

CM number	HWQLD/23/115	Due Date	30 April 2023
Approved by:	[REDACTED], Health and Wellbeing Queensland (HWQld)		
Request	HWQld response to the Early Years Strategy (Department of Social Services)		
Request from:	The Australian Government is seeking feedback and ideas to develop the Early Years Strategy which is an opportunity to have a national conversation about what we want for young children and their families, and where efforts should be directed to achieve these aspirations.		

Survey Questions

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

The proposed structure for the Early Years Strategy will provide a strong framework for action and reform. HWQld is pleased to see that Implementation Action Plans and an Outcomes and Evaluation Framework will be developed to identify specific targets and outcomes that will provide true impact. It would be useful to consider how upstream, social-determinant focused, cross-cutting actions that may contribute to more than one Policy Priority area, or more than one outcome area, can be applied within the proposed structure.

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

An Australia that encourages and enables all children to reach their full potential.

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

- Systems change across portfolios.
- Strengthening policies to foster secure and healthy environments for ideal growth, learning and development, acknowledging cultural identity, language and values.

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

- Social determinants of health and the patterns of interaction between them – addressing housing, employment, education, justice, welfare, recovery systems and responsive health and social support services is imperative to reducing child health inequity and adverse childhood experiences.
- Prevention models of care – ensuring preventative care is embedded across systems and sectors to facilitate early identification and intervention.
- Exploration of ‘stacking’ early interventions across the early years of a child’s life to maximise impacts on child outcomes. This includes measuring the collective impact of multiple evidence-based strategies rather than the efficacy of single interventions only.
- Integrated, community based and local solutions – collaboration between health and other support services is needed to meet the holistic needs of families. Valuing community and consumer voice to inform or lead solutions helps ensure a strengths-based approach where existing beliefs, knowledge and social capital can be respected and built upon.
- Healthy built environments – the physical environment in which a child grows impacts their future educational attainment and long-term health and development.
- Food Security – healthy food provision across different systems is closely linked to an increased risk of chronic disease. Consideration needs to be given to access, availability and affordability of healthy, good quality food which can also impact provision.

- Workforce – recognition of the importance of a skilled and diverse workforce with capacity to meet the needs of children and families.
- Supporting breastfeeding-friendly environments – ensuring breastfeeding is considered the preferred choice for women and their babies.

5. What could the Commonwealth do to improve outcomes for children – particularly those who are born or raised in more vulnerable and or disadvantaged communities?

- Increase investment in preventive healthcare – provide MBS rebates for preventative health for GPs, nurses and allied health professionals. HWQLD recommends increasing the number/frequency of MBS covered visits for allied health to improve service provision for children and their parents with chronic disease. Improving access to allied health and practice nurses to provide preventive healthcare will provide long-term cost benefits and reduce future risk of chronic disease. It will also reduce the burden on GPs in rural and regional areas and have long-term community benefits.
- Invest in awareness of preventive healthcare across the first 2000 days including federally funded preventative health programs such as Australian Breastfeeding Association, Triple P and other behaviour change programs.
- Implement legislation and regulation that supports the WHO code for breastfeeding to improve normalisation of breastfeeding.
- Implement regulation of ‘junk food’ advertising on television and social media for children in daylight hours.
- Implement taxation of Sugar Sweetened Beverages to reduce overall consumption and improve health outcomes.

6. What areas do you think the commonwealth could focus on improving coordination and collaboration in developing policies for children and families?

- Stronger collaboration between systems to improve healthy environments that are led by the community.
- An increased focus on active transport including in regional towns, to support healthier transport options that are accessible and equitable to all.
- Addressing the factors that create the conditions that lead to food insecurity.

7. What principles should be included in the strategy?

- Equity – HWQLD has co-developed an evidence-based Queensland Equity Framework which offers a strategic and systemic change approach to understanding underlying causes and joint ways to interrupt cycles of disadvantage.
- Child and family-centred health outcomes.
- Evidence-based – measure effectiveness, connect learnings and translate research into practice.
- Co-design - universal solutions that are localised and adapted by communities and a strong regional and rural focus.

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