

Submission to the Department of Social Services- Early Years Strategy

Preamble

NSW Family Day Care Association wishes to register our support for the development of an Early Years Strategy for Australia.

Our members provide high quality education and care to children in their early years via a home-based model. Many of our members have been providing home-based education and care for over 50 years.

Through this rich history, we have learnt that the early years truly are a unique period in a child's life.

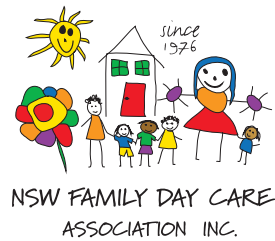
The opportunities a child receives during this time can positively impact every other part of their life. The early years provide an irreplaceable foundation for learning and help shape the architecture of a child's brain.

As a nation, it is therefore justified for us to capitalise on children's learning opportunities in the early years – providing rich learning to children during the first five years of life will ensure our adult population of the future are as prepared as possible, for that future.

As a peak organisation, we have identified opportunities for improvement in how Australia's various levels of government address children's needs. We are optimistic that the Commonwealth Government can take positive steps to ensure children's needs can be met holistically rather than having some needs met by the education and care system. This is especially true for children facing additional disadvantage, be it socio-economic, cultural, or structural.

We consider children's development through a socio-cultural lens and recognise that children have unique needs and rights that exist independently of their family's circumstances. While it's important to support children within the context of their first educators - their families - we must also ensure that we are meeting their individual needs and promoting their growth and development.

We commend the Australian Government for undertaking the work to develop an Early Years Strategy.

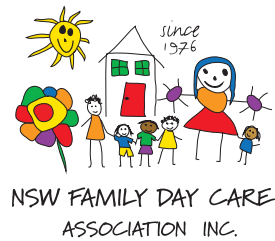


This Submission

The NSW Family Day Care Association and its members specialise in meeting the needs of families who access home-based early education and care, and are passionate about promoting children's early educational and care needs. While we may not be experts in strategy creation or structure, we bring a wealth of knowledge and expertise in these key areas.

In our submission, we will focus on specific key areas where we can provide valuable insights and recommendations. Our goal is to offer a unique and informed perspective on the needs of children and families in the context of home-based early education and care, and to contribute to the development of effective strategies that support their growth and development.

- It is important to prioritise the benefits of high-quality education and care for children as an **outcome** in the Early Years Strategy. By recognising the positive impact that access to quality early education and care can have on children's development, we can create a strategy that is truly child-centred and focused on promoting their well-being.
- Education and care must be selected as a key **policy priority** in the Early Years Strategy. This will ensure that the needs of children and families are at the forefront of decision-making, and that effective policies and practices are developed to support their growth and development.
- It is essential to enshrine the concept that early education and care is a right of every child. While it may have additional benefits for families and the workforce, it should be defined and recognised as a fundamental right of children. By doing so, we can ensure that all children have access to the education and care they need to thrive.
- Families should have the right to choose the education and care **type** that best meets the unique needs of their child. By enshrining this right in the Strategy, we can create a more flexible and responsive system that supports the diverse needs of families and children.
- A **policy priority** in the Strategy should be reorganising Commonwealth/State responsibilities for education and care, so that prior to school education no longer sits solely with the States/Territories. This division is not in the best interests of children, and by streamlining responsibilities, we can create a more cohesive and effective system that supports the needs of all children.



NSWFDCA Position Statements

1. The receipt of high-quality early education and care needs to be an outcome within the Strategy.

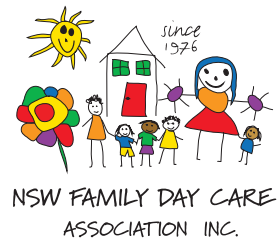
We believe that the Early Years Strategy presents an excellent opportunity to ensure that every child in Australia has access to high-quality early education and care. It is essential to enshrine the right of every child to receive early education in the Strategy as a measurable outcome. The Strategy should prioritize early education as a fundamental right of every child in Australia, just like education for children over five years old.

Early education plays a critical role in a child's development, and numerous studies have proven its benefits. However, children in Australia do not have the assurance of receiving an early education, let alone a high-quality one. The Early Years Strategy gives us the chance to change this and ensure every child's right to access early education is met. Let's seize this opportunity and create a Strategy that guarantees every child the best possible start in life.

2. Education and care needs to be included as a key policy priority.

Education and care should be a top priority in the Early Years Strategy. It is imperative to acknowledge that the current early education and care system in Australia has its shortcomings. While we have a robust curriculum and quality framework that ensures children's safety, the funding system is fragmented, and some corporations profit from delivering education and care. Additionally, some types of education and care are favored over others without clear evidence to support this view. Furthermore, educators' remuneration often fails to reflect the importance of their work to children's development.

We need to improve the education and care system in Australia to better serve the needs of our children. The Early Years Strategy can play a vital role in addressing these issues by prioritizing education and care as a key policy area. By doing so, we can ensure that our children receive the best possible start in life and that educators receive the recognition and support they deserve.



3. Early education belongs to children – the Strategy should enshrine this.

The NSWFDCA strongly advocates for the Early Years Strategy to enshrine the understanding that early education belongs to the child. It should be recognised as a fundamental right of every Australian child, and not merely an ancillary benefit for working families. The current perception of early education as a means to facilitate workforce participation creates a disparity between the needs of children and the broader societal goals.

By prioritising the right to early education in the Strategy, we can align our values with the growing body of evidence that highlights the benefits of early learning for children's development. The Strategy should emphasise that early education is not a commodity for families to purchase, but rather an essential component of a child's holistic development. This message will resonate with families, governments, and the community at large, thereby ensuring that early education is recognised as a right of children, for their benefit, and not just a means to an end.

4. Education and care type choice must be guaranteed.

The Early Years Strategy should ensure that families have the right to choose the type of education and care that best suits their child's individual needs. NSW Family Day Care Association's members understand that not all education and care types are the same, and they have a deep knowledge of the unique advantages of home-based care.

In order to meet the diverse needs of children, the Early Years Strategy should guarantee the availability of multiple education and care types. Home-based care, such as that provided by Family Day Care, is a highly desirable option for many families, particularly for children with complex medical or additional needs who require individualised attention from knowledgeable educators.

By enshrining the right of families to choose the education and care type that best suits their child, the Early Years Strategy would prioritise the best interests of the child and ensure that each child has access to the education and care that is most beneficial for their unique needs.



5. Reorganising responsibility for education and care must be a policy priority.

The Early Years Strategy has a unique opportunity to make reorganising responsibility for education and care a top policy priority. The current system is fragmented, with states and territories responsible for preschool education and the Commonwealth for policy and funding of the rest of early education and care. This siloed approach may have made sense in the past, but it no longer serves the best interests of children and families. The complexity it creates for providers and families can be a barrier to accessing quality education and care. By dismantling this silo, the Early Years Strategy can create a more streamlined and effective system that places the needs of children and families at its core.