



Brotherhood  
of St Laurence

Working for an Australia free of poverty

## BSL Submission to the Early Years Strategy

April 2023

### Summary

Significant social and economic advantages are gained by investing in the early years. Yet our current early childhood development system is inaccessible, confusing and unaffordable, particularly for those who need it most. A major shift is needed in current public policy and funding decisions that impact on children 0–8 years, by placing children and their families at the centre of early years reform and investing in joined-up approaches across policy platforms that impact on children and their families.

We at the Brotherhood of St. Laurence (BSL) believe the Early Years Strategy can be transformative and intergenerational in scope. To realise this potential, we offer the following recommendations drawing on our practice, policy and research insights:

1. Articulate a nation-wide guarantee for every child
2. Create a national framework for home-based learning from birth to build parents' capacity to be their child's first teacher and expand parent capabilities through timely informal and formal supports
3. Provide universal, affordable, high-quality services and ensure the mainstream system caters for all children as well as targeted additional supports for those who need it
4. Build a sustainable, high quality and culturally responsive early childhood workforce
5. Invest in place-based early childhood systems that harness community capabilities, ensure participation is inclusive, and respond to the aspirations of children and families
6. Commit to broader policies that promote child wellbeing and remove structures and conditions that create child poverty, including abolishing the Activity Test for Child Care Subsidy and removing the Maintenance Income Test from calculating Family Tax Benefits.

## The Brotherhood of St. Laurence

The Brotherhood of St. Laurence (BSL) is a social justice organisation working alongside people experiencing disadvantage to prevent and alleviate poverty across Australia. Our approach is informed directly by people experiencing disadvantage and uses evidence drawn from our research, together with insights from our programs and services, to develop practical solutions that work.

BSL has a long history of empowering children, families and communities to build capability and confidence. This includes creating platforms for early learning, such as HIPPIY Australia (Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters), and support for children with developmental delay or disability. Demonstration models developed by BSL work with the principles of access and inclusion, creating interconnected pathways that offer timely information and support to families so children can thrive. BSL is also a founding syndicate partner for Goodstart Early Learning, an active member of the Thrive by Five Network, and a SNAICC National Voice for our Children Associate member.

The recommendations we submit to the Early Years Strategy outline an ambition for a universal, high quality, accessible early years system that meets the needs of every child in Australia. We draw on our practice experience, lived experience, policy positions and research to articulate what it will take to deliver on the strategy.

## Proposed structure of the Early Years Strategy

### **Question 1: Do you have any comments on the proposed structure of the Strategy?**

BSL proposes that the structure for the Early Years Strategy include detail on how the national strategy will integrate with state and territory policies to create a comprehensive early childhood system, rather than multiple early childhood systems with fragmented funding models.

## Vision

### **Question 2: What vision should our nation have for Australia's youngest children?**

BSL recommends an ambitious vision: that Australia is the best place in the world to be, and to raise, a child.

## Outcomes

### Question 3: What mix of outcomes are the most important to include in the Strategy?

BSL recommends the Early Years Strategy Advisory Panel consider the following outcomes. These have been derived from the MOR (Material, Opportunity, Relational) for Children Framework, which demonstrates relationships between intersecting domains of wellbeing.<sup>1</sup>

#### Material outcomes

- Children and their families have the material means to thrive, including adequate income support and family assistance payments

#### Opportunity outcomes

- Children have a love of learning: young children have access to a suite of early learning opportunities including early childhood education and care, maternal and child health, and a safe and supportive home learning environment
- Service design is informed through community voice: children and families voice their needs and opinions that contribute to their education
- Children from First Nations and multicultural communities participate in early childhood services that embrace inclusive practice
- The early childhood workforce is culturally diverse and responsive to the needs of First Nations and multicultural children and families

#### Relational outcomes

- Children have enabling relationships with their parents/caregivers as well as adult educators: children have stable and secure attachment and relationships with parents, leading to improved family functioning, including a sense of belonging and connection to culture and place
- Families develop knowledge and skills to support children to thrive; parents have improved confidence and capabilities as their child's best advocate and child's first teacher
- Children and families feel valued and a sense of belonging
- Children feel safe and are free from abuse.

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<sup>1</sup> S Bessell, A Bexley & C Vuckovic, [The MOR for Children Framework](#), Children's Policy Centre, The Australian National University, Canberra, September 2021. ANU.

## Policy priorities

### Question 4: What specific areas/policy priorities should be included in the Strategy and why?

The Commonwealth Government holds a number of critical policy levers and a clear responsibility to engage and catalyse action by states, territories and local governments. Implementation of the following recommendations for the Strategy should be the responsibility of central agencies in Commonwealth and state and territory governments. This would both elevate early childhood development as a priority issue for first ministers and ensure that a connected and integrated approach is taken.

Investing in the universal platform to ensure access for all children will not address all risk factors that impact on child vulnerability and poverty. Parallel to investment in universal early childhood learning and development, there needs to be investment to integrate and align broader policy that will impact on child wellbeing including economic inclusion, family violence, immigration, disability and strengthening communities.

The early years strategy can be well supported by other critical reform processes, such as the Commonwealth Treasury Wellbeing Framework, the work of the Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee and the Women's Economic Equality Taskforce, the Employment White Paper and the review of the National Disability Insurance Scheme, as well as by our international obligations.

### Recommendation One: Commit to a nation-wide guarantee for every child

The first policy priority for the Strategy should be to support a nation-wide guarantee or entitlement for every child in Australia. BSL supports the Guarantee for Young Children and Families, developed by the Centre for Policy Development and supported by the Thrive by Five partnership. Such a guarantee would be enshrined in legislation and driven by a new Commonwealth and state early childhood body, and every jurisdiction would be required and incentivised to work towards it. It would entitle every child in Australia and their family to<sup>2</sup>:

- three days per week free or low-cost quality early education from birth until school, with more days available at minimal cost. This begins as soon as families need it. This means all children will experience the lifelong benefits of quality early education.
- more paid parental leave shared between partners. This will give babies time with their parents in the crucial first year of life, and it will give families the confidence to balance work and home more easily and equally.
- support for children and parents from within their community, including up to 25 visits from maternal and child health nurses.

Importantly, in addition to the model proposed by the Centre for Policy Development, BSL recommends that the guarantee include an entitlement to material basics through investment in

<sup>2</sup> <https://cpd.org.au/2021/11/starting-better-centre-for-policy-development/> Centre for Policy Development, 2021

adequate social security and family assistance payments so that all children in Australia have their basic needs met.

## Recommendation Two: Create a national framework for home-based learning from birth to build parents' capacity to be their child's first teacher and expand parent capabilities through timely informal and formal supports

Parents and the environment at home are central in supporting child development. Early interactions with parents/caregivers are a key determinant in each child's developmental trajectory. Families need to have choice and control in finding the most suitable early learning and care arrangements for their children and these need to include learning in the home. Home-based learning requires significant investment, equal to the investment directed to formal learning settings.<sup>3</sup> We support the development of a national home learning framework that provides evidence-based pedagogy to assist parents and/or caregivers to promote learning in the home.

Investment in home-based learning is critical in remote areas where access to an early learning centre and the broader support system may be limited. A national home learning framework could include funded roles that connect families to services and supports in a timely and coordinated way.

### **Case study: HOME INTERACTION PROGRAM FOR PARENTS AND YOUNGSTERS (HIPPY)**

BSL delivers HIPPY in over 100 communities across Australia is a highly effective, evidence-based model for strengthening the home learning environment, particularly for families experiencing disadvantage. Through a longitudinal evaluation<sup>4</sup>, HIPPY has been shown to significantly improve children's literacy, numeracy, and school readiness; increase parents' confidence in parenting and the time spent learning with their child; and provide job training and employment pathways for parents who participate as home tutors.

## Recommendation Three: Provide universal, affordable, high-quality services, and ensure the mainstream system caters for all children as well as targeted additional supports for those who need it

Investment is needed in universal early years services and a mainstream system that caters for all children, including those living with disability or developmental delay, children from diverse cultural and faith backgrounds, and children experiencing disadvantage or poverty. This should include bespoke, responsive and timely supports to assist families in reaching the aspirations they hold for children. A progressive universal system within each community (including regional and remote) would promote the engagement and participation of children and their families. It is important to recognise that not all children who face disadvantage are living in places of disadvantage. While there are clear pockets of disadvantage around the country, through our

<sup>3</sup> S Pascoe & D Brennan, [Lifting our game: report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools through Early Childhood Interventions](#), Department of Education and Training, Melbourne, 2017.

<sup>4</sup> [Summary of the impact of HIPPY on children](#), drawing from Connolly, J & Mallett, S, *Changing children's trajectories: results of the HIPPY Longitudinal Study*, Brotherhood of St. Laurence, Fitzroy, Vic., 2020.

work we also observe disadvantage occurring in places that are not classified as a disadvantaged community and disadvantage presenting at various points of a child's developmental trajectory.

**Case study: EARLY YEARS REFERRALS FOR FAMILIES SEEKING ASSISTANCE TO PROMOTE EARLY DEVELOPMENT**

Over the last four years, BSL's disability services have received over 24,000 early childhood referrals, largely in metropolitan Melbourne. In the City of Stonnington alone, which includes the suburbs of Kooyong, Prahran and Malvern with relatively high median incomes – more than 130 families are currently calling out for support and information to support their child's development.

An inclusive universal system must be accompanied by additional supports and proactive engagement with families who are disengaged, excluded or disadvantaged, to reduce barriers and provide equity.

Many families either do not know of the supports available to them or need additional assistance to enrol and participate. A joined-up approach to state and federal supports would reduce the complexity that faces families. Expanding the scale of programs that can assist families to navigate the early years and broader support systems would be a wise investment.

**Case study: REFUGEE CHILD OUTREACH**

BSL demonstration program, Refugee Child Outreach, is an effective early navigation service that connects with newly arrived refugee families with children 0–8 years. The outreach worker supports parents while they learn about different cultural and societal parenting styles in context of Australia and how they differ to previous experience and understanding. Refugee Child Outreach assists parent to navigate local infrastructure and the local early years' service system (often a new concept for these families). RCO enables parents to promote their child's development by strengthening connections to local supports and the early years system, as well as addressing settlement challenges including very low incomes.

**Recommendation Four: Build a sustainable, high quality and culturally responsive early childhood workforce**

Investing in the early childhood workforce must be a priority. One of the biggest challenges for the successful delivery of a National Early Years Strategy will be the recruitment and retention of early childhood educators.

Workforce and skill shortages are currently widespread in early childhood education and care settings, and turnover is high. Pay and conditions remain low in a predominantly female workforce, and career structures remain unclear. Retaining and developing the workforce is critical to ensure that staff have the skills and knowledge to support the developmental trajectories of all children, including children with additional needs, children with experience of trauma as well as children from diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds.

An early childhood workforce that reflects diversity across the community is vital. Local career pathways for community members to develop skills and capabilities as early childhood educators could align with the federal Jobs & Skills Summit recommendations. Investment in career pathways for people with lived experience of the diverse experiences children and their families bring to early childhood settings would be a progressive step to strengthen connections and participation.

To build a high-quality, accessible and inclusive system that connects the universal system with broader early childhood supports requires a funded workforce strategy that builds connections between early years staff and specialist staff, allied health staff or prevention programs in context of place.

#### **Case study: FAMILY LEARNING SUPPORT PROGRAM**

A demonstration project that has been jointly funded by community donors and state government is BSL Family Learning Support Program. This program assists families living in Melbourne public housing estates to navigate the early years system by employing local community people who understand the cultural and community experiences of these families. Bi-cultural workers bring skills in speaking first language, understand cultural ways of being and knowing, and can connect with families in their home or a community setting. In this way they build bridges for families to access early childhood education. BSL invests in training and skill development for the bi-cultural workers, so they have the option of further study and potential employment with place based early childhood providers. BSL's employment pathway model has been trialled and tested in BSL Youth Employment demonstration projects, generating evidence of the value for employers investing in local people and workforce development strategies that engage local businesses (including not for profit and private providers).

#### **Question 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?**

**Recommendation Five: Invest in place-based early childhood systems that harness community capabilities, ensure participation is inclusive, and respond to the aspirations of children and families.**

A universal response cannot mean a uniform response. Not every family wants or needs the same support at the same time. Commissioning models need to enable flexible, tailored approaches that reflect the diversity of children, families and communities across Australia.

To make sense of the complexity of disadvantage, the early years strategy must enable community-led and integrated place-based services shaped by the voices of local children and parents.

Local community-based planning processes can play a critical role in the development of interconnected pathways that ensure families access services and local supports in a timely way. Resources that enable long-term planning and local facilitation, such as Communities for Children, improve access to local supports through service mapping, referral pathway development and service models that reflect family aspirations.

Service design must be based on co-design around local needs, aspirations and commitment. A joined-up approach to early childhood education and care together with broader systems and programs should be the rule, not the exception. We support variation across integrated service models that are shaped for local settings, and ask government to attend to data sharing, funding criteria that enable blending to resource a broader long-term strategy, and investment in enabling bodies.



**Case study: JINDI CHILD AND FAMILY CENTRE**

Early childhood hubs that are built from strong, genuine partnerships between local providers and community can provide children and their families with access to the right services at the right time. Community-informed and community-led design of place-based hub models not only ensure that services reflect the aspirations of families, but also open opportunity for neighbours to engage in early learning and care systems which can prove a significant support to families within the local community.

One example of a place-based model is Jindi Child and Family Centre in Mernda, a growth area north of Melbourne. Jindi is built from a partnership between BSL, Goodstart Early Learning and local government. Community engagement is a key pillar of the model, with deep engagement of the local community which enables the centre to reflect community aspirations and to find solutions to local issues identified by families. Joined up services provided to families respond to their shared goals, including economic participation, connections and supports for families with a child who has a disability, community prevention of family violence and participation in early learning.

## **Recommendation 6: Commit to policies that promote child wellbeing and remove structures and conditions that create child poverty, including abolishing the Activity Test for Child Care Subsidy and removing the Maintenance Income Test from calculating Family Tax Benefits.**

One in six Australian children are living in poverty<sup>5</sup>. Growing up in poverty restricts the opportunities for children to have the best start in life. Poverty is a structural contributor to the rising numbers of children entering the child protection system and out of home care. If governments are serious about addressing child abuse and neglect and improving child wellbeing, then poverty as a key driver of disadvantage and vulnerability must be addressed.

Therefore, the Early Years Strategy should set a bold ambition for reducing childhood poverty in Australia. This starts with strengthening the policies and programs that meet the basic needs of children and families. Broader social security, housing and employment policies are critical enabling policies that support children in their early years. To deliver on this, BSL proposes seven sub-recommendations, which are consistent with the recommendations of the Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee<sup>6</sup> and Women's Economic Equality Taskforce<sup>7</sup>.

### **a) Increase the base rates of working age payments**

A crucial finding of the Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee is that the current rates of working age payments including JobSeeker Payment and Parenting Payment are seriously

<sup>5</sup> Davidson, P; Bradbury, B & Wong, M, [Poverty in Australia 2023: Who is affected?](#), Poverty and Inequality Partnership Report no. 20. Australian Council of Social Service and UNSW Sydney, 2023

<sup>6</sup> Interim Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee, *2023–24 Report to the Australian Government*, see <https://ministers.treasury.gov.au/ministers/jim-chalmers-2022/media-releases/release-economic-inclusion-advisory-committee-report>

<sup>7</sup> [Letter to Senator the Hon. Katy Gallagher re: Women's Economic Equality Taskforce advice for May 2023 Budget](#)



inadequate.<sup>8</sup> People receiving these payments face the highest rates of poverty and financial stress in the Australian community. Increasing the base rates of working age payments would have a significant impact on reducing child poverty. During the COVID-19 pandemic when the \$550 Coronavirus Supplement was introduced for JobSeeker and Parenting Payment recipients, the rate of after-housing child poverty in single parent families fell to 17% before returning to 41% in April 2021 when the Supplement was removed.<sup>9</sup>

#### b) Increase Commonwealth Rent Assistance

The rising cost of living is hitting families with young children particularly hard. BSL recommends that Commonwealth Rent Assistance be reviewed, increased and indexed to rents to maintain its value in order to reduce the economic hardship of families with young children.

#### c) Remove compulsory participation in programs such as ParentsNext

Parents in receipt of income support are currently subject to varying mutual obligations. These obligations can include compulsory participation in programs such as ParentsNext for parents of young children. Non-compliance carries the threat of suspension or cancellation of payments. Such policy settings harm children because the threat of suspension of payments exacerbates family stress and anxiety, and if payments are suspended family income is affected, materially affecting the wellbeing of children.<sup>10</sup>

#### d) Remove the Activity Test for the Child Care Subsidy

The Activity Test of the Child Care Subsidy should be removed to guarantee all children access to a minimum of three days per week of subsidised early childhood education and care. The test restricts the number of hours of Child Care Subsidy a family is entitled to, based on the parents 'recognised activity', such as working, studying or looking for work. While the activity test aims to encourage participation in the workforce, in effect it does the opposite by creating uncertainty for parents in casual employment due to the ongoing risk that they will fail to meet the test and generate overpayment debts. The result is that children – especially those in low-income families – are unable to access early education and care and live in greater financial insecurity. Recent research by Impact Economics and Policy found the current activity test for the Child Care Subsidy is contributing to at least 126,000 children from the poorest households missing critical early childhood education and care.<sup>11</sup> Removing the Activity Test is the next step towards achieving universal child care in Australia.

#### e) Improve access to the Additional Child Care Subsidy

Additional support is available for families to meet the cost of child care, but our experience is that families in need are not accessing this support. Most commonly, this is because families do

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<sup>8</sup> <https://ministers.treasury.gov.au/ministers/jim-chalmers-2022/media-releases/release-economic-inclusion-advisory-committee-report>

<sup>9</sup> Social Ventures Australia & BSL, [Making a difference to financial stress and poverty](#), 2021. This briefing is based on research undertaken by Australian National University.

<sup>10</sup> D Bowman & S Wickramasinghe 2020, [Trampolines not traps: enabling economic security for single mothers and their children](#), Brotherhood of St. Laurence, Fitzroy, Vic.

<sup>11</sup> Impact Economics and Policy, [Child Care Activity Subsidy Activity Test: undermining child development and parental participation](#), August 2022.

not know that they are eligible for the Additional Child Care Subsidy. For some families, the system is too complex to navigate. Better communication strategies are needed to ensure that eligible families know about, and can then access, this support.

**f) Remove the Maintenance Income Test (MIT) from the calculation of Family Tax Benefit Part A (FTB Part A) for child support customers**

The complexity of the administrative system for child support, and its interaction with Family Tax Benefit Part A (FTB Part A), has resulted in the families who receive child support payments becoming less financially secure.

Child support payments can fluctuate dramatically depending on reported income. When child support is not paid, parents receive less income than is expected, but do not receive commensurate increases in FTB Part A payments. Women report that child support payments are often unreliable or are even used as a weapon by ex-partners.<sup>12</sup>

Removing the Maintenance Income Test (MIT) would mean that child support is not included as income in the calculation of FTB Part A. This would increase income certainty for recipient families, remove the prospect of retrospectively applied FTB Part A debts, and concurrently close a loophole that allows child support and FTB Part A to be used as vehicles for financial abuse. BSL is working with Professor Miranda Stewart, University of Melbourne, on a publication which will detail how the Family Tax Benefit system could be reformed.

This reform would represent a significant step towards reducing financial insecurity of low-income single parent households (predominantly female-headed) and improving children's opportunities for the best start in life.

**g) Legislate measures on child poverty reduction and establish a multidimensional poverty index that includes wellbeing in the early years**

As proposed by the Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee, the Government should consider legislating measures on poverty reduction, underpinned by a multidimensional poverty index that considers the importance of wellbeing in early childhood. Both Canada<sup>13</sup> and New Zealand<sup>14</sup> have implemented national poverty reduction strategies with legislated targets. In New Zealand the Prime Minister has actively led Child Poverty Reduction. When she resigned in January 2023, Prime Minister Ardern cited the work done to turn around child poverty statistics as among her greatest achievements.<sup>15</sup>

Legislated targets could be supplemented by non-legislated multidimensional indicators which consider not just income-based poverty, but also opportunity deprivation and relational

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<sup>12</sup> K Cook, T Edwards, Z Goodall & J McLaren, *Debts and disappointments: mothers' experiences of the child support system*, National Council of Single Mothers and their Children & Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne, 2019. doi:10.25916/5dd4ab2528b12.

<sup>13</sup> Canadian Government, *Opportunity for all: Canada's first poverty reduction strategy*, Employment and Social Development Canada, Gatineau, Quebec, 2018.

<sup>14</sup> New Zealand Government, *Child Poverty Reduction Act 2018*.

<sup>15</sup> Beehive.govt.nz, 'Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern announces resignation', New Zealand Government 2023, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/prime-minister-jacinda-ardern-announces-resignation>.

deprivation.<sup>16</sup> These could be incorporated into the Treasury's wellbeing framework and the 'Measuring What Matters' statement.<sup>17</sup>

**Question 6: What areas do you think the Commonwealth could focus on to improve coordination and collaboration in developing policies for children and families?**

The level of complexity within and around systems for children highlights the need for child-centred policy reform in which multiple policies are developed and implemented with the wellbeing of children at the forefront, rather than developed in isolation. To work with this level of complexity, we recommend the following:

- **Implementation of the Strategy should be the responsibility of central agencies in Commonwealth and state and territory governments.** This would both elevate early childhood development as a priority issue for first ministers and ensure that a connected and integrated approach is taken (rather than one that focuses predominantly on education, or on health, for example).
- **Broader social security, housing and employment policies** are critical enabling policies that support children in their early years, and must be considered in addition to policies related to education and health. As articulated in our response to Question 5, improvements in social security, housing and employment are essential to reduce child poverty. The Strategy discussion paper does not sufficiently identify the connections that will need to be made with these policy areas to have a truly integrated and effective early years strategy.
- **The Strategy should facilitate national consistency and coordination between jurisdictions.** Presently, some states are racing ahead, but without a consistent approach. Inconsistent service access, eligibility criteria and reporting requirements between state and federal systems add complexity and make it harder to integrate services. Families should be able to move anywhere in Australia and continue to access support.
- **The Early Years Strategy should be connected to Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–2031, the NDIS Review and NDIS Early Years Taskforce.** Given the importance of strengthening the early years system to make it inclusive for all children, including those with disability and developmental delay, the Early Years Strategy will need to interface with the disability system. Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–2031, the NDIS Review and NDIS Early Years Taskforce are not listed in Appendix A of the discussion paper as relevant Commonwealth Government initiatives.
- **Integrated service models should be the rule, not the exception.** Integration at policy level that enables service integration on the ground is a priority. Too often integrated service models are halted due to lack of alignment and/or decision-making processes being controlled centrally by government rather than shared with local communities.
- **Investment in evidence and innovation.** The Early Years Strategy needs investment to build a stronger evidence base on what works in shifting the dial of disadvantage for children across

<sup>16</sup> S Bessell, 'Rethinking child poverty', *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, vol. 23, no. 4, 2021, pp. 539–61. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19452829.2021.1911969>

<sup>17</sup> The Treasury, *Statement 4 Measuring What Matters*, Commonwealth of Australia, 2022.

Australia. This should include investment in innovation that works at the nexus of practice, policy and research, where new ideas can be trialled and tested while gathering data and generating evidence. Such innovative practice could identify elements that lead to success and propose ways to scale and embed them in local service systems across communities.

## Principles

### Question 7: What principles should be included in the Strategy?

BSL recommends the following principles guide the Strategy:

- **Children at the centre of all policy development, service design and delivery.** The voices and interests of children and their families should be central in all areas of public policy that intersect with children 0–8 years. This needs to go beyond consultation to include co-design and engagement in implementation, governance and evaluation. Child-centred frameworks would lead service providers to respond to the voice of children and families, rather than expecting families to navigate and fit within complex service systems.
- **Funding to enable community-led design informed by lived experience.** The strategy should be underpinned by place-based, flexible and sustainable funding models that enable communities to design local early years systems, providing the right interventions at the right time from before children are born until they start school.
- **Economic conditions enabling families to fulfil their role in raising healthy, thriving children.**<sup>18</sup> Children 0–8 years and their families have basic needs met through income support and subsidies that are an enabling mechanism, in preference to more punitive policy approaches, as found in the review of Parents Next.
- **An equitable and accessible system, with a lens of diversity and disability.** Mainstream services need to deeply understand and respond to the aspirations and needs of children and families with diverse lived and living experience – for example, those with diverse cultural and faith backgrounds, those living with disability, families experiencing poverty and financial hardship, LGBTIQ+ families, and people with lived or living experience of trauma.
- **Prioritising First Nations children and their families.** This involves ensuring that there are no gaps for First Nations children in early development nor in First Nations families and communities supporting their children to thrive.
- **Recognition of individual choices.** Not every family wants or needs the same support at the same time. An inclusive early years system should be tailored, flexible and family-focused.
- **Evidence informed and evidence generating.** A review of early years evidence of what works across Australia and Internationally could inform the development of the early years strategy and provide a baseline for future evidence.

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<sup>18</sup> Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, [Submission: Select Committee on the Cost of Living](#), March 2023.

## Evidence-based approach

### Question 8: Are there gaps in existing frameworks or other research or evidence that need to be considered for the development of the Strategy?

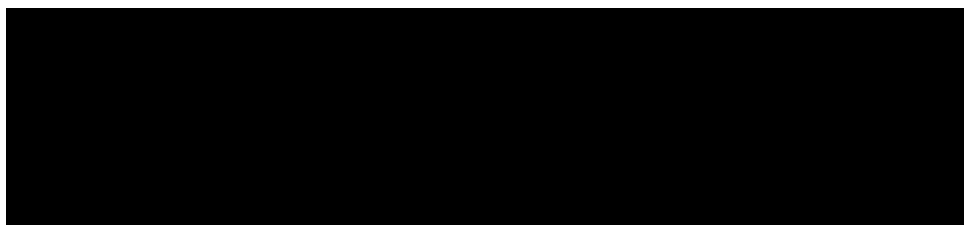
BSL supports the frameworks referenced in the Discussion Paper to be considered in the development of the Strategy, including the Nest Child Wellbeing Framework model (ARACY), and Australia's obligations under the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child.

We recommend the following frameworks and position papers also inform the early years strategy:

- Early Years Catalyst work (Orange Compass)<sup>19</sup>
- MOR (Material, Opportunity, Relational) for Children Framework<sup>20</sup>
- Centre for Policy Development Guarantee for Young Children and Families<sup>21</sup>
- United Nations Sustainable Development Goals
- Murdoch Institute Centre for Community Child Health Policy Position papers

We thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the Early Years Strategy development. It is an exciting time for Australia, recognising the importance of investing in early learning and development for our children now and into the future.

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<sup>19</sup> F McKenzie & E Millar, [Mapping the systems that influence early childhood development outcomes](#), prepared by Orange Compass for the Early Years Catalyst, August 2022.

<sup>20</sup> S Bessell, A Bexley & C Vuckovic, [The MOR for Children Framework](#), Children's Policy Centre, The Australian National University, Canberra, 2021.

<sup>21</sup> Centre for Policy Development, [Starting better – a guarantee for young children and families](#), CPD, 2021.