



# **The Early Years Strategy**

**Consultation submission  
April 2023**

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# Place-based community-led change for children

## Overview

Logan Together is a community movement committed to the wellbeing of every child in Logan from 0 to 8 years of age. Our big goal is to see Logan's children happy, healthy, and thriving now, and for generations to come.

In learning from what is currently working in Logan and what we need to do more of, we offer five policy priorities that should be at the heart of a national approach to the Early Years. These policy priorities would create the conditions for real impact:

- **Place-based, community-led solutions and shared decision-making**
- **Quality offerings and strong practice principles**
- **A strengthened and energised Early Years workforce**
- **Data to support shared decision-making**
- **Resource allocation and procurement to enable holistic wellbeing**

## Background and context

*We've come together and we've said – "We're not really happy with what's happening in Logan" This about taking power back and sharing decision-making in a culturally sensitive way. We are asking that our people are able to assume leadership over our own lives, our own community.*

**Walking Together for Logan's Children Team members**

When a child falls behind, they most commonly remain behind without intervention. Impoverished early environments are powerful predictors of adult failure on a number of social and economic dimensions. We know that when developmental challenges are addressed in early childhood there is a minimum 7:1 return on investment.<sup>1</sup>

Logan is a melting pot of cultural diversity and an incubator for responses to Early Childhood Development that embrace the richness of community, culture and traditions. In Logan, children and place matter. We understand that what we do to enable our children and families to thrive, and how we deliver it, needs to be led by the local community and supported by the data and evidence.

At Logan Together, our bold goal is to achieve impact for Logan's youngest children (age 0-8 years), both now and across generations. The Logan Together movement and cross-sectoral partners use Community-led, place-based Collective Impact to grow Logan's children. We believe that by working together, with leadership from community alongside

<sup>1</sup> Heckman, James J., and Stefano Mosso. "The economics of human development and social mobility." (2014)

professional partners, we will be able to create the conditions for wholesale systems reform and social change.

Through our ongoing conversations with community, we are aware of the opportunities and the challenges in place around building a child's safe, nurturing and stimulating early journey from birth to 8 years of age. Community has told us that this journey is currently complex and confusing, that the barriers to access services are often insurmountable and that the pathway itself is invisible. Both locally and nationally, we know from the data that we are not making the difference required to ensure our children's lives are better off.

Our work alongside the Logan Community over the past years has shown that to address the complexity and create real change for our children, we must create an approach which is necessarily multi-layered and requires:

- Place-based, community-led solutions and shared decision-making
- Quality offerings and strong practice principles
- A strengthened and energised Early Years workforce
- Data to support shared decision-making
- Resource allocation and procurement to enable holistic wellbeing

At Logan Together, we understand that to enable positive intergenerational change for Logan's children we need to re-imagine our Early Childhood Development system. We have addressed this through the co-creation of Logan's 'Core Suite'. The Core Suite for Logan proposes an evidence-based, actionable universal response, underpinned by the conditions for change which work best in Logan.

Our reimagined response is currently being rolled out for our families and children and is joining up the 'pockets of brilliance' already underway in early childhood development in Logan, providing wrap-around support and, in doing so, creating real and lasting impact for Logan's children. From these successes, we have extracted common features about why these approaches work – the 'ingredients for success' in Logan.

## About Logan Together

We put First Nations First. We believe we need to do the work to strengthen cultural ways of knowing and embed First Nations principles, practice and learning in our ways of working.

We are community-led and place-based. We believe power should be shared equally with our diverse community. We enable community members to share decision-making and accountability with government, the service sector, business and other partners.

We make sure children are at the heart of all our work. We want to see Logan's children loved, safe, valued and thriving. This means making sure our children can directly influence the decisions we make together.

As a community movement we are focused on working together and have created a collective response to achieve the shared vision of the Logan community. We know the priorities and preferences of our community and have made these clear in our Collective Plan. We have also made clear in our Roadmap how we will measure whether we are seeing the outcomes that our community wants.

# Policy priorities to create impact for children

## Place-based, community-led solutions and shared decision-making

At Logan Together, we believe that things work best when community is involved in the design and delivery as context experts. Successful systems change initiatives such as Walking Together for Logan's Children<sup>2</sup> (an initiative led by Logan's cultural leaders to focused on the child safety system), have pointed the way to authentic co-design of community-led solutions.

We have drawn from this approach to identify how best to support those children in greatest need. This has meant working with community to build a Collective Plan and priority indicators for success for Logan's Children.

Throughout our work together, our community has told us that in the Early Childhood System:

- Culture counts
- Children and families want to experience a sense of belonging
- Families, children and whole communities seek the agency and authority to be part of decisions that impact their lives

Seeing change for children means providing real and relevant opportunities for community to co-create solutions, and then monitor outcomes and delivery. This has changed the way we do things in Logan.

Below is a visual summary of our community priority outcomes, which creates 'Our Focus on Logan's Children'.

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<sup>2</sup> See 'Walking Together' video available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iSV58ZfJLzM>



Safe, protective environment

Belonging, connection, community

Loved & safe

Deep knowledge of childhood development

Positive view of self as a learner

Inclusive, safe learning spaces

Access to the 'village'

Play

Learning

Material Basics

Secure and stable housing  
secure employment

High quality education and well supported teachers

Effective Systems

Connected, collaborative and well-communicated wellbeing services

Equitable access to quality, inclusive wellbeing services

Quality, healthy food

Participating

Health

Improved birthing outcomes for mums, babies and families

Children meet developmental milestones

Culture and Identity

Equity

First Nations First

Children's voice and agency

Nothing about us without us

Pride in Logan

Data sovereignty

Our Focus on Logan's children

## Quality offerings and strong practice principles

Both in Logan, and nationally, there is work to be done to offer a seamless and impactful universal journey through early childhood development. We believe that there is a need to focus on:

- prevention and the accumulation of protective factors – excellent early years services and support should be available to all children to ensure children and families are set-up with strong foundations, and the need to rely on targeted and tertiary responses is reduced.
- quality – the availability of services and support in the early years is not sufficient. The offerings provided need to be of high quality to ensure children start life well.

Key data points collected in Logan by the Murdoch Children’s Research Institute (MCRI)<sup>3</sup> reveal that:

- While the number of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) places in Logan is adequate to meet demand (0-5 year olds), only 11% of those centres has been rated as ‘exceeding’ the required standard of care (NQS) and for 16% there is significant further improvement required to meet the national standard. For Family Day Care in Logan, the percentage requiring significant further improvement rises to 50%.
- 96% of children in Logan are enrolled in ECEC for more than 15 hours, however up to 40% of those children enrolled did not attend for 15 hours during the evaluation period, and the data shows that children from the most disadvantaged quintiles have a lower median attendance compared with those from the most advantaged areas.
- Only 25% of evidence-based parenting models in Logan have the conditions in place to enable implementation fidelity and these programs reach only approximately 3% of the target group.
- Around 20% of both parents and teachers identify concerns with the social-emotional management and behavioural strategies to promote a positive school environment.

Research around childhood wellbeing reinforces the need to think differently and to build offerings and opportunities that ‘stack together’ to create an accumulation of protective factors for the holistic wellbeing of a child.

The ‘stacking’ concept has been highlighted within the ‘Restacking the Odds’ work from the Centre for Community Child Health (2019 ongoing), which has demonstrated that by offering aligned and evidence-based early interventions longitudinally (across all stages of a child’s early life) and ecologically (targeting child and their families), there will be a cumulative effect of amplifying the impact and sustaining the benefit. While most research

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<sup>3</sup> Restacking the Odds. Logan Overview and insights 2021



focuses on the efficacy of single interventions, combining multiple, evidence-based strategies over the early years of a child's life may yield greater impact.<sup>4</sup>

At Logan Together, we have therefore started to build the priorities and preferences of community into 'Logan's Core Suite for Early Childhood Development', alongside the national research and local evidence. The Core Suite reflects the focus on 'Effective Systems' which underpins the Logan Together Roadmap and is an integrated first step in creating a new system of Early Childhood Development.

Our efforts within the Core Suite are focused on the **preventative** end of the continuum. Concurrently, we will need to be refining and co-creating those **secondary and tertiary interventions** to keep our most vulnerable children safe and thriving now and into the future.

Critically, our Core Suite emphasises the need for continuity of care and long-term and enabling relationships over the life course of a child.

In looking at the initiatives that fall within the Core Suite, we have identified key regional practice principles ('Ingredients for success in Logan') to underpin current and future delivery and practice:

- Co-design the offering
- Apply a collective approach
- Offer individualised support
- Increase community connectedness
- Deliver in ways that are sensitive to cultural needs
- Remove barriers to accessing services
- Offer seamless referral pathways
- Deliver in place
- Create a safe space to connect
- Engage authentically in two-way learning
- Offer holistic, integrated responses which meet the vision of community
- Continuity of Care

**Systems Enablers** underpin and support the implementation of Logan's core initiatives, the service delivery mechanisms and pathways, formal and informal networks, relationships and policies which make up the Early Childhood Development System. They are broader than the individual initiatives and require deep collaboration, partnerships and codesign to embody the specifics of place.

Logan's Enablers work on the elements of the systems perpetuating inequity and disadvantage and to be successful, all aspects of the systemic conditions of Mindsets,

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<sup>4</sup> Goldfeld et. al. Restacking the Odds. Centre for Community and Child Health, The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne. Melbourne, VIC (2019).

Relationships and Connections, Power Dynamics, Policies, Practices and Resource Flows<sup>5</sup> need to be addressed through these enablers over time.

Our systems enablers in Logan include:

- Strengthened community
- Community Connectors and Navigators
- Workforce Development
- Deep collaborative approach across sectors
- Cultural Development throughout the system

## A strengthened and energised Early Years workforce

Working across sectors of the Early Childhood System, and linking health, child safety and education, we have together identified the workforce challenges which currently hold back impact for the children of Logan. These challenges can be categorised at the highest level as:

- Unclear and uncertain pathways into the early childhood workforce
- The need for a commitment to ongoing professional development and leadership pathways
- The need to support workforce wellbeing – making sure culture, conditions and incentives exist to attract, retain and grow the early childhood workforce

A cultural shift is needed to understand early childhood work as valuable and complex work within a system, and that specialist skills and opportunities for career-long learning are available and important. This is a shift away from a focus on specific, individual roles and professions, to identifying possibilities and pathways into working in the early childhood system.

Together, we propose the following approaches to address our workforce needs:

- Creating a **systems narrative** which is empowering and engaging, focussed on outcomes for children. This narrative should embrace the notions that the early years are critical to wellbeing in childhood and later-life, meaning we need high quality, committed and qualified people across different roles, skills and professions coming to work in the early childhood system.
- Building career pathways that are clear and where people are supported to advance and continue building their professional skills.
- Leveraging existing pathways for training and education of the workforce, and activating community members who have the skill sets and connect the right people.
- Thinking creatively about professional development, and building a culture of reflection, continuous improvement and professional commitment.

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<sup>5</sup> Kania, John, Mark Kramer, and Peter Singe. *The Water of Systems Change*. FSG (2018).

- Connecting people across the Early Childhood system to understand the scope and nature of the system and the work that happens within it, with the aim of creating a community of practice.
- Optimising existing funding resources and exploring opportunities to pool resources for workforce development to be used for the greatest impact within the early childhood system

## Data to support shared decision-making

Data exchange between services, government and community mimics the confusion of the current early childhood journey, with siloed efforts disabling the opportunity to link data and sense-make to spot trends and, most importantly, outcomes.

We acknowledge that while we are increasingly clear on the voice of community, currently there is other vital data missing from our decision-making process. We are also aware of the urgency to address Australia's child development system now from both a social and economic perspective.

Sharing data is about being transparent with the stories of what is happening in communities, where it can be tested, examined, discussed and challenged. Data is a critical contributor to shared decision-making across community, government, and services.

## Resource allocation and procurement to enable holistic wellbeing

We already know that community, governments and services want to best for our children, to see them happy, healthy and thriving. There is significant investment across different systems looking to support vulnerable families, keep children safe, and see that they are learning and healthy. Despite many good intentions, though, we are not seeing the change we need for our children.

We believe that listening to community preferences and priorities, and sharing accountability between community, government and services and working in deep partnership that is backed by data, will make the difference. This means sharing power and allowing communities to make decisions that affect them.

We have seen how this change in power can see resources allocated in ways that are meaningful and relevant to community. Often, this does not need additional investment, but rather a reallocation of funds and resources already in the system.

We have seen this beginning in Eagleby through Eagleby Together – a focus community walking alongside Logan Together. Eagleby Together described an example of this work:<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> See more detail about this case study in the Stronger Places, Stronger People report, *Disrupting Disadvantage: Early Evidence of Impact of Community-led Change* (2022), available at: <https://platformc.org/publications/spsp-early-evidence-report-community-led-change>

One morning in June 2022, community members from Eagleby Together and a small group of Logan Together partners came together on the wetlands. We sat together amongst the towering trees and dewy grass in an open sided marquee, a pelican circling above. We had come together to discuss finalising a submission to government for several million dollars to meet a critical need in community.

The group that gathered was diverse, but well equipped. The assets with which they arrived included a deep understanding of community voice, heard over time within Eagleby itself, and more recently through conversations held for the 1000 Voices initiative throughout Logan.

Over years, the Eagleby community had already articulated a clear vision for their children and families. Behind the voices of community, the data and evidence had been gathered and shared. We were aware of what works in Eagleby, the 'ingredients' for real change. And from the voices, the evidence and the ingredients, together we had commenced the journey to build a 'core suite' to nurture and grow Logan's children through their early years of development. In the end, the meeting went longer than the scheduled hour, but only slightly.

Early on in the meeting, as the wordsmithing for the submission was about to commence, we paused and simply asked, ***'Why do we need to wait?'***

We set aside the ask of government and instead described what we wanted for the children of Eagleby. This included:

- Wrap-around health support in place which offered continuity of care
- A donga on the site of the organic community hub (Jinndi Mibunn), to support the journey through pregnancy and birth
- Health and allied health professionals in place
- The opportunity for early diagnosis at the early childhood centre and on school grounds A pop-up clinic on the wetlands
- Community Connectors providing seamless passage throughout the Early Childhood Development system.

We, as Eagleby residents, spoke of culture, flexibility and integration. We described how a connected, clear and holistic Early Childhood Development system contributed to safety and jobs, family support and housing.

At this meeting, solutions were identified within more than eight government, service sector, philanthropic organisations and community-controlled organisations. These solutions have the potential to redesign the use of significant levels of existing resourcing, possibly up to \$2-3 million.

Therefore, the first steps of realising this vision of early childhood development in Eagleby had been fully funded through a reallocation of priorities by the Logan Together partners. The submission to government remained untouched. By the end of that evening, the commitment was documented in draft agreements for each of the partners.

New partnerships have been formed to extend the holistic model and, at the request of community, Queensland Government Regional Executive Directors have shared the indicators of their own policy priorities to be mapped, by community, against the Eagleby vision. This map will increasingly inform state government's work in the region.

The Logan Together movement is led by community. Our community is clear on the conditions required to make real change. We recommend our Government adapts and creates policy that would enable:

- **Place-based, community-led solutions and shared decision-making**
- **Quality offerings and strong practice principles**
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