, Efthymia & Rentzou, Konstantina & Tawell, Alice & Slot, Pauline & Broekhuizen, Martine & Leseman, Paul. (2015). *A review of research on the effects of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) upon child development*. CARE project; Curriculum Quality Analysis and Impact Review of European Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). <https://ecec->

[care.org/fileadmin/careproject/Publications/reports/CARE\\_WP4\\_D4\\_1\\_review\\_of\\_effects\\_of\\_ecec.pdf](https://care.org/fileadmin/careproject/Publications/reports/CARE_WP4_D4_1_review_of_effects_of_ecec.pdf)

- Moore, T. G., McDonald, M., & Sanjeevan, S. (2013). Evidence-based service modules for a sustained nurse home visiting program: A literature review. Prepared for the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth. Parkville, Victoria: The Centre for Community Child Health at Murdoch Childrens Research Institute and The Royal Children's Hospital.
- Moore, T.G. (2021a). Core care conditions for children and families: Implications for integrated child and family services [brief]. Prepared for Social Ventures Australia. Parkville, Victoria: Centre for Community Child Health, Murdoch Children's Research Institute, The Royal Children's Hospital.
- Moore, T.G. (2021b). Developing holistic integrated early learning services for young children and families experiencing socio-economic vulnerability [brief]. Prepared for Social Ventures Australia. Parkville, Victoria: Centre for Community Child Health, Murdoch Children's Research Institute, The Royal Children's Hospital.
- Moore, T.G., McDonald, M., Sanjeevan, S. and Price, A. (2012). Sustained nurse home visiting for families and children: A literature review of effective processes and strategies. Prepared for Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth. Parkville, Victoria: The Royal Children's Hospital Centre for Community Child Health, Murdoch Childrens Research Institute.
- National Early Language and Literacy Coalition (2021). *Proposed National Early Language and Literacy Strategy*. National Early Language and Literacy Coalition.  
<https://speechpathologyaustralia.cld.bz/Proposed-National-Early-Language-and-Literacy-Strategy-WEB/4-5/>
- National Child & Family Hubs Network (2021) *Integrated Child and Family Hubs - a Plan for Australia Submission*
- Productivity Commission 2022, Review of the National School Reform Agreement, Study Report, Canberra.
- Scott, J.G et al. (2023). The association between child maltreatment and mental disorders in the Australian Child Maltreatment Study. *Med J Aust*. 218 (6)
- Sollis, K. (2019). Measuring child deprivation and opportunity in Australia: applying the NEST framework to develop a measure of deprivation and opportunity for children using the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children. Canberra: Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth.
- Sparks, S. (2020), *ENGAGING CHILDREN'S VOICES IN THE EARLY YEARS PRACTICE GUIDELINES*. Brotherhood of St Laurence, Victoria.  
[https://hippyaustralia.bsl.org.au/fileadmin/user\\_upload/News\\_and\\_important\\_information/Children\\_s\\_Voices/CVLT\\_Practice\\_Guidelines.pdf](https://hippyaustralia.bsl.org.au/fileadmin/user_upload/News_and_important_information/Children_s_Voices/CVLT_Practice_Guidelines.pdf)
- The Australian Child Maltreatment Study, (2023) <https://www.acms.au/>
- The Front Project (2019) A Smart Investment for a Smarter Australia: Economic analysis of universal early childhood education in the year before school in Australia. The Front Project.

<https://www.thefrontproject.org.au/images/downloads/ECO%20ANALYSIS%20Full%20Report.pdf>

The Front Project. (2021). *Work and Play: Understanding How Australian Families Experience Early Childhood and care*. The Front Project.

<https://www.thefrontproject.org.au/media/attachments/2021/06/16/work-and-play-report-final.pdf>

The Front Project (2023) *Funding Models and Levers for Early Childhood Education and Care*. The Front Project. <https://www.thefrontproject.org.au/media/attachments/2022/08/30/eccec-funding-models-and-levers.pdf>

# Attachment A:

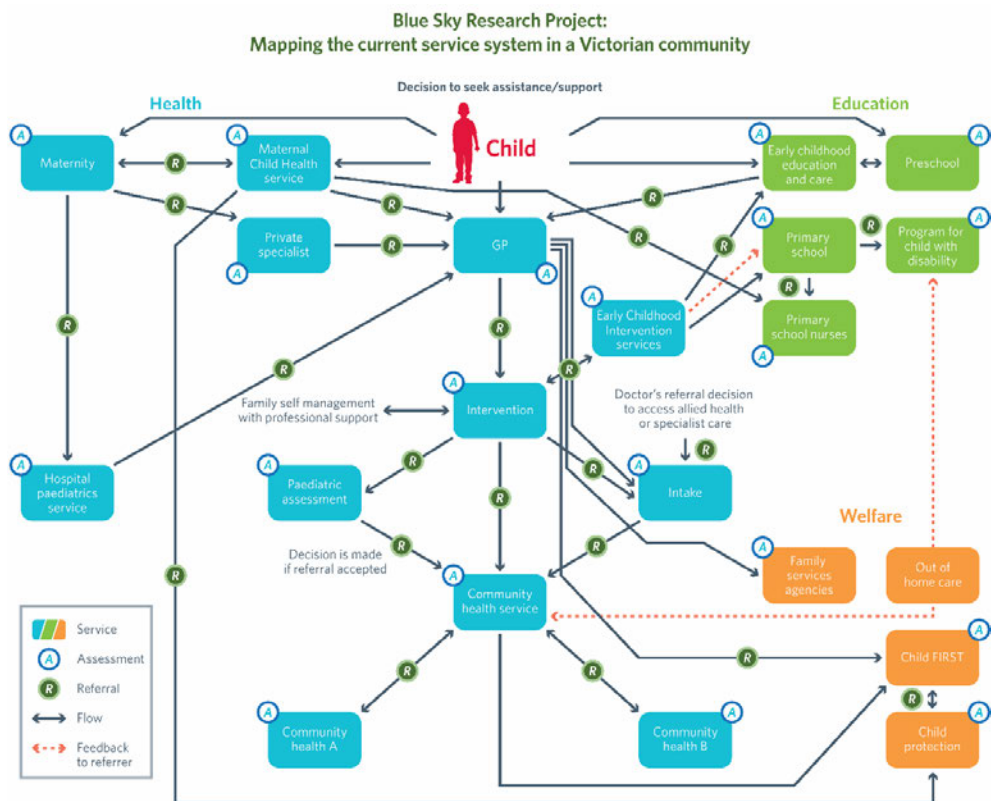


Figure 1 Diagram from Goldfeld et. al (2013)

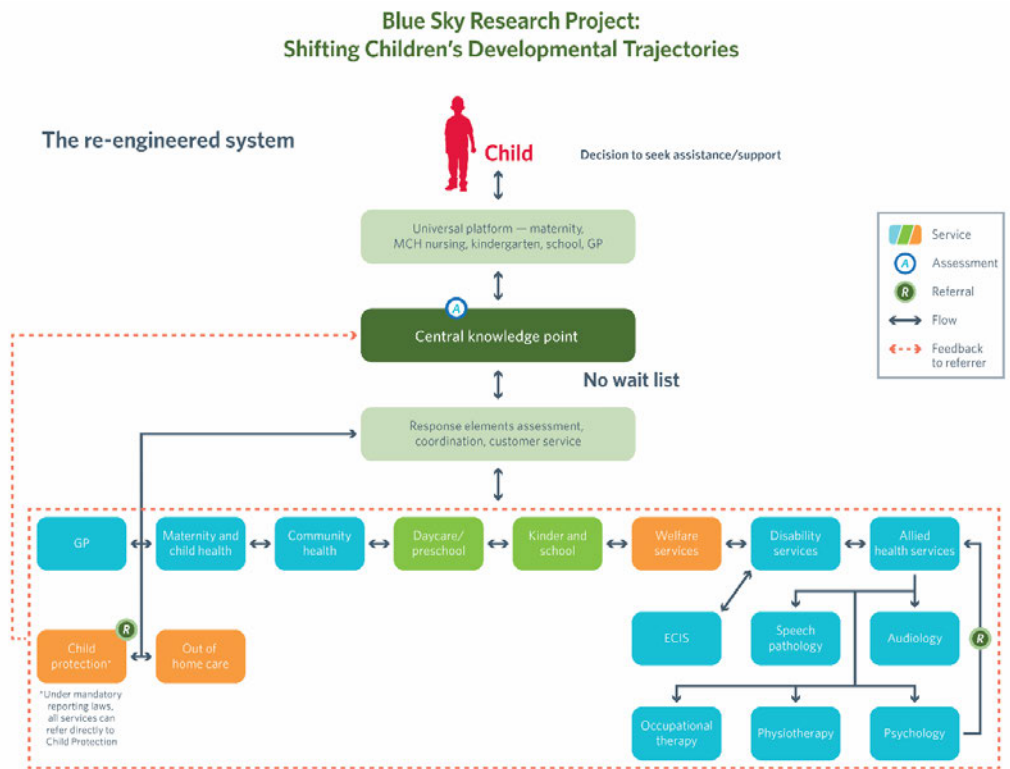


Figure 2 Diagram from Goldfeld et. al (2013)

## Attachment B:

# The Nest *and* the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

### How does the Nest correspond to the UNCRC?

The Nest is a way of thinking about the wellbeing of children and young people. It is a conceptual framework that answers the question “what does it take for a child or young person to have a good life?” It looks at six broad domains that work together to create overall wellbeing. To thrive, a child must be doing well in all six domains.

The UNCRC also looks at children’s needs across a number of wellbeing areas. These correspond closely to the domains of the Nest. Because the Nest domains are connected and interdependent, the Articles of the UNCRC tend to cross over more than one Nest domain. For example, Article 6 states that all children have the right to live a full life. Wellbeing under the Nest would say that a “full life” requires a child to be doing well in all Nest domains, therefore all domains are relevant to this Article.

As well as specifying what children need to thrive, the UNCRC also:

- assigns roles and responsibilities to governments, families, and “organisations concerned with children”
- covers the administrative requirements for signatories to the Convention, and
- espouses general human rights principles of inclusion.

These things are not explicitly contained in the Nest, as the Nest is a child-centred framework that focuses on what a child needs and not specifically who is responsible for providing that and how. This was a deliberate choice to reflect the primacy of the child or young person, and to recognise that a child’s needs can be filled in many ways depending on that individual child’s circumstances.

In short, the Nest covers **what** a child needs to thrive. The UNCRC also considers what a child needs, then goes further to prescribe **who** should be involved in providing for a child’s needs and to some extent **how** this should be done.

UNCRC Article	Corresponding Nest domain OR general principle/administrative responsibility
Article 1 Everyone under 18 years of age has all the rights in this Convention.	General principle



Article 2 The Convention applies to everyone whatever their race, religion, abilities, whatever they think or say, whatever type of family they come from.	General principle
Article 3 All organisations concerned with children should work towards what is best for each child.	General principle
Article 4 Governments should make these rights available to children.	General principle
Article 5 Governments should respect the rights and responsibilities of families to guide their children so that, as they grow up, they learn to use their rights properly.	Participating
Article 6 Children have the right to live a full life. Governments should ensure that children survive and develop healthily.	All domains
Article 7 Children have the right to a legally registered name and nationality. Children also have the right to know their parents and, as far as possible, to be cared for by them.	Positive sense of identity and culture Valued, loved and safe
Article 8 Governments should respect a child's right to a name, a nationality and family ties.	Positive sense of identity and culture Valued, loved and safe
Article 9 Children should not be separated from their parents unless it is for their own good. For example, if a parent is mistreating or neglecting a child. Children whose parents have separated have the right to stay in contact with both parents, unless this might harm the child.	Valued, loved and safe Positive sense of identity and culture
Article 10 Families who live in different countries should be allowed to move between those countries so that parents and children can stay in contact, or get back together as a family.	Valued, loved and safe Positive sense of identity and culture Participating
Article 11 Governments should take steps to stop children being taken out of their own country illegally.	Valued, loved and safe Positive sense of identity and culture
Article 12 Children have the right to say what they think should happen when adults are making decisions that affect them and to have their opinions taken into account.	Participating
Article 13 Children have the right to get and to share information, as long as the information is not damaging to them or to others.	Participating Learning
Article 14 Children have the right to think and believe what they want and to practise their religion, as long as they are not stopping other people from enjoying their rights. Parents should guide children on these matters.	Participating Positive sense of identity and culture
Article 15 Children have the right to meet with other children and young people and to join groups and organisations, as long as this does not stop other people from enjoying their rights.	Participating
Article 16 Children have the right to privacy. The law should protect them from attacks against their way of life, their good name, their family and their home.	Valued, loved and safe Positive sense of identity and culture
Article 17 Children have the right to reliable information from the media. Mass media such as television, radio and newspapers should provide information that children can understand and should not promote materials that could harm children.	Participating Learning
Article 18 Both parents share responsibility for bringing up their children and should always consider what is best for each child. Governments should help parents by providing services to support them, especially if both parents work.	Valued, loved and safe

Article 19 Governments should ensure that children are properly cared for and protect them from violence, abuse and neglect by their parents, or anyone else who looks after them.	Valued, loved and safe
Article 20 Children who cannot be looked after by their own family must be looked after properly by people who respect their religion, culture and language.	Positive sense of identity and culture Valued, loved and safe
Article 21 When children are adopted the first concern must be what is best for them. The same rules should apply whether children are adopted in the country of their birth or if they are taken to live in another country.	Valued, loved and safe
Article 22 Children who come into a country as refugees should have the same rights as children who are born in that country.	Valued, loved and safe Positive sense of identity and culture All other domains
Article 23 Children who have any kind of disability should receive special care and support so that they can live a full and independent life.	All domains
Article 24 Children have the right to good quality health care, clean water, nutritious food and a clean environment so that they will stay healthy. Richer countries should help poorer countries achieve this.	Material basics
Article 25 Children who are looked after by their local authority rather than their parents should have their situation reviewed regularly.	Valued, loved and safe All other domains
Article 26 The Government should provide extra money for the children of families in need.	Material basics
Article 27 Children have the right to a standard of living that is good enough to meet their physical and mental needs. The government should help families who cannot afford to provide this.	Material basics
Article 28 Children have the right to an education. Discipline in schools should respect children's human dignity. Primary education should be free. Wealthier countries should help poorer countries achieve this.	Learning Participating Positive sense of identity and culture
Article 29 Education should develop each child's personality and talents to the full. It should encourage children to respect their parents, their cultures and other cultures.	Learning Participating Positive sense of identity and culture
Article 30 Children have the right to learn and use the language and customs of their families, whether or not these are shared by the majority of the people in the country where they live, as long as this does not harm others.	Learning Participating Positive sense of identity and culture
Article 31 Children have the right to relax, play and to join in a wide range of leisure activities.	Participating
Article 32 Governments should protect children from work that is dangerous or that might harm their health or education.	Valued, loved and safe
Article 33 Governments should provide ways of protecting children from dangerous drugs.	Valued, loved and safe Healthy
Article 34 Governments should protect children from sexual abuse.	Valued, loved and safe
Article 35 Governments should make sure that children are not abducted or sold.	Valued, loved and safe
Article 36 Children should be protected from any activities that could harm their development.	Valued, loved and safe Healthy



Article 37 Children who break the law should not be treated cruelly. They should not be put in a prison with adults and should be able to keep in contact with their family.	Valued, loved and safe Participating Positive sense of identity and culture
Article 38 Governments should not allow children under 15 to join the army. Children in war zones should receive special protection.	Valued, loved and safe
Article 39 Children who have been neglected or abused should receive special help to restore their self-respect.	Valued, loved and safe Healthy Participating Positive sense of identity and culture
Article 40 Children who are accused of breaking the law should receive legal help. Prison sentences for children should only be used for the most serious offences.	Valued, loved and safe
Article 41 If the laws of a particular country protects children better than the articles of the Convention, then those laws should override the Convention.	General principle
Article 42 Governments should make the Convention known to all parents and children.	General principle
Articles 43-53 These articles cover how governments, the United Nations (including the Committee on the Rights of the Child) and other organisations should work to make sure all children enjoy all their rights and report on their progress.	Administrative responsibilities

If you would like further discussion, please contact the ARACY team via [enquiries@aracy.org.au](mailto:enquiries@aracy.org.au)

## Attachment C:

# The Nest and the OECD Children’s Wellbeing Framework

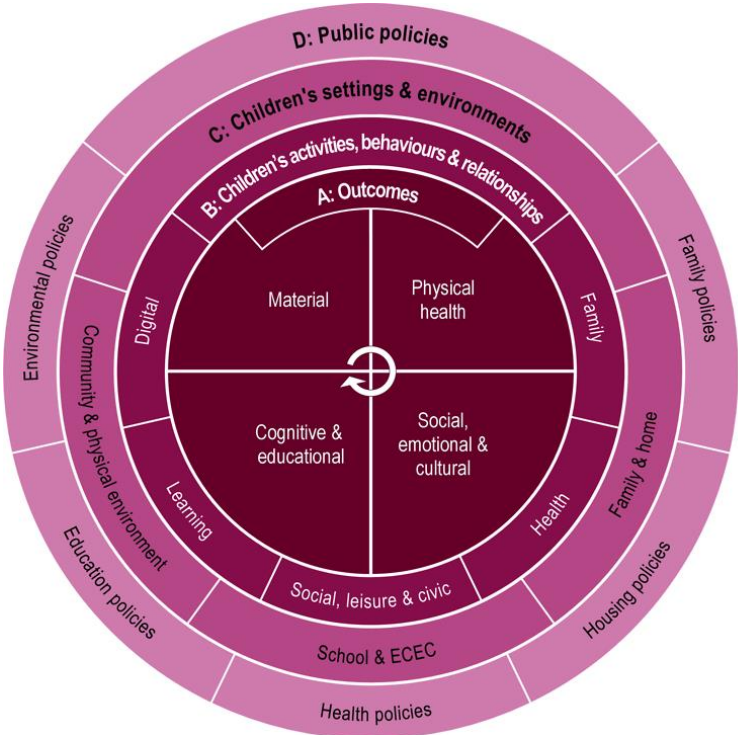
The Nest and the OECD Children’s Wellbeing Framework share many important characteristics.

Both are aspirational and present similar outcomes for optimal child wellbeing. They are both informed by a Bronfenbrenner lens, emphasising the holistic, interrelated and socio-cultural-environmental influences on children’s wellbeing. Shared principles include being child-centred, including children’s perspectives and viewing outcomes as responsive to age and are developmentally appropriate. Where the Nest categorises outcomes and influences into six different domains that expand from the individual child, their family and broader community, the OECD articulates four domains for wellbeing monitoring (material living standards, physical health, social, emotional cultural outcomes and cognitive & educational) and how different policy and environment settings impact on these.

The two notable domain additions from the Nest that are not exclusive domains in the OECD Wellbeing Framework are Identity and Culture and Participation. The Nest created all six domains based on consultation with over 4000 children, young people, parents and carers and child wellbeing experts in Australia. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in particular noted the need for identity and culture to be valued as it’s own separate domain. The OECD Wellbeing Framework was not designed on the basis of community consultation, however reflecting children’s views is noted as a core measurement principle in the framework.

The OECD Wellbeing Framework focuses on avenues for child wellbeing measurement, whereas the Nest offers aspirational outcomes without the guidance of the types of enabling factors that may produce these outcomes, such as the OECD Wellbeing Framework’s specific reference to public policies. In addition the OECD Wellbeing Framework suggests advice for measuring wellbeing, drawing attention to measurements of inequalities in the distribution of child wellbeing and being responsive to the needs of children from diverse backgrounds or in vulnerable positions.

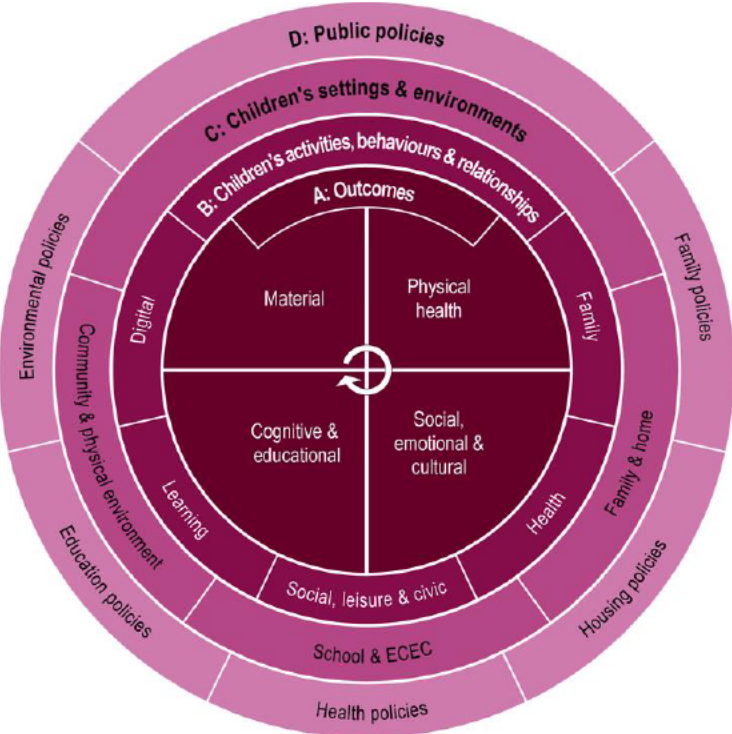
In summary, the Nest provides qualifying descriptors for a vision of child wellbeing categorised into six different domains across an individual, family and community level, whereas the OECD Wellbeing Framework targets four domains and how various ecological structures can support the success of wellbeing outcome measurements. The Nest is best placed to articulate what wellbeing looks like to Australian children and young people, and the OECD Wellbeing Framework can navigate the various structures that can be used to contribute and measure wellbeing outcomes.



- Measures and indicators should:**
- Be **child-centred**
  - Be **age- and stage-sensitive**
  - Reflect **children's views**
  - Reflect **contemporary childhoods**
  - Capture **stability and change** in children's lives
  - Capture **inequalities**
  - Be responsive to the needs of children from **diverse backgrounds** and/or in **vulnerable positions**



<p><b>OECD Children's Wellbeing Framework Levels</b></p>	<p><b>ARACY's Nest corresponding sections</b></p> <p>Material basics Child level, family level, community level                      Learning child level, family level, community level                      Valued, loved &amp; safe child level, family level, community level                      Healthy child level, family level community level                      Participating child level, family level community level                      Identity and culture child level, family level, community level</p>
<p><b>Level A: Outcomes</b></p>	
<p><b>Material</b></p>	<p>Material Basics: Child Level (feels provided for)</p>
<p><b>Physical Health</b></p>	<p>Healthy: Child Level (physically healthy and active)</p>
<p><b>Social, emotional &amp; cultural</b></p>	<p>Healthy: Child level (emotionally and mentally well supported)</p>
	<p>Participating: Child level (plays, has friends)</p>
	<p>Identity and culture: Child level (belonging, positive sense of self, positive cultural and spiritual identity)</p>
<p><b>Cognitive &amp; educational</b></p>	<p>Learning: Child level (Goes to school or early education, enjoys learning)</p>
	<p>Participating: Child level (feels heard, opportunities to have a say)</p>
<p><b>Level B: Children's Activities, Behaviours &amp; Responsibilities</b></p>	
<p><b>Digital</b></p>	<p>Participating: Family level (appropriate online activities)</p>
<p><b>Learning</b></p>	<p>Learning: Community level (school supports individual learning needs)</p>
	<p>Participating: Child level (plays, has friends, feels heard, opportunities to have a say)</p>
<p><b>Social, leisure &amp; civic</b></p>	<p>Participation: Community level (community clubs and groups, helps and is helped by friends and neighbours, social gatherings)</p>
	<p>Identity and culture: Family level (Family, cultural, religious, or linguistic practices)</p>
	<p>Valued, loved and safe: Family level (environmentally aware habits)</p>

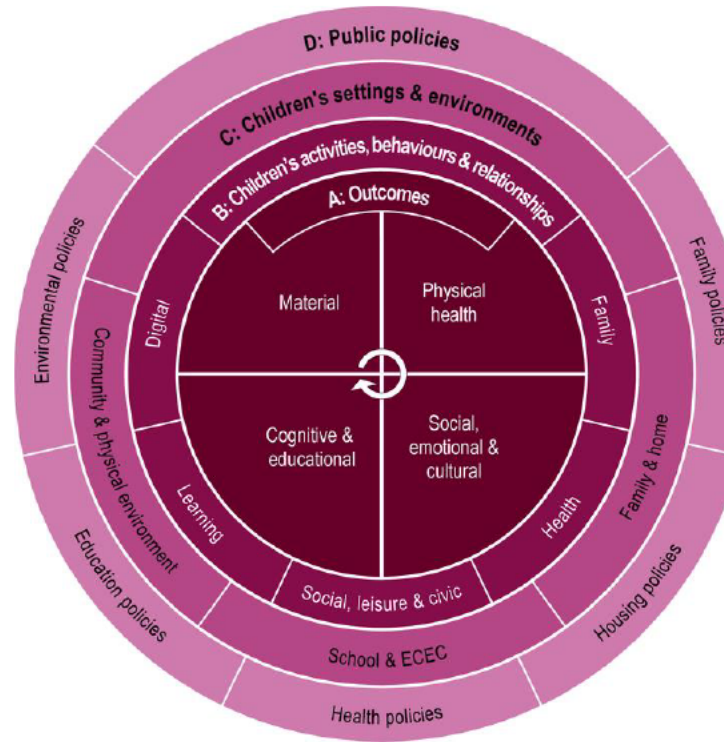


- Measures and indicators should:**
- Be child-centred
  - Be age- and stage-sensitive
  - Reflect children's views
  - Reflect contemporary childhoods
  - Capture stability and change in children's lives
  - Capture inequalities
  - Be responsive to the needs of children from diverse backgrounds and/or in vulnerable positions





	Learning: Community level (unstructured play, learning activities outside of school)
<b>Health</b>	Healthy: Family level (Family's physical health, family's mental and emotional health, healing from harmful experiences, healthy eating)
	Health: Community level (health services available when needed, sport or outdoor play)
	Valued, loved and safe: Community level (protects environment)
	Material basics: Family level (appropriate food and clothes, enough money for necessities)
<b>Family</b>	Learning: Family level (spends quality time with family)
	Identity and culture: Family level (Family traditions)
	Participating: Family level (Family activities and games, family group decisions)
	Healthy: Family level (Family's physical health, family's mental and emotional health, healing from harmful experiences)
	Valued, Loved and Safe: Family level (positive family interactions)



- Measures and indicators should:**
- Be child-centred
  - Be age- and stage-sensitive
  - Reflect children's views
  - Reflect contemporary childhoods
  - Capture stability and change in children's lives
  - Capture inequalities
  - Be responsive to the needs of children from diverse backgrounds and/or in vulnerable positions

**Level C: Children's settings & environments**

<b>Community &amp; physical environment</b>	Participating: Community level (community clubs and groups, social gatherings)
	Healthy: Community level (health services available when needed)
	Valued, loved & safe: Community level (trusting relationships, feels safe at school and in neighbourhood, protects environment and climate)
	Identity and culture: Community level (Connection to community and culture, identity is supported and respected)
	Material basics: Community level (Access to open spaces in nature, access to transport and local services, stable and suitable housing)
<b>School &amp; ECEC</b>	Learning: Community level (school supports individual learning needs)
<b>Family &amp; home</b>	Learning: Family level (family values learning, spends quality time with family)
	Valued, Loved and safe: Family level (positive family interactions, house is safe)
	Healthy: Family level (family's physical family's mental and emotional health, healthy eating, healing from harm,)
	Participating: Family level (family activities and games, family group decisions)
	Identity and culture: Family level (family traditions, family cultural, religious or linguistic practices)



OECD Measurement principles	ARACY's Nest Comparison/equivalent
Child-centred	Nest and common approach are child-centred

	Material basics: Family level (Family working or looking for work, enough money for necessities)		Age and stage sensitive	Common approach provides age and stage sensitive versions of Nest language	
	Material basics: Community level (stable and suitable housing)		Reflect children's views	Nest was built on consultation with 4000 children and common approach centred entirely on children's views	
<b>Level D: Public Policies</b>			Reflect contemporary childhoods	Nest has been regularly updated since 2010	
Environmental policies	Valued, loved and safe: Community level (protects environment and climate)		Capture stability and change in children's lives	Common approach provides age and stage sensitive versions of Nest language	
	Material basics: Community level (access to open spaces in nature)		Capture inequality	N/A for the Nest or Common approach as it is individually strengths based and not a tool to track or compare inequality across different demographics.	
Education policies	Learning: Community level (school supports individual learning needs)		Be responsive to needs of children from diverse backgrounds and vulnerable positions	Common approach uses children at the centre to identify needs and next steps	
Health policies	Healthy: Community level (health services available when needed)				
Housing policies	Material basics: Community level (stable and suitable housing)				
Family policies	Material basics: Community level (access to transport and local service, stable and suitable housing)				
	Material basics: Family level (enough money for necessities, family working or looking for work)				
	Identity and culture: Community level (identity is respected and supported)				
	Healthy: Family level (Family's physical health, family's mental and emotional health, healthy eating, healing from harmful experiences)				