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**Submission from OMEP Australia
(World Organisation for Early Childhood Education)**

EARLY YEARS STRATEGY

OMEP Australia welcomes the opportunity to contribute to Australia's Early Years Strategy.

OMEP Australia is the Australian arm of the Organisation Mondiale pour l'Éducation Prescolaire (OMEP) or the World Organisation for Early Childhood Education. OMEP is an international, non-governmental and non-profit organisation with Consultative Status at the United Nations and UNESCO. It has an active voice in international debate, consulting to the United Nations on issues of childhood well-being and sustainable development. OMEP urges the world community to include ECEC as a priority in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2015-2030 (<https://en.unesco.org/sustainabledevelopmentgoals>).

Founded in 1948, OMEP defends and promotes the rights of the child to education and care worldwide and supports activities that improve accessibility to higher-quality education and care (<https://www.worldomep.org/>). OMEP has affiliates in more than 70 countries. As the oldest and largest global professional organisation committed to children between birth and 8 years of age, OMEP urges local, state, regional, and international decision-makers to invest in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). OMEP Australia has over 80 members, including researchers, practitioners and members of the general public.

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

1.1 The proposed structure of the Strategy is linear. However, ensuring all children have the very best start in life is a wicked problem and as such, requires a concentric design such as Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model of development.

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

2.1 OMEP's vision is that all young children are respected as citizens from birth, who effectively enjoy all the human rights enshrined in the CRC, developing integrally as healthy and happy people.

2.2 The Strategy's vision should also align with the vision of the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration. The updated Early Years Learning Framework vision for children's learning is now aligned with second goal: All young Australians become confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners, and active and informed members of the community.



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

3.1 Access for all children, regardless of location or family income, to quality early childhood education and care. As noted in the Tashkent Declaration and Commitments to Action for Transforming Early Childhood Care and Education 16 November 2022 held in Ukraine.

Recognizing that as inequalities and disparities in development and learning start early and often persist throughout life, access to inclusive and quality ECCE is an important enabler of well-being and holistic development, foundational and lifelong learning, gender equality and social equity, and sustainable development where all children can have the opportunity to reach their full potential. (Preamble, p. 1)

3.2 Wrap-around services that include health, well-being and education where children and families are at the centre.

3.3 Contact points for children and families with support services between immunisations. According to the Immunisation schedule, children have an 18-month immunisation and then the next one is when they are four years old. It would be helpful to have one or two checkpoints between these times to meet with families, complete health and development screens, and begin early supports where necessary.

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

4.1 With just over half of children starting school developmentally on track, priorities must include the following:

- access and provision of early childhood education and care
- wrap-around services that identify and provide support for families much earlier than is currently available.
- promotion and advocacy of ways families can support their children's development and learning.

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

5.1 Address workforce issues and shortages for ECEC and health workforce, including pay and work conditions in ECEC. Encourage and incentivise ECEC and health professionals to work in remote and rural areas. Develop and maintain telehealth and fly-in/fly out health provision to remote and rural areas.



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6. What areas do you think the Commonwealth should focus on to improve coordination and collaboration in developing policies for children and families?

6.1 Early childhood education and care policy and provision alignment between states and territories.

6.2 Development of wraparound services for families regardless of where they live or income to ensure they receive the support they need. Finding ways to access families between 18 months and 4 years

7. What principles should be included in the Strategy?

7.1 Children’s rights must be promoted. Their voices should be heard to.

7.2 Families must be at the heart of any strategy and strengths-based approaches should be used.

7.5 Transdisciplinary approaches need to replace silo approaches.

8. Are there gaps in existing frameworks or other research or evidence that need to be considered for the development of the strategy?

8.1 While investing in early childhood is important (Section 2), more emphasis should be placed on children being citizens and ensuring their rights as citizens.

8.2 The government could also consider the East Asia-Pacific Early Childhood Development Scales (EAP-ECDS) that can be used for direct assessment of children ranging in age from 3 to 5 years. They are the first regional child assessment tool developed based on the culture and values of countries of a world region. The EAP-ECDS were developed with support of UNICEF, the Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC) and the Open Society Foundations (OSF).

9. General comments

We are pleased that the government is developing an Early Years Strategy and seeking public consultation. We hope they also consider recommendations from the 2009 Investing in the Early Years—A National Early Childhood Development Strategy An initiative of the Council of Australian Governments.

Thank you for considering this submission.

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