



**Ben Blackburn Racing submission
on the Australian Government's
The Early Years Strategy
Discussion Paper**



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The Early Years Strategy Discussion Paper

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To whom it may concern,

PUBLIC SUBMISSION

I am extremely pleased to provide this public submission in response to the Australian Government's release of its *The Early Years Strategy Discussion Paper* for public consultation. Feedback on this paper is sought by Sunday 30th April 2023.

I acknowledge that this discussion paper and process will shape the way that the Commonwealth Government understands what the Australian community wants for our young children, a policy vision, what we want them to achieve in terms of outcomes and what we should prioritise to ensure the best outcomes for all Australian children including priority reform areas moving forward.

I note that public consultation on this discussion paper is an opportunity to work together and share in the ownership of a new Early Years Strategy and Ben Blackburn Racing values the opportunity to make a contribution to this process.

A focus on breaking down silos

The Early Years Strategy Discussion Paper (February 2023) on page 6 noted that:

"Many of these Commonwealth early childhood policies and programs and their funding are delivered across different departments and agencies. This structure tends to create silos that discourage collaboration across organisations and may hamper the Commonwealth's efforts to deliver the best outcomes for children and families".

This is a sensible acknowledge by the Australian Government and Ben Blackburn Racing welcomes any additional policy development and efforts to break down silos that discourage collaboration across organisations and to help to ensure that the major overarching focus is on the delivery of the best outcomes for Australian children, their families and caregivers.

Ben Blackburn Racing supports an evidence-based approach when it comes to governments developing and implementing public policy.

New policy approaches on tackling funding silos

In an effort to drive shared objectives, some governments are providing regional authorities more flexibility to deploy funds and coordinate multiple siloed funding streams around specific community needs in the jurisdiction.

Government agencies often default to working as single-purpose organisations, with inconsistent horizontal coordination between agencies. This siloed approach can create costly inefficiencies when it comes to common problems and ultimately lead to poor public policy outcomes for Australians.

Some policy measures and initiatives around the globe to help to address this and to break down these funding silos has included:

- More **issue-focused funding initiatives** that multiple agencies draw on to tackle wicked problems.
- Emergence of **new governance models** to oversee shared-funding programs.
- Increased **interagency funding mechanisms** to address common challenges across agencies.
- **Greater funding authority** delegated to local/regional governments.

As some detailed recent 2023 Deloitte research '*Tackling funding silos*' has highlighted some additional measures worthy of consideration by governments and policy decision-makers include:

- **Adopt an outside-in view.** By putting themselves in the shoes of citizens and businesses transacting with government, agencies can better understand the needs of the constituencies they serve that transcend individual business units and agencies. These needs can inform the development of a road map for targeted collaboration initiatives.
- **Create a culture of collaboration in funding.** Governments can encourage collaboration by establishing cross-sectoral committees or working groups to encourage those working on similar issues to promote shared-funding mechanisms.
- **Utilize data and technology to measure impact and drive outcomes.** Data-driven processes can help enable shared governance, track the impact of cross-sector initiatives, and pivot goals as required to deliver desired outcomes.
- **Shift from siloed to shared governance models.** Governments can promote shared-funding models by revisiting historical governance policies and regulatory frameworks that hinder the scope of cross-sector financing.

One of the best silo busters in the business is Singapore design professional Mr Alexander Lau. Mr Lau has more than 25 years of experience in design and has been undertaking ground-breaking work for the Innovation Lab within the Public Sector Transformation Cluster, Public Service Division, Prime Ministers' Office, Singapore.

He delivered the keynote address at the 2019 IPAA National Conference held in Darwin.

Mr Lau highlighted his role in project design and delivery at the Singapore Public Service Division including *Moments of Life (Families)* — a project which used ethnographic studies to understand the needs of parents with children aged 0–6 years, generating insights and design principles to guide an app design, creating citizen narratives to help a 15-agency committee align on common goals for the citizen, and facilitating a 4-agency Business Process Re-engineering to align their process to the new app.

In another article, *Innovating Singapore: One lab's journey to change government for good*, Mr Lau said that “demystifying innovation tools and partnering agencies to walk their innovation journeys made innovation go viral in Singapore’s Public Service.”

Mr Lau describes how Innovation Lab was given a mandate to build an empathetic Public Service that puts citizens at the centre of all policy making setting the tone for their “do first, apologise later” DNA which he said is “a critical innovation mindset needed to challenge public service culture.”

There is a similar need that currently exists within the Australian Public Service (APS) for disruption and cultural change to help to break down the bureaucratic silos and hierarchies that constrain our national capacity to fix common problems and to improve the lives of many Australians including our children and young people.

The National Early Learning Framework

Australia’s *National Early Learning Framework (2022)* conveys the highest expectations for all children’s learning, development and wellbeing from birth to five years and through the transitions to school. It communicates these expectations through the following five learning outcomes:

- Children have a strong sense of identity.
- Children are connected with and contribute to their world.
- Children have a strong sense of wellbeing.
- Children are confident and involved learners.
- Children are effective communicators.

This national framework provides broad direction for early childhood educators to facilitate all children’s learning, development and wellbeing and ensure children are supported, celebrated, and connected to their community.

It also guides educators in their professional decision-making and assists in planning, implementing and evaluating high quality educational programs and practices in early childhood settings. It also underpins the implementation of relational and place-based pedagogies and curriculum relevant to each local community and all children in the early childhood setting.

How children learn

Children's learning is dynamic, complex and holistic. This means that cognitive, linguistic, physical, social, emotional, personal, spiritual and creative aspects of learning are all intricately linked.

Play-based learning capitalises on children's natural inclination to be curious, explore and learn. Children actively construct their own understandings that contribute to their own learning. In play experiences children integrate their emotions, thinking and motivation that assists to strengthen brain functioning.

They exercise their agency, intentionality, capacity to initiate and lead learning, and their right to participate in decisions that affect them, including about their learning.

Play-based learning:

- Allows for the expression of personality and uniqueness.
- Offers opportunities for multimodal play.
- Enhances thinking skills and lifelong learning dispositions such as curiosity, persistence and creativity.
- Enables children to make connections between prior experiences and new learning and to transfer learning from one experience to another.
- Assists children to develop and build relationships and friendships.
- Develops knowledge acquisition and concepts in authentic contexts.
- Builds a sense of identity.
- Strengthens self-regulation, and physical and mental wellbeing.

Machinery of government

Part of the issue and the 'challenge of reform' if you like in Australia also lays in the complex machinery of government and when a new Cabinet is announced which is never put together in a uniform, consistent or particularly rational fashion with the allocation of Ministerial portfolios and Assistant Ministers for example.

This reality can often present challenges for policy reform and for key decision makers when dealing with multi-agency and cross jurisdictional matters and issues.

Governments change, Ministers come and go, portfolio responsibilities are shifted, reshuffled, or completely removed altogether and new agencies created which invariably moves the policy goal posts around, none of which is conducive to innovation, a robust and rigorous mindset or frank and fearless independent advice from within the Australian Public Service.

Successive Australian Governments from both sides of politics over the past four decades have had a bad tendency to overlook important national youth policy objectives and reforms – instead preferring to pursue quick fix education policies during election campaign cycles in order to pursue short-term political expediency and political objectives.

This enigma which is often centred in the Canberra bubble along with an antiquated mindset within the Canberra bureaucracy that somehow 'Government always knows best' has at times led to some very poor public policy outcomes for Australia's children, their families and caregivers and unfortunately over many years has done Australia a great disservice.

THE EARLY YEARS STRATEGY DISCUSSION PAPER – QUESTION 3 – What mix of outcomes are the most important to include in The Early Years Strategy?

Let boys be boys and our kids be kids

What I mean by that is let them play in the sandpit at preschools and then later on play football and rugby league at recess in the school playgrounds and tackle each other in the mud and get their hands a bit dirty – don't wrap them up in cotton wool – let them get off their iPhones, iPads and Xbox after school, and explore the nature and wonder outside, ride on their BMX bikes, graze their knees, get into trouble like some young boys and girls do – to be curious, to explore and to learn – these are all important life skills later on when they become adults and need to display different leadership qualities, grittiness and resilience in complex problem solving scenarios including in the workplace.

Ben Blackburn Racing strongly believes that *every* Australian child has the right to be heard and given a voice and agency to reach their full potential.

We also believe that a strong, evidence-based and inclusive Early Years Strategy and that a thriving and highly valued early childhood learning sector can play an important role in ensuring that remains the case for future generations of young Australians to come.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to make a contribution through this public submission on the Australian Government's *The Early Years Strategy Discussion Paper*.

