

The Hon. Dr Anne Aly (MP)
Minister for Early Childhood
Early Years Strategy
Via email: earlyyearsengagement@dss.gov.au

28th April 2023

Dear Minister

The National Early Language and Literacy Coalition welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Early Years Strategy (the Strategy). We commend the Australian Government on the development of the Strategy and consulting with the sector around this important issue. It is pleasing to see that the importance of early years is recognised at a national level.

Early childhood (0-5) is a crucial time for the development of language and the other foundations of literacy. In Australia many children are falling behind their peers in early language and literacy development – well before they start school. This issue crosses the domains of health, education, and social services, as well as Commonwealth, state and territory, and local government. While many useful initiatives happen around the country, it is difficult to address the issue effectively without a nationally coordinated approach.

The National Early Language and Literacy Coalition (NELLC) is made up of a broad scope of stakeholders whose work intersects in the early language and literacy space. It includes peak professional bodies from education, libraries, and speech pathology, as well as research organisations, indigenous literacy programs, and charities. We represent the experts in this field, both at a research level and on the ground, in what works. Our focus over several years has been undertaking a systematic literature review and scoping and developing a National Early Language and Literacy Strategy for Australia. The [Proposed National Early Language and Literacy Strategy](#) includes four key areas: 1. Family support within communities, 2. Early Education and transitions, 3. Specialist support, and 4. Knowledge production and dissemination.

To ensure all Australian children are provided with the best start in life, parents, families and those working with young children require timely access to accurate information, quality community programs, high-quality early childhood education and care and equitable access to support services. The National Early Language and Literacy Coalition supports the identified need for a coordinated approach to the provision of these supports to families, children and care givers.

The National Early Language and Literacy Coalition urge the Early Years Taskforce to:

- Recognise early language and literacy as a focus area within the broader early years strategy and policy frameworks.
- Recognise the NELLC as the specialist early language and literacy reference group.

- Foster collaboration between portfolios and coordination between all levels of government and the NELLC to reduce silos and to avoid duplication of functions, competition for limited resources and missed opportunities to work collaboratively for greater impact across related areas of practice.
- Invest in resourcing to continue the NELLC, to cover program staff embedded within an existing related entity, and to deliver key national programs and projects representing the four focus areas of our strategy, including:
 - Provide a national point of information sharing and collaboration for professional stakeholders across the country. (Website, newsletter etcetera)
 - Establishment and administration of a research fund, in partnership with Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) or other appropriate entity, to identify knowledge gaps and best practice with a particular focus on Early Years Strategy priority equity cohorts, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
 - Support for the NELLC to work with Government to oversee the development and delivery of a national public awareness campaign, similar to Slip Slop Slap. For example, “Read, talk, sing, play. Every baby, every day”.
 - Support for the NELLC to work with ACECQA and similar accrediting bodies to develop and improve vocational, undergraduate and post graduate training for educators, health professionals and other stakeholders, AND to develop a centralised directory for quality ongoing professional learning opportunities.
 - Support for the NELLC to contribute to the development and implementation of effective national systems to support early identification of vulnerable or at risk children (0-5) and their families, through health and allied health programs. For example, speech pathologists embedded in ECEC settings, national hearing health programs focused on otitis media, a national paediatric literacy policy (similar to USA).

We look forward to engaging in further consultation opportunities to support the development of the Early Years Strategy. You can find a link to the Proposed National Early Language and Literacy Strategy here: [Proposed National Early Language and Literacy Strategy](#).

If the National Early Language and Literacy Coalition can assist in any other way or provide additional information please contact [REDACTED]

