

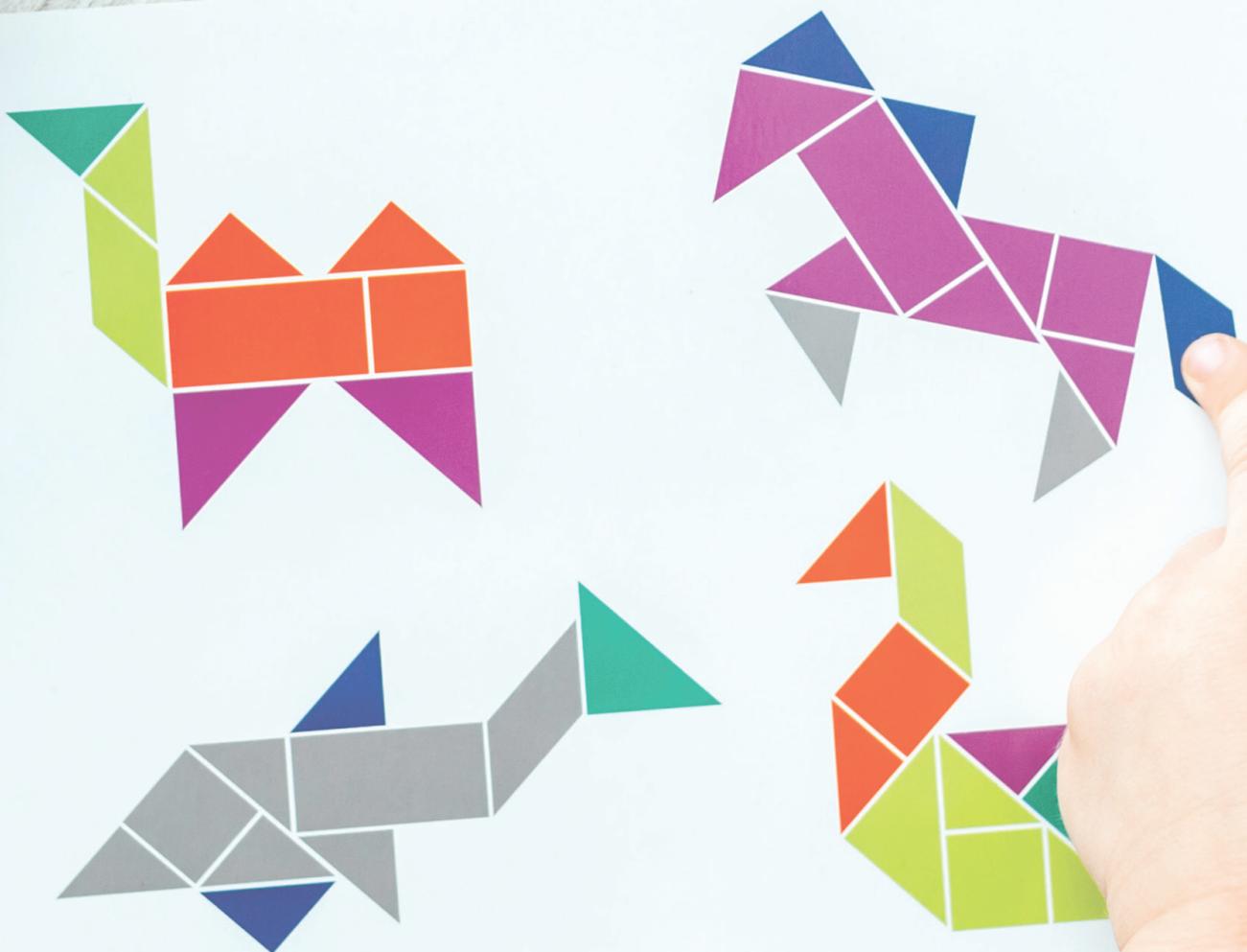


Children First
Alliance

**Submission to the Future
of Education Review:**

**Developing an Early Childhood
Strategy**

April 2018



Children First Alliance Founding Members



Jeremy Halcrow
Chief Executive Officer




Belconnen
Community
Service

Dira Horne
Chief Executive Officer



Communities@Work

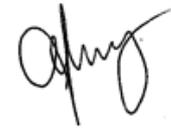
Lorcan Murphy
Chief Executive Officer



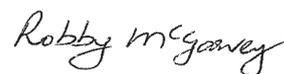

Amanda Tobler
Chief Executive Officer




Liz Farry
Territory Manager




Robby McGarvey
Director




Bruce Papps
Chief Executive Officer




Chris Redmond
Chief Executive Officer




Darren Black
Chief Executive Officer




Frances Crimmins
Executive Director



Contents

About the ACT Children First Alliance	4
Summary of Recommendations	6
Introduction	9
Priority areas	12
Develop a meaningful Early Childhood Strategy for the ACT	13
Overview of plans and strategies	15
Developing an ACT Strategy	16
Reach children experiencing disadvantage	18
Support Equity scholarships for children experiencing disadvantage	19
Support an early intervention fund for ECEC providers	20
Support outreach services targeting children at risk of missing out	20
Continue universal access to preschool for four year olds and introduce funded access to preschool for three year olds	21
Commission modelling into approaches and costs of extending funded preschool access to three year olds in the ACT	23
Establish a permanent commitment for access to 15 hours of preschool per week for four year old children	23
Commit to funding access to 15 hours of preschool per week for three year old children	23
Support and develop the ECEC workforce	24
Ensure that workforce development is a key strategic area for the ACT Strategy	25
Fund ongoing professional development for ECEC professionals through grants for in-house professional development and scholarships for Diploma and Bachelor level qualifications in ECEC	25
Improve planning processes for new early learning centres	26
Approvals for new schools in the ACT	27
Introduce a need, viability and proximity assessment for new early learning centres	28
Appendix 1: Summary of State and Territory Strategies	30
Appendix 2: Our guiding principles	35



About the Children First Alliance

The ACT Children First Alliance (the Alliance) is a network of longstanding not-for-profit providers of children's service in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), including early learning centres (ELCs), family day care, preschool and after school care.

There is a significant body of research that demonstrates the importance of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) on a child's social, emotional, educational and economic wellbeing across the lifespan. Despite this, more than one in five ACT children were developmentally vulnerable when entering school.

The Alliance was established to develop and communicate a shared vision for ECEC in the ACT and to ensure that all children have access to ECEC.

The ten community ECEC providers that make up this Alliance operate 46 ELCs with 3,543 places. The Alliance has ten Founding Members:

- Anglicare NSW South, NSW West & ACT
- Belconnen Community Service
- Communities@Work
- Community Services #1
- Goodstart Early Learning ACT
- MOCCA
- Northside Community Service
- Woden Community Service
- YMCA Canberra
- YWCA Canberra

The Alliance's approach will involve:

- Developing policy and program priorities based on the evidence-base and experience of Alliance members;
- Working with the ACT Government to progress these reforms;
- Working collaboratively with like-minded stakeholders; and
- Communicating information about these reforms with the ACT community.

To contact the ACT Children First Alliance, please email lydia.randall@ywca-canberra.org.au or call Lydia on 6175 9928.



Summary of Recommendations

Develop a meaningful Early Childhood Strategy for the ACT

An ACT Early Childhood Strategy should focus on children most at need, be guided by strong principles and adopt a whole of government approach. More specifically, an ACT Early Childhood Strategy should also be a reform plan for action with:

- A longer term vision for ECEC, including the ACT Government's position on policy areas that require bi-lateral or multi-lateral agreement such as extending access to 15 hours of supported education in the two years before school.
- Specific, tangible actions that clearly outline the policy and program need to improve the outcomes for ECEC in the ACT.
- A financial commitment and costings with funding across the timeframe of the Strategy.
- A ten year timeframe to allow for both immediate change and longer term reform to improve the outcomes for children.
- The inclusion of baseline data and specific outcome measures that are numeric and clearly indicate the ACT Government's commitment to improving ECEC. Outcome measures should be focused on reducing the proportion of children who enter school developmentally vulnerable, increasing access to ECEC for children experiencing disadvantage, increasing the quality of services and increasing the qualifications of ECEC staff.
- An evaluation framework, with funding available for analysis of the effectiveness of the ACT Strategy in meeting its success measures, particularly relating to innovative programs that aim to improve outcomes for children experiencing disadvantage.
- A strong governance and advisory structures including extending the membership of the Ministerial Early Years Advisory Council to include a specified position for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and practitioners.

Reach children experiencing disadvantage

- Partially fund Equity Scholarships for children experiencing disadvantage to access 15 hours of ECEC per week using a partnership model with not-for-profit providers.
- Develop an Early Intervention Fund and Co-Lab to support programs that improve access to ECEC for children experiencing disadvantage.
- Provide funding to ECEC services and Children's Service Providers to support outreach to target children at risk of missing out on ECEC and provide flexible and targeted support. This will occur in collaboration with the Community Services Directorate and ACT Health.

Continue universal access to preschool for four year olds and introduce funded access to preschool for three year olds

- Commission modelling into approaches and costs of extending funded preschool access to three year olds in the ACT.
- Establish a permanent commitment for access to 15 hours of preschool per week for four year old children.
- Commit to funding access to 15 hours of preschool per week for three year old children.

Support and develop the ECEC workforce

- Ensure that workforce development is a key strategic area for the ACT Early Childhood Strategy.
- Fund ongoing professional development for ECEC professionals through grants for in-house professional development and scholarships for Diploma and Bachelor level qualifications in ECEC.

Improve planning processes for new early learning centres

As part of the development of an Early Childhood Strategy and the review of the Education Act 2004, introduce a need, viability and proximity assessment for new early learning centres in the ACT including that considers:

- The need for the centre as determined by the existing demand for services and consideration of population changes and growth.
- The proximity of the centre to other existing centres.
- The impact of the centre on the viability of existing centres, including their capacity to ensure that centres are able to be staffed by qualified ECEC educators and teachers.



Introduction

The Children First Alliance (the Alliance) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Future of Education review (the Review). This submission focuses on the development of an Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Early Childhood Strategy (ACT Strategy), as part of the Review.

As the Minister for Education stated in her introductory remarks in the Early Childhood Strategy Discussion Paper ‘The start a child gets in life has the power to determine everything that follows’. ¹ This is important for all children and particularly children experiencing disadvantage, who have the most to gain from accessing quality early childhood education and care.

The Alliance welcomes moves by the ACT Government to develop the first ACT Strategy. The ACT Strategy is crucial to ensuring that we have a strong, professional Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector that meets the needs of all children.

Over the last ten years, since the introduction of the National Quality Framework, the ECEC sector has made significant progress in improving quality and access, demonstrating its adaptability and professionalism.

The next five to ten years will be characterised by the need to continue to focus on quality and strive for excellence across the sector. This shift will need to be supported by continued investment in the workforce and a need to reframe the way that we talk about ECEC, away from the outdated views that the sector is here to simply provide care while parents work, to a focus on children and the outcomes and benefits that they achieve from accessing ECEC.

The ACT Strategy is being developed at a time when the ECEC sector in the ACT is experiencing significant change including:

- The replacement of the Child Care Benefit and Child Care Rebate with the Child Care Subsidy, and associated changes to support for children experiencing, or at risk of, disadvantage through the Additional Child Care Subsidy on 2 July 2018.
- Amendments to the Education and Care Services National Law and Regulations on 1 October 2017.
- The introduction of the revised National Quality Standards on 1 February 2018.
- The expiration of the Australian Government Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Strategy for Australia 2012–2016. ²
- The cessation of two Australian Government sources of funding for professional development: the Professional Support Coordinators (PSC) and the Long Day Care Professional Development Program (LDCPDP) in 2016 and 2017 respectively.
- The implementation of the Reportable Conduct Scheme

1 ACT Government (2017) Early Childhood Strategy Discussion Paper, Future of Education Review, <https://yoursay.act.gov.au/futureofeducation>

2 Australian Government Department of Ageing (2012) Early Years Workforce Strategy, <https://docs.education.gov.au/node/2918>

in the ACT which commenced on 1 July 2017.

- The ongoing uncertainty about funding for the National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education (Agreement) which provides funding for 15 hours per week of preschool education to all ACT Children and continues to be committed to on a year by year basis and is currently funded to December 2019.

With the ongoing and constant changes to ECEC, an ACT Strategy will also ensure that the sector and the professionals that work within it, are supported to respond to the changes and ensure that children continue to receive the best possible outcomes.

This shift in focus for ECEC policy and need to consider future directions was acknowledged by all state and territory governments commissioning the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools through Early Childhood Interventions. In January 2018 the final report from this review; ‘Lifting our Game’ made recommendations under the following six themes:

- ‘Embedding foundations for future reform and improved education and life outcomes.
- Progressively expanding access to quality early childhood education, for example preschool, for all three year olds.
- Targeting additional support for some children and families to promote access, equity and inclusion.
- Focussing on quality improvement and workforce issues.
- Improving parent and community engagement.
- Supporting associated transparency and accountability measures.’¹

The Alliance supports these themes and encourages the ACT Government to consider this report in the development of the ACT ECEC Strategy.

There is a considerable evidence-base that demonstrates the educational, social and economic benefits of ECEC for children and the broader community, now and into the future. The ACT Strategy has the potential to put this evidence into practice by providing a framework for the future with clear targets and investment.

This submission builds on our Policy Position statement; Children First: A shared vision for early childhood education and care in the ACT and Children First Alliance Submission to the 2018-19 ACT Budget Consultation.

¹ Pascoe, S & Brennan D, Lifting our game: Report of the review to achieve educational excellence in Australian schools through early childhood interventions, December 2017



Priority areas

The ACT Government is currently developing an ECEC Strategy (ACT Strategy). The Strategy is being developed as part of the Future of Education Review process. The sections below outline the Alliance's recommended priority areas for the ACT Strategy. These are:

- Develop a meaningful Early Childhood Strategy for the ACT;
- Reach children experiencing disadvantage;
- Continue universal access to preschool for four year olds and introduce funded access to preschool for three year olds;
- Support and develop the ECEC workforce; and
- Improve planning processes for new early learning centres.

Each of these sections provides recommendations of specific policies and programs for the ACT Strategy.

Develop a meaningful Early Childhood Strategy for the ACT

The ACT Government is currently developing an ECEC Strategy (ACT Strategy). The Strategy is being developed as part of the Future of Education Review process. The sections below outline the Alliance's recommended priority areas for the ACT Strategy. These are:

The ECEC sector has experienced a decade of significant change. A plan is now needed for the next ten years to ensure that the quality of ECEC services continues to improve, the educator workforce is supported and that children achieve the best possible outcomes. Planning is also important to ensure that the sector continues to be responsive to best practice and evolving evidence.

In 2009, all Australian Governments committed to 'Investing in the Early Years—A National Early Childhood Development Strategy'. The Strategy articulates a vision that 'By 2020 all children have the best start in life to create a better future for themselves and for the nation'.¹

Several states and territories across Australia have developed jurisdictional strategies relating to the early years and ECEC. These strategies vary in their timeframe, focus and investment. To inform the recommendations in this section, a brief analysis of some of these existing strategies was undertaken. These Strategies were:

- 'Great Start, Great Future: Northern Territory Early Years Strategic Plan':² an early years strategy that includes 'quality learning' as one of the four 'building blocks'. Priority actions include improving the quality of ECEC, transforming preschool and improving integration, expanding

1 Investing in the Early Years – A national early childhood development strategy: An initiative of the Council of Australian Governments, 2 July 2009, Commonwealth of Australia, http://www.startingblocks.gov.au/media/1104/national_ecd_strategy.pdf

2 Northern Territory Government (2016) Great Start, Great Future: Northern Territory Early Years Strategic Plan, <https://education.nt.gov.au/education/statistics-research-and-strategies/early-years-strategic-plan>

professional development for teachers and educators and expanding the 'Families as First Teachers' program. Success measures include increased enrolments in 'Families as First Teachers' program, reductions in vulnerability as measured by the AEDC, an increase in services meeting the national quality standard and improved longer term NAPLAN results.

- 'Children Thriving in Strong, Connected Communities: Tasmania's strategy for children – pregnancy to eight years 2018-2021':¹ a pregnancy and early years strategy. Five key areas are highlighted: children, families, communities and environments. The document is principles based and includes actions such as 'Research and evidence underpin all programs, services and practice' and 'Diversity is recognised, respected and socially inclusive of all'. Success measures are also principles based and include 'Children report they feel safe, valued and connected' and 'Children are developmentally on track across the five domains measured by the Australian Early Development Census'.
- 'Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Action Plan 2016-19' (Queensland):² a workforce development strategy. The strategy has three priorities: Being valued, qualifications and skills. Actions in the plan include launching an ECEC careers campaign 'Inspire the future', subsidising Certificates and Diplomas for ECEC and piloting leadership skills development projects. Key Performance Indicators include increases in numbers of educators, numbers of enrolments for qualifications and reductions in vacancy rates.
- 'Early Childhood Reform Plan' (Victoria):³ a \$202.1 million early years plan. The Plan includes four 'reform directions' including supporting higher quality services and reducing disadvantage in early education. Some of the education-related 'key reform actions' include providing funding for additional support for children who need it in preschool, quality improvement grants, additional funding for the 'Early Start Kindergarten' program for Koorie children. No success measures are included within the plan, but they are planned for the future.
- 'The Early Years Initiative' (Western Australia):⁴ a \$49.3 million early years Initiative will see four Western Australian communities partner with State Government, Minderoo Foundation and Telethon Kids Institute on a ten year to improve outcomes for young children and their families. The Initiative is a response to evidence that suggests many children aged 0-4 years old in WA are not reaching developmental milestones before reaching school age.

A more detailed overview of these plans and strategies is included in this document as Appendix 1.

1 Tasmanian Government (2017) Children Thriving in Strong, Connected Communities: Tasmania's strategy for children – pregnancy to eight years 2018-2021, <https://www.education.tas.gov.au/2017/11/tasmanias-strategy-children-pregnancy-eight-years-2018-2021/>

2 Queensland Government (2016) Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Action Plan 2016-19, <https://qed.qld.gov.au/earlychildhood/educators/our-initiatives/workforce-action-plan>

3 Victorian Government (2017) Early Childhood Reform Plan, <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/educationstate/Pages/earlychildhood.aspx>

4 Government of Western Australia Department of Communities, Early Years Initiative, <https://www.communities.wa.gov.au/about/projects-and-programs/early-years-initiative/>

Overview of plans and strategies

The strategies vary in their focus and approach. The table below provides a brief overview of the key features of their approach to the plans.

State or Territory	Plan or Strategy	Focus areas	Approach
Northern territory	Great Start Great Future: Northern Territory Early Years Strategic Plan 2016-2020	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Healthy thriving children 2. Quality learning 3. Resilient families 4. Quality service provision. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Early years focus •Performance measures included
Tasmania	Children Thriving in Strong, Connected Communities: Tasmania's strategy for children – pregnancy to eight years 2018-2021	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Children 2. Families 3. Communities 4. Environments 5. Service Providers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Early years focus •High level framework •Performance measures included
Queensland	Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Action Plan 2016-2019	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Being valued 2. Qualifications 3. Skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Specifically focused on workforce development •Key performance indicators included
Victoria	Early Childhood Reform Plan (July 2017 – June 2026)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Supporting higher quality services and reducing disadvantage in early education; 2. Providing more support for parenting; 3. Making early childhood services more accessible and inclusive; and 4. Building a better system. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Early years focus •Longer term plan (ten years) •Costed
Western Australia	The Early Years Initiative	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Place-based approaches in four communities 2. Research 3. Partnerships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Early years focus •Longer term plan (10 years) •Costed

Some common themes and approaches were observed across all plans. Some unique features were also identified in some of the plans. These are outlined below.

All strategies, except for the Victorian and Western Australian Plans, included performance measures or KPIs, although the Victorian Plan did indicate that measures will be developed in the future to monitor progress and the Western Australian Plan indicated that the programs and progress will be measured against the five Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) domains. Success measures are important for assessing the impact of the actions in delivering the plans intended outcomes. Some of the plans included more specific measures such as the Queensland Plan indicator to 'Increase in

the number and proportion of educators who hold a relevant qualification'. However none of the plans that were analysed included a numeric targets, making it difficult to understand the magnitude of the increase that will be required to improve outcomes for children. By not using clear targets, it is easier for the measure to be achieved without making an impact on overall outcomes because, for example using the Queensland Plan indicator outlined above, an increase in one qualified teacher will meet that measure.

All plans, except for the Tasmanian Plan which was a principles-based document and Western Australian Plan which is a high level document relating to the project, outlined clear and specific actions for implementation. This clearly communicates the intent of the plan and the policies programs that will be included as part of their implementation. It also allows for better outcomes measurement against the actions.

All Plans have some focus on targeting children experiencing disadvantage and reaching children who are at risk of missing out on ECEC. The Victorian Plan exclusively focuses on children who are most at need or at risk of missing out of ECEC. This includes children known to the child protection system, Koorie children, children with disabilities and refugee children. This focus on equitable access to ECEC is demonstrated through the actions of the plan which mainly focus on improved access for these population groups. The Western Australian Plan is a partnership initiative that focuses solely on communities with children who with a clear need to improve outcomes.

All of the plans have a three to four year timeframe except for the Victorian and Western Australian Plans which are to be implemented over a ten year timeframe. This Victorian Plan outlines that the reason for this is the time that these reforms will take time to implement. A longer term outlook allows for more transformative change and longer term investments. It also acknowledges the need for systemic change to improve outcomes for children.

Only the Victorian and Western Australian Plans are costed. These funding commitments demonstrate that the Plan will be supported by an investment to help to make it a reality, rather than it being a principled based document. This does not mean that the other plans assessed have not resulted in an additional funding commitments, this is just not outlined in the plans.

Developing an ACT Strategy

The Alliance welcomes the moves by the ACT Government to establish an ACT Early Childhood Strategy. The Alliance recommends that the ACT Strategy is a detailed reform document that outlines the work needed to build on the first ten years of reform following the introduction of the National Quality Framework. The suggested areas for the next phase of this reform are outlined below.

Focusing on children most at need

AEDC data shows that children who attend preschool are less likely to be developmentally vulnerable on all five developmental domains (physical,

social, emotional, language and communication). A strong focus of the ACT Strategy should be on reaching and improving outcomes for children experiencing disadvantage. This should include working collaboratively with the Community Services Directorate (CSD) and ACT Health to reach children and families who engage with their programs and services.

Be guided by strong principles

An ACT Strategy should be guided by strong principles. These principles must aim to counter the harmful misconceptions about ECEC which contribute to policy development at the national level that does not acknowledge the important role of ECEC in a child's development and the required skills and structures needed to establish quality education and care.

The Alliance has recommends that the ACT Strategy include the principles that guide the work of the Alliance. These are: children first, evidence, quality, equity, accessibility and whole of child, whole of community. More information relating to these principles is included as Appendix 2.

Adopt a whole of government approach

A whole of Government strategy is needed to acknowledge the many areas that impact on ECEC policy beyond the Education Directorate. This includes the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate, Community Services Directorate (CSD) and ACT Health. For example planning decisions about the number and location of Early Learning Centres impacts on the quality of services and the sustainability of nearby services. Similarly services that operate out of CSD to support children experiencing disadvantage can be engaged to reach children most at need and connect them with the ECEC sector.

The Alliance believes that the plan should adopt a 'social determinants' approach. The Social Determinants of Health are 'the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, and age, and the wider set of forces and systems shaping the conditions of daily life'.¹ The 'social determinants' acknowledge the broader implications of policies, including economic policies, development agendas and social policies, on the health and wellbeing of people and communities. Policies and programs that are also based on the principle of equity can contribute to addressing the social determinants, including education, benefiting the child throughout their lives.

A strong strategy with clear outcome measures and sound governance structures

The ACT Strategy must be more than a principles-based framework and instead be a reform plan for action that clearly articulates actions, investment, timeframes and success measures. More specifically, the ACT Strategy should:

- Outline a longer term vision for ECEC, including the ACT

¹ World Health Organization, Social determinants of health, http://www.who.int/social_determinants/en/

Government's position on policy areas that require bi-lateral or multi-lateral agreement such as extending access to 15 hours of supported education in the two years before school.

- Include specific, tangible actions that clearly outline the policy and program need to improve the outcomes for ECEC in the ACT.
- Be costed with a clear commitment to funding across the timeframe of the Strategy to ensure that the actions outlined in the document are supported by an adequate investment of funds.
- Have a ten year timeframe to allow for both immediate change and longer term reform to improve the outcomes for children.
- Include baseline data and specific outcome measures that are numeric and clearly indicate the ACT Government's commitment to improving ECEC. Outcome measures should be focused on reducing the proportion of children who enter school developmentally vulnerable, increasing access to ECEC for children experiencing disadvantage, increasing the quality of services and increasing the qualifications of ECEC staff.
- Include an evaluation framework, with funding available for analysis of the effectiveness of the ACT Strategy in meeting its success measures, particularly relating to innovative programs that aim to improve outcomes for children experiencing disadvantage.
- Have strong governance and advisory structures including extending the membership of the Ministerial Early Years Advisory Council to include a specified position for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and practitioners.

Reach children experiencing disadvantage

An ACT Strategy must have a strong focus on reaching children who are missing out on ECEC and who are more likely to be developmentally vulnerable. This includes children experiencing disadvantage, children from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, children with disabilities and children from emerging communities.

In 2005, across the ACT, 22.5 per cent of children were developmentally vulnerable on at least one measure when entering school. This rate is almost twice as high in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, with 41.9 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children being developmentally vulnerable on at least one measure. ¹

The ACT has high rates of enrolment in preschool in the year before school, with 100 per cent of children enrolled in a preschool program. However 91 per cent are enrolled for 15 or more hours and far fewer, 74 per cent, attend 15 or more hours. ²

Both the AEDC data and ECEC access data provide an indication of the

¹ Emerging trends from the AEDC, Fact sheet on AEDC results for the 2009, 2012 and 2015 collection, <https://www.aedc.gov.au/resources/detail/fact-sheet--emerging-trends-from-the-aedc>

² Two years are better than one: Preschool programs in the ACT: Fact Sheet, October 2016, www.mitchellinstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/.../ACT-Fact-Sheet-FINAL.pdf

current provision of and access to ECEC and areas where additional supports may be needed. This data should be used to inform targeted programs for children in the community who are experiencing barriers to accessing ECEC.

AEDC data shows that children who attend preschool are less likely to be developmentally vulnerable on all five developmental domains (physical, social, emotional, language and communication).¹ There are a number of barriers to children and families accessing ECEC including limited access to specialist supports for children with additional needs, complex paper work and enrolment processes, lack of trust and access and availability.²

Engaging children and families who experience these barriers in ECEC involves ELCs being linked in with their communities and with services that support people experiencing disadvantage. ELCs can be best placed to identify early learning or health issues, provide information on strategies to support early learning at home, build supportive relationships with families who aren't engaging with other services and connect families with other support services.³

Community ECEC providers often provide other community services and/or are connected with a range of other community organisations. This makes them best placed to provide and connect people with the wrap around services needed to identify problems early, intervene and refer to appropriate services.

The recently released 'Lifting our Game' report specified the need for 'Targeting additional support for some children and families to promote access, equity and inclusion, recognising that some children and their families require it in order to thrive.' The report indicates that 'Nowhere is the evidence clearer than in the benefits of early intervention. A child who starts behind stays behind, which comes at enormous cost to him or her, the community and governments. Targeted, evidence-based early childhood interventions can prevent this from happening, and break intergenerational cycles of disadvantage.'⁴

Support Equity scholarships for children experiencing disadvantage

The ACT Government currently provides funding for emergency ECEC places, usually for children who are experiencing significant hardship or who are in the care and protection system. These places are limited and temporary. Community ECEC providers understand that despite the subsidies in place, price and administrative burden will always be a barrier for some people in engaging in ECEC. Equity Scholarships could go part of the way to addressing this, by providing funding for people experiencing disadvantage or hardship. Through a partnership approach, Community ECEC Providers could provide matched funding with the ACT Government to deliver two Equity Scholarships per ELC to provide

1 O'Connell M, Fox S, Hinz B and Cole H (2016). Quality Education for All: Fostering creative, entrepreneurial, resilient and capable learners, Mitchell Institute policy paper No. 01/2016. Mitchell Institute, Melbourne. www.mitchellinstitute.org.au

2 Ibid

3 Ibid

4 Pascoe, S & Brennan D, Lifting our game: Report of the review to achieve educational excellence in Australian schools through early childhood interventions, December 2017

ongoing ECEC for 15 hours per week for children experiencing disadvantage.

Support an early intervention fund for ECEC providers

An ‘Early Intervention Fund’ is also needed to provide greater access to ECEC by children experiencing disadvantage. The Fund should be targeted and informed by the data on the socio-economic status of the local, data on access to ECEC and where AEDC data on vulnerability. The fund should provide grants to ECEC providers to implement evidence-based programs that improve engagement of children experiencing disadvantage. In applying for grants, ECEC providers should need to demonstrate the need for the program and the evidence supporting their intended approach for engagement of children and families.

A possible model for the fund is to provide ten grants per annum of up to \$30,000 to ECEC providers to implement evidence-based and innovative programs that improve engagement of children experiencing disadvantage. This would be trialled over a two year period. In applying for grants, ECEC providers should be required to demonstrate the need for the program and the evidence supporting their intended approach for engagement of children and families.

A Co-Lab process could be developed to support the application process for the Early Intervention Fund. The Co-lab would provide training to potential applicants and support the development of innovative applications that are embedded in the evidence-base. The process would involve potential applicants being called to provide an Expression of Interest and then being supported through workshops and coaching to develop an application that is innovative. This could be modelled on the ‘NSW Domestic and Family Violence Innovation Fund’ which supports applicants through two workshops on topics such as business case development and social innovation, alongside particular feedback being provided on draft applications.¹

Support outreach services targeting children at risk of missing out

Children at risk of missing out on ECEC because of disadvantage often have contact with other support systems across health and community services. Targeted funding for ECEC’s and Children Service Providers in the ACT would allow for outreach to connect with existing services to reach children who are at risk of missing out on ECEC. This funding could also support system navigation for families to assist with accessing the available rebates to access free or subsidised ECEC.

This support is needed now more than ever with the replacement of the Childcare Benefit and Rebate with the Childcare Subsidy and changes to the Childcare Safety Net being introduced on 2 July 2018. These changes will mean that people experiencing disadvantage are more likely to miss out on ECEC because of more onerous ‘work test’ arrangements. These changes will also require additional reporting and administration which is

¹ NSW Department of Family and Community Services (2017) Domestic and Family Violence Innovation Fund, http://www.women.nsw.gov.au/violence_prevention/innovation-fund

already a barrier to children experiencing disadvantage accessing ECEC.

Continue universal access to preschool for four year olds and introduce funded access to pre-school for three year olds

The ACT Strategy must include a longer term plan for ECEC, including a commitment to introduce larger reform measures that are proven to significantly improve outcomes for children early in life and into the future. The most significant of these reforms is the extension of universal preschool provision to three year olds.

The newly released report ‘Lifting our Game’ recommends ‘Progressively expanding access to quality early childhood education, for example preschool, for all three year olds.’ The report goes on to say ‘In terms of improving school outcomes through early childhood interventions, the evidence points to this as the single most impactful reform Australia could undertake, with international comparisons highlighting it as the biggest gap in the current system. The case for this investment is compelling.’¹

More specifically the report recommends that:

- ‘Australian governments agree to permanent, adequate funding for Universal Access in the year before school and the National Quality Framework.’²
- ‘Australian governments progressively implement universal access to 600 hours per year of a quality early childhood education program, for example preschool, for all three year olds, with access prioritised for disadvantaged children, families and communities during roll out.’³
- ‘Australian governments promote and support full participation by three and four year olds in quality early childhood education programs, in particular to maximise participation by vulnerable or disadvantaged children.’

In 1998 the United Kingdom (UK) Government introduced subsidised preschool for four year olds. This was later extended to three year olds in 2004 and two year olds experiencing disadvantage in 2013. In September 2017, this was increased from 15 hours per week to 30 hours per week. Sweden offers all three to five year old children 15 hours of free ECEC per week and Italy offers 40 hours of free ECEC for all three to six year olds.

The EPPE study assessed the impact of ECEC on participants’ longer term outcomes. The study found that the more months a child spends in quality ECEC, the better their language skills will be, and that an early start (aged two or three years) is linked with better intellectual attainment at school entry. The researchers

1 Pascoe, S & Brennan D, Lifting our game: Report of the review to achieve educational excellence in Australian schools through early childhood interventions, December 2017

2 Ibid

3 Ibid

concluded that two or more years in a high quality preschool environment had the biggest statistical impact on intellectual development and early literacy skills.^{1 2}

As the Mitchell Institute Report ‘Quality Early Education for All’ identified ‘Commencing work on planning the extension of Universal Access to 3 year olds would bring Australia into line with international norms’.³ Providing two years of preschool would have the greatest impact on child outcomes and would provide greater benefits for children experiencing disadvantage for whom one year of preschool is not adequate to close the achievement gaps.⁴

Approximately two thirds of Australian three year olds (66 per cent) access ECEC. In the ACT 71 per cent of children access ECEC. Of the 66 per cent of three year olds accessing ECEC in Australia, just 21 per cent attend a preschool program. Preschool is defined by the Mitchell Institute Report ‘Preschool: Two years are better than one’ as ‘A defined learning-focused program, usually with minimum hours of attendance for children in the year or two before school and delivered by a qualified Early Childhood Teacher.’⁵ However there is no nationally defined program of preschool for three year olds in Australia.

The Mitchell Institute Report ‘Preschool: Two years are better than one’ provides a pathway for implementing a preschool program for three year olds in Australia. The pathway is a four stage process:

- ‘Designing: Defining the structural and process elements of a preschool program for three year olds and considering how a three year old program could be delivered within the existing system in each jurisdiction, based on current utilisation and capacity. Scoping and developing jurisdictional-specific implementation plans in collaboration with relevant stakeholders.’
- Implementing: A phased approach to expanding capacity, delivering a workforce strategy and gradually building attendance rates.
- Embedding: Once there is adequate capacity within the sector, maintaining a focus on quality, attendance for the right dosage,
- and ensuring priority cohorts have equitable access.
- Sustaining: Maintaining appropriate levels of quality and funding, and responding to emerging evidence

1 Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I., & Taggart, B., (2004). The Effective Provision of PreSchool Education (EPPE) Project: final report. Institute of Education, University of London: London. https://www.ioe.ac.uk/RB_Final_Report_3-7.pdf

2 Melhuish, E., Ereky-Stevens, K., Petrogiannis, K., Ariescu, A., Penderi, E., Rentzou, K., Talwell, A., Leseman, P., & Broekhuisen, M., (2015). A review of research on the effects of early childhood education and care (ECEC) on child development. Curriculum and Quality Analysis and Impact Review of Early Childhood Education and Care http://ecec-care.org/fieadmin/careproject/Publications/reports/summaries/D4__1_EcecutiveSummary.pdf

3 O’Connell M, Fox S, Hinz B and Cole H (2016). ‘Quality Education for All: Fostering creative, entrepreneurial, resilient and capable learners’ Mitchell Insitutute policy paper No. 01/2016. Mitchel Institute, Melbourne. www.mitchellinstitute.org.au

4 Fox, S and Geddes, M. (2016). Preschool - Two Years are Better Than One: Developing a Preschool Program for Australian 3 Year Olds – Evidence, Policy and Implementation, Mitchell Institute

5 Ibid

about dose, duration and quality thresholds.’¹

The changes to ECEC in Australia implemented over the past decade, which include the provision of funding for 15 hours per week for four year olds to access preschool, have brought Australia in line with minimum practices among most OECD countries. This move was taken a decade after the UK.

Extending preschool to three year olds would ensure that we continue to progress our ECEC policies, rather than continuing to lag behind globally.

Commission modelling into approaches and costs of extending funded preschool access to three year olds in the ACT

Work is needed in the ACT to undertake the ‘Designing’ component of the transition to three year old preschool as outlined above by the Mitchell Institute. This will allow the ACT Government to determine both the possible policy for the provision of preschool to three year olds in the ACT and modelling of various scenarios to determine the costing of these policies. The policies to be modelled should consider the existing infrastructure available and ways to incorporate the provision of preschool to three year olds building on this foundation. This research should be undertaken as part of the Future of Education Review process.

Establish a permanent commitment for access to 15 hours of preschool per week for four year old children

The current Partnership Agreement for access to preschool for 15 hours of access to preschool in the year before school has been extended to the end of 2019. This funding is reconsidered each year and extended on a year by year basis. Australian Governments need to move away from this ad hoc commitment to preschool and commit to funding in an ongoing way for preschool into the future, including support for multi-lateral agreements over several years.

Commit to funding access to 15 hours of preschool per week for three year old children

Any longer term plan for ECEC reform and policy in the ACT needs to include the extension of universal preschool access to three year olds so that children can access 15 hours of funded preschool in the two years before school. This is consistent with the evidence on the most effective measures to give children the best start in life and with advice being provided by independent government reports like ‘Lifting our Game’ and research institutes with expertise in this area such as the Mitchell Institute.

Support and develop the ECEC workforce

Workforce development needs to be a key strategic area of the ACT Strategy. This is because the ECEC workforce is crucial to developing quality services with great outcomes for children.

¹ Ibid

Across the ECEC sector 61.7 per cent of people working in ECEC has a relevant qualification.¹ This figure goes beyond early childhood education and care centres and includes areas that don't have a minimum qualification requirement such as after school care.

When looking exclusively at Early Learning Centres, consistent with the National Quality Framework, all educators working in Early Learning Centres in the ACT have a qualification or are working towards one. Since 2010 there has been a significant improvement in the qualifications of the ACT ECEC sector. In the ACT in 2016 almost 90 per cent of staff working in early education and care centres had an early education and care qualification. This is up from 65 per cent just six years earlier. When we look even closer – there has been a 180 per cent increase in qualified teachers working in early childhood education and care centres from 91 in 2010 to 255 in 2016.²

These significant improvements in qualifications needs to be ongoing and be supported by both strategy development and investment in workforce capacity building. However, both the strategy and funding for professional development for ECEC professionals in Australia has lapsed, with no plan for further policy development or support. The Australian Government Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Strategy for Australia 2012–2016 expired in 2016 and has not been renewed.³ Two Australian Government sources of funding for professional development: the Professional Support Coordinators (PSC) and the Long Day Care Professional Development Program (LDCPDP) also ceased in 2016 and 2017 respectively.

The PSC was funded by the Australian Government to provide professional development to the ECEC sector in the ACT. The PSC was a single organisation selected through a tender process and provided with funding to support sector-wide professional development. The LDCPDP was another Australian Government investment of \$200 million to support ECECs with the cost of accessing professional development and upskilling educators to meet the requirements of the National Quality Framework.

The lapse in these policies and funding has occurred at a time when there is significant and ongoing change in the ECEC sector. This includes the introduction of the revised National Quality Standards on 1 February 2018 and implementation of regulatory changes such as the implementation of the Reportable Conduct Scheme in the ACT which commenced on 1 July 2017. Support for workforce development needs to be for both formal qualifications and also ongoing professional development in day-to-day operations of Early Learning Centres.

'Lifting our Game' recommended that there be a focus on 'quality improvement and workforce issues, given the importance of quality to

1 Productivity Commission, 2018, Report on Government Services, Early Childhood Education and Care, Accessed at <https://www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2018/child-care-education-and-training/early-childhood-education-and-care>

2 Ibid

3 Australian Government Department of Ageing (2012) Early Years Workforce Strategy, <https://docs.education.gov.au/node/2918>

child outcomes, and the importance of a skilled and stable workforce in delivering this. Dedicated, strategic approaches to both issues are required. Investing in quality and a stable, well-supported and professional workforce is vital.’ More specifically the report recommended that:

- ‘Australian governments agree to a new national early childhood education and care workforce strategy to support the recruitment, retention, sustainability and enhanced professionalisation of the workforce, thereby improving service quality and children’s outcomes.’
- ‘The strategy should consider, at a minimum, opportunities to improve:
 - a. service leadership capability
 - b. pre-service training quality and content
 - c. ongoing professional development of the workforce
 - d. responsiveness of pre-service training and ongoing professional development providers to the sector
 - e. consistency and applicability of workforce registration and professional standards
 - f. workforce attraction, stability and retention, including medium and long-term career paths
 - g. the impact of remuneration and conditions on workforce stability and retention, and quality of practice
 - h. workforce diversity, including Indigenous communities
 - i. the status of the profession
 - j. responses to localised issues, including in regional and remote areas
 - k. engagement with parents.¹

Ensure that workforce development is a key strategic area for the ACT Strategy

Without a strong, qualified and valued workforce, the provision of quality ECEC will not be possible. Strategic directions and targets for the expansion of the qualified workforce and ongoing supports for professionals is needed to ensure that the sector continues to focus on the need to improve qualifications and services to improve outcomes for children.

Fund ongoing professional development for ECEC professionals through grants for in-house professional development and scholarships for Diploma and Bachelor level qualifications in ECEC

Professional development for ECEC educators is vital to ensuring that ECEC is high quality and results in outcomes that prepare children for school and beyond. In particular, research has drawn a direct link between the quality of teachers and educators and positive outcomes for children. Professor Edward Melhuish, a world leading expert on ECEC, indicated that an effective

¹ Pascoe, S & Brennan D, Lifting our game: Report of the review to achieve educational excellence in Australian schools through early childhood interventions, December 2017

and efficient way to improve the quality of ECEC is to provide in-house professional development to educators. ¹ This funding will support ECEC's to access the necessary skills to provide this training to their staff and to backfill positions while staff are accessing this professional development.

A grants program for professional development should be established by the ACT Government to demonstrate its ongoing commitment to quality ECEC. The program could offer 50 grants valued up to \$5,000 per Early Learning Centre to seek in-house professional development support.

Consideration should also be given to providing scholarships to ECEC professionals to increase their qualifications and access both Diploma and Bachelor qualifications to support their work in the ECEC sector.

Improve planning processes for new early learning centres

Currently no consideration is given to the need for an ELC when approving new centres or the proximity of the centre to others in the local area.

After planning approvals are granted, applications are submitted to CECA for new services, however CECA's role is to ensure that facilities and service operations comply with relevant legislation. CECA does not assess the need for a new service in a specific geographical location. 'The Discussion Paper – Review of Early Childhood Education and Care in the ACT' indicated that historically there have been general shortages of ECEC places in the ACT, particularly between 2008 and 2012. However in recent times, there has been significant growth in the sector, resulting in underutilisation of centres. ² The Review also indicates that the sector has grown 3,230 places or 39 per cent since 2011.

An analysis of more recent data shows that the number of 'long day care' centres in the ACT has increased from 113 to 145 over two years, an increase of 28 per cent. This is demonstrated in the table below. It is difficult to ascertain whether these centres are at full capacity. However, the 46 centres operated by the 10 community ECEC providers that make up this Alliance operate at 60-95 per cent capacity, with an average of 80 per cent. Management have identified that the capacity of services has declined in recent years, due to the increasing number of ELCs across Canberra.

1 Professor Melhuish presentation to ACT Members of The Legislative Assembly, 6 October 2017

2 ACT Government (2016) Review of Early Childhood Education and Care in the ACT: Discussion Paper 2016

2 ACECQA, NFQ Snapshot Q4 2015, Accessed <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf/snapshots>

3 ACECQA, NFQ Snapshot Q4 2016, Accessed <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf/snapshots>

4 ACECQA, NFQ Snapshot Q4 2017, Accessed <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf/snapshots>

ECEC Type	Q4 2015 ²	Q4 2016 ³	Q4 2017 ⁴
Family day care	6	17	13
Long day care	113	136 (+20 per cent)	145 (+28 per cent)
Preschool	93	99	95
Outside of school hours care	90	99	101
Total	302	351	354

When looking at specific regions of Canberra the significant increase in ELC's is more apparent. In Gungahlin in 2015 there were five early learning centres in the inner Gungahlin region. This has increased to 21 centres within five kilometres to the centre of Gungahlin and seven in the inner Gungahlin township. There are now 2,299 early learning places within five kms of the Gungahlin town centre.

The rapid expansion of the sector has implications for the provision of quality care. The quality provision of ECEC is essential to achieving positive lifelong effects for children. A number of factors

contribute to ECEC quality. One of these factors is the presence of staff who are adequately trained. Attracting staff can be challenging for providers because of the low wages available for childhood teachers and educators, particularly as potential staff are able to earn a higher income in most other industries. If there are too many centres in the ACT, then the ability to adequately staff these centres becomes increasingly difficult. Additionally, if a new centre is placed alongside an existing centre, it may make other centres unavailable. This can result in the inefficient use of ACT Government and community resources when centres are forced to close. This also affects the continuity of care being provided by a longstanding ECEC provider who has gotten to know the child and developed a community around the child.

The core consideration in determining the need for new ECEC centres should be the outcomes of the child. Children do not benefit when there are too many centres and when staff are spread thin, putting at risk the capacity to provide quality care.

Approvals for new schools in the ACT

The Education Act 2004 (ACT) S.14 (Austl) outlines the process for the application of Government and non-government Schools in the ACT. For 'in principle approval' for a proposed registration of a non-government school the person must apply in writing to the Minister for approval at least two years, but not more than four years before the opening day of the school. The Director-General of the Education Directorate must then give public notice of the proposed registration and written comments on the proposed registration be made to the Minister.

Decisions regarding the in-principle approval of the registration of a school must consider the viability and need for the school and potential impact on existing schools. More specifically:

1. In deciding whether to give in-principle approval for the provisional registration of a school, the Minister must have regard to—
 - a) whether the proposed school would undermine the viability of existing schools; and
 - (b) whether there is, or is likely to be, demand in the community for the proposed school, including—
 - (i) any increase, or likely increase, in the number of school age children in the area where the school is to be located; and
 - (ii) the level of registration of interest shown by the community for the proposed school.
2. In deciding whether to give in-principle approval for the registration of a school at an additional campus, the Minister must have regard to—
 - (a) whether the provision of the additional campus by the school would undermine the viability of other existing schools; and
 - (b) the demand for the additional campus, including the level of registration of interest shown by the community for the proposed provision of the additional campus by the school.
3. In deciding whether to give in-principle approval for the registration of a school at an additional educational level, the Minister must have regard to—
 - (a) whether the provision of the additional educational level by the school would undermine the viability of other existing schools; and
 - (b) the demand for the additional educational level, including the level of registration of interest shown by the community for the proposed provision of the additional educational level by the school.¹

When a new early learning centre is planned for development in the ACT, there is no consideration of need, viability or impact on existing schools. A new early learning centre can open next door to another centre and several centres can open in the same neighbourhood, with no consideration given to the impact of existing centres.

Introduce a need, viability and proximity assessment for new early learning centres

The Alliance recommends that the following is considered when new early learning centres are proposed for the ACT:

- The need for the centre as determined by the existing demand for services and consideration of population changes and growth.

¹ Education Act 2004 (ACT) S.14 (Austl)

- The proximity of the centre to other existing centres.
- The impact of the centre on the viability of existing centres, including their capacity to ensure that centres are able to be staffed by qualified ECEC educators and teachers.

The development of the ACT Early Childhood Strategy should examine the intersection between the planning and education functions of the ACT Government, in strategically determining where new ECEC services are located to best meet community need.



Appendix 1: Summary of State and Territory Strategies

Northern Territory ‘Great Start, Great Future: Northern Territory Early Years Strategic Plan’

The Northern Territory Government has developed the ‘Great Start, Great Future: Northern Territory Early Years Strategic Plan 2016-2020’ (NT Plan). The NT Plan has four ‘building blocks’: ¹

1. Healthy thriving children
2. Quality learning
3. Resilient families
4. Quality service provision.

The Strategy outlines ‘Priority actions’ and progress measures against each of the ‘building blocks. The ‘Priority actions’ outlined under building block 2 ‘Quality learning’ are to:

- ‘improve the quality and sustainability of early childhood education and care in the Northern Territory in line with the National Quality Framework to ensure all children have access;
- transform preschool delivery to better meet the needs of children and families (through the implementation of a preschool curriculum, fostering greater integration between preschool and care, and investigating the options for expanding three-year old preschool to all vulnerable and disadvantaged children in the Northern Territory);
- expand professional development for teachers and educators to enhance their capacity to support children with complex and additional needs
- expand the Families as First Teachers program in remote, urban and rural communities across the Northern Territory.’

The success measure outlined in the NT Plan are:

- ‘increased numbers of children enrolled in and attending Families as First Teachers programs and preschool;
- a reduction in vulnerability of Northern Territory children as measured by the AEDC;
- an increase in the number of early childhood education and care services that meet the national quality standard;
- improved longer term results from NAPLAN assessments;
- the implementation of assessment tools to measure the effects of early childhood programs’.

Tasmanian ‘Children Thriving in Strong, Connected Communities: Tasmania’s strategy for children – pregnancy to eight years 2018-2021’ ²

The Tasmanian Government has developed: Children Thriving in Strong, Connected

1 Great Start Great Future: Northern Territory Early Years Strategic Plan 2016-2020 <https://education.nt.gov.au/education/statistics-research-and-strategies/early-years-strategic-plan>

2 Tasmanian Government (2017) Children Thriving in Strong, Connected Communities: Tasmania’s strategy for children – pregnancy to eight years 2018-2021, Available from: <https://www.education.tas.gov.au/2017/11/tasmanias-strategy-children-pregnancy-eight-years-2018-2021/>

Communities: Tasmania's strategy for children – pregnancy to eight years 2018–2021. The strategy is a one page framework presented under five key areas: Children, Families, Communities, Environments and Service Providers. The United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child are reiterated against these areas.

The actions in the strategy are grouped under quality, equity and partnerships. Some of the actions relevant to ECEC are:

- 'Research and evidence underpin all programs, services and practice'
- 'Families, communities and service providers have the skills and knowledge they need to work together with children positively and effectively'
- 'Diversity is recognised, respected and socially inclusive of all'
- 'All children and their families have consistent access to quality resources services and support; working towards overcoming barriers'
- 'Appropriate specialist and targeted support is available when and where it is needed'
- 'Transitions for children's education, health and wellbeing across services and communities are maintained through effective partnerships'
- 'Policy development, service design and delivery is undertaken in partnership with services, families and communities in ways that respect children's voice and agency'

The Tasmanian Strategy also outlines measures of success under 'How we will know', including:

- 'Tasmania's Early Years services meet the National Quality Standard'
- 'Children report they feel safe, valued and connected'
- 'Children are developmentally on track across the five domains measured by the Australian Early Development Census'
- 'The gap between access and achievement measures for highest and lowest SES quintiles is diminished'

Queensland 'Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Action Plan 2016-19'¹

The Queensland Government has developed the Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Action Plan 2016-2019. The plan focuses solely on workforce development and sets out actions within three areas:

1. Being valued
2. Qualifications
3. Skills

Some of the actions outlined in the plan are:

- Launching an ECEC careers campaign – Inspire the future. The campaign will encourage people to choose a career in early childhood. The campaign will aim to demonstrate the ways that ECEC makes a difference during the early years.

¹ Queensland Government (2016) Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Action Plan 2016-19, Available from: <https://qed.qld.gov.au/earlychildhood/educators/our-initiatives/workforce-action-plan>

- Consult with the ECEC sector about options for professional registration for educators.
- Subsidise the Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care, Diploma in Early Childhood Education and Care and Diploma of School Age Education and Care.
- Explore support for educators to meet pre-requisites for early childhood teaching degrees, broaden access to the Diploma subsidy to enable primary teachers to gain early childhood teaching qualification, provide additional study support for rural and remote educators to meet legislative qualification requirements and support educators in remote Indigenous communities to gain approved early childhood qualifications.
- Launch an Early Years Connect service for educators working with children with additional needs, including online resources and face-to-face professional development.
- Pilot leadership skills development projects, support local networks to develop place-based models for pedagogical leadership, and communities of practice across ECEC and the early years of school.

The Key Performance Indicators outlined in the plan include:

- ‘Increase in the number of early childhood educators’.
- ‘Increase in enrolments in early childhood education and care qualifications’.
- ‘Reduction in vacancy rates in the early childhood education and care sector’.
- ‘Increase in the number and proportion of educators who hold a relevant qualification’.
- ‘Increase in the number of early childhood teachers working in early childhood education and care services’.
- ‘Reduction in vacancy rates in the early childhood education and care sector’.
- ‘Increased satisfaction by early childhood education and care educators that they have the skills and knowledge to deliver a quality early childhood program’.
- ‘Increased satisfaction by services that skills development activities produce service level change’.

Victorian ‘Early Childhood Reform Plan’ ¹

The Victorian Government ‘Early Childhood Reform Plan’ (Victorian Plan) includes a \$202.1 million commitment to services and supports across the early years, including child and maternal health and education.

The Victorian Plan is presented under four ‘Reform Directions’:

1. Supporting higher quality services and reducing disadvantage in early education;
2. Providing more support for parenting;
3. Making early childhood services more accessible and inclusive; and

¹ Victorian Government (2017) Early Childhood Reform Plan, Available from: <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/educationstate/Pages/earlychildhood.aspx>

4. Building a better system.

Some of the education-related 'key reform actions' outlined in the Victorian Plan include:

- Increasing funding for kindergartens by approximately ten per cent (\$55.3 million) over four years to provide additional support to children who need it. The funding will support evidence based practice which could include language and literacy assistance, speech therapy and reach out to isolated families or those experiencing disadvantage.
- A \$4.6 million investment in quality improvement grants for services that need additional support. This funding may go to activities such as coaching and the provision of training and advice.
- Funding (\$1.1 million) for non-government schools to encourage them to offer a kindergarten program. This funding will focus on low socio-economic areas.
- Additional funding for the 'Early Start Kindergarten' program for Koorie children and children known to child protection (\$6.3 million over two years).
- Continuing to pre-purchase places in the kindergarten system for children who risk missing out because of missing application timeframes. This will focus on children who are most in need including Koorie children, children known to child protection and refugees.
- Providing \$5 million in funding to expand the 'Kindergarten Inclusion Support' program which targets improved access for children with disabilities.
- Providing \$5.4 million in funding for the 'Koorie Families as First Educators program' for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to provide Koorie families with parenting support programs in targeted communities

Western Australian 'The Early Years Initiative' ¹

The Western Australian Government has partnered with the Minderoo Foundation and Telethon Kids Institute on a ten year strategy to improve outcomes for children aged zero to four and their families. The initiative will partner with four communities to examine ways to better design and deliver services across housing, employment, education, health and safety.

The four communities will be identified based on need and each community will have a community board that will oversee the project.

The partners involved in this initiative including the Western Australian Government have committed \$49.3 million investment over 10 years to the initiative.

¹ Government of Western Australia Department of Communities, Early Years Initiative, Available from: <https://www.communities.wa.gov.au/about/projects-and-programs/early-years-initiative/>



Appendix 2: Our guiding principles

We believe that ECEC policies and programs should be underpinned by the six following principles. These principles guide our policy approach to the future of ECEC in the ACT.

1. Children first

In determining future directions for ECEC, the needs and outcomes of the child should be the primary consideration for policy makers.

2. Evidence

There is considerable evidence on what constitutes effective ECEC. As providers of ECEC, we are committed to implementing evidence-based approaches within our Early Learning Centres (ELCs) and School Age Care. We also work to advocate for evidence-based policies across the sector.

3. Quality

Quality is key to ensuring that children get the lifelong benefits of ECEC. We support the implementation of the National Quality Standards (NQS) across all centres. We aspire to have our centres exceeding these standards.

4. Equity

Some children experience significant disadvantage and require additional support to ensure that they have the best start in life. The principle of equity underpins all that we do, as we ensure that children's needs are met, both within and beyond the education and care setting.

5. Accessibility

All families should be able to access affordable, quality ECEC. This is particularly important to ensure that the needs of all the children are being met in the ECEC they are receiving.

6. Whole of child, whole of community

The early years are vital to developing skills and qualities that remain with children for life. As community sector providers of ECEC and School Age Care, we take seriously our role to provide support to children in a holistic manner, including determining the needs of the child and family, beyond their immediate education and care needs.

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For more information regarding
ACT Children First Alliance contact:

Lydia Randall

p. 6175 9928

e. lydia.randall@ywca-canberra.org.au