

East Gippsland Early Years Plan 2014-2017



Message from Cr. Peter Neal, Mayor East Gippsland Shire Council

East Gippsland Early Years Plan 2014-2017

Strategic Directions Paper

Introduction

The East Gippsland Early Years Plan 2014- 2017 represents the shared vision of a broad range of individuals and organisations that every child in the East Gippsland Shire area has the best possible start in life and is supported to reach their full potential.

The East Gippsland Early Years plan gives all key stakeholders a basis for translating the national and state priorities into meaningful partnerships, practical actions and measurable outcomes.

The 'Early Years' is usually defined as children 0-8 years, however the East Gippsland Early Years Plan has been extended this plan to children up to and including 12 years. Planning, funding and delivery of services for children 9-12 years have historically fallen between Early Years Plans and Youth Strategies, which has often created gaps in the planning and delivery of services to address the needs of children in this age group.

In particular, the East Gippsland Early Years Plan facilitates Council and early childhood providers to work in partnership with the community to improve health and wellbeing outcomes for young children by:

- increasing support for young children and their families;
- supporting vulnerable families;
- improving access to services, support and opportunities for participation amongst children, parents and families
- increasing the responsiveness of services and efficient use of other resources, by increasing service integration and collaboration; and
- promoting children as important local citizens.
- maximising resources and undertake long-term planning for children including the development and evaluation of early years services, activities and facilities while enabling Council to make more informed and strategic decisions about future needs and priorities.

The 2014- 2017 East Gippsland Early Years plan should be considered in the context of the current political and economic landscape both in Victoria and nationally. Australia is currently experiencing a period of economic retraction which will continue to influence strategic directions of policy development and funding for the foreseeable future.

In addition to political uncertainty the recent release of the Australian Government's report and recommendations of the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Child Care and Early Childhood Learning 2014, will influence future policy direction.

The early years plan is aimed to be reflective of and responsive to changing government policy and funding initiatives.

Policy and Research underpinning the Early Years Plan

International and national research shows that a child's early years are critical in shaping their future; and investing resources in the early years pays positive dividends for communities. Investment in children's wellbeing builds the 'human capital' of a strong society.

There is evidence that investing in children in their early years increases their self confidence, health and educational prospects. What happens in the early years plays a very important role in brain development that affects learning, behavior and physical and mental wellbeing throughout life.

Investing in the Early Years – A National Early Childhood Development Strategy was developed under the auspices of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and focuses on all children (aged 0-8 years) having the best start in life.

Seven outcomes are identified where support for children and families is needed to realize the Strategy's vision:

- Children are born and remain healthy;
- Children's environments are nurturing, culturally appropriate and safe;

- Children have the knowledge and skills for life and learning;
- Children benefit from better social inclusion and reduced disadvantage, especially Indigenous children;
- Children are engaged in and benefiting from educational opportunities;
- Families are confident and have the capabilities to support their children's development; and
- Quality early childhood development services that support the workforce participation choices of families.

The **Victorian Government's Early Years Strategic Plan 2104-2020** aims to improve outcomes and better support children in the period from pregnancy up to eight years of age. The focus of the Plan is on building sector capacity in areas relation Maternal Child Health Services, early childhood education and early intervention services.

The Early Years Strategic Plan focuses on three key areas:

- Supporting parents and communities to give children a great start by:
 - a. Growing parent and community capacity through enhanced local planning and the introduction of a parenting strategy
 - b. Supporting an evidence based framework which eliminates service duplication
 - c. Reviewing and enhancing the Maternal and Child Health Services, including the introduction of a breast feeding strategy.
- Early and sustained support for those who need it most by:
 - a. Streamlining and strengthening the service system for universal and intervention services
 - b. Focusing on outcomes for aboriginal children
- All children benefiting from high quality early learning by:
 - a. Exploring best practice in the development of language and literacy
 - b. Supporting collaborative learning approaches between schools, early learning centres, parents and community organizations.

Development of the East Gippsland Early Years Plan 2014-2017

Stage 1.

Council and early year's providers have met to develop a set of strategic directions for the Plan. At the same time the group has developed a Context and Analysis Paper which draws from the Good Beginnings , *State of East Gippsland's Children and Young People Report* as well as documenting the national and state policy context for the Plan.

The Strategic Directions Paper defines a set of key **outcomes, objectives and strategies** for the Plan. This work recognizes the actions already being undertaken in this field and its successes and gives an opportunity to identify further work to address gaps in provision and new and emerging issues.

Stage 2

The Plan framework will be provided for comment and consultation across the municipality. From this work there will be a set of actions developed for each strategy which define the work by Council and early years providers to support the main aims of the Plan.

East Gippsland Early Years Community Profile

In 2012, there were 43,154 people residing in East Gippsland, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people making up 3.2% of the population.

Population by Age group – 2012

(Source ABS: East Gippsland (S) Regional Data Summary)

Age group	Males	Females	Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander
0-4	1216	1158	188
5-9	1290	1206	161
10-14	1341	1217	163

Early Years Indicators

The East Gippsland fertility rate is higher than the Victorian average. Of the resultant births, East Gippsland ranks 3rd in Victoria for low birth weight babies.

Low birth weight babies	9.1%	Rank 3 in Victoria
% of children aged 24-27 months fully immunised	98.1%	Highest % in Gippsland and higher than Victoria (95.3%)
Fertility Rates (children born per woman)	2.2	Victoria 1.8

(Source DEECD State of Victoria's Children Report 2012)

Children's Development

The early years from 0-6 are critical in a child's development. Starting out in a healthy, safe and loving environment increases a child's chances of success throughout their life.

The Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) is a population measure undertaken in children's first year at school. The AEDI measures children's development across five key areas, or domains.

- Physical health and wellbeing
- Social competence
- Emotional maturity
- Language and cognitive skills
- Communication and general knowledge

While there has been an improvement in the proportion of children identified as developmentally vulnerable across East Gippsland, the rates of vulnerability are still higher than the state average across all domains.

Proportion of children 'developmentally vulnerable'

Domain	2009	2012	Vic
Physical health & wellbeing	12.9%	12.1%	7.8%
Social competence	14.4%	9%	8.1%
Emotional maturity	15.5%	9.1%	7.2%
Language & Cognitive skills	10.2%	7.4%	6.1%
Communication skills & General Knowledge	12.3%	10.2%	8%

(Source: AEDI data <http://maps.aedi.org.au/lga/vic/22110>)

Kindergarten Participation rates for East Gippsland

2008	2010	2011	2012	2013	Vic
94.5%	95%	103.2%	94.5%	92.8%	98.2%

(Source: DEECD Annual Confirmed Data Collection)

Children achieving at school

Children starting school with one or more speech or language difficulties

	Number	EG	ATSI	Vic
2010	74	16.7%	20%	14.1%
2011	96	20.1%	23.2%	14.1%
2012	95	18.9%	22.5%	13.8%

(Source: DEECD VCAMS indicator data spreadsheets 8.1 -SEHQ)

Children starting school with emotional or behavioural difficulties

	Number	EG	ATSI	Vic
2010	19	4.3%	11%	4.3%
2011	25	5.2%	10.6%	4.1%
2012	30	5.9%	12.7%	4.3%

(Source: DEECD VCAMS indicator data spreadsheets 10.1- SEHQ)

The National Assessment Program- Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) is an annual assessment for students in years 3, 5, 7, and 9. NAPLAN measures literacy and numeracy skills. NAPLAN data provides benchmarking measures to assess how children are developing over time.

Students meeting national minimum standards in Reading

	East Gippsland	ATSI	Vic
Year 3	91%	84%	95%
Year 5	91%	67%	94%
Year 7	96%	86%	96%
Year 9	91%	53%	93%

(Source DEECD, NAPLAN data 2012)

Students meeting national minimum standards in Numeracy

	East Gippsland	ATSI	Vic
Year 3	96%	77%	96%
Year 5	95%	83%	95%
Year 7	96%	80%	95%
Year 9	97%	93%	95%

(Source DEECD, NAPLAN data 2012)

Students feel connected to school

Year level	5-6			7-9		
	EG	ATSI	Vic	EG	Vic	ATSI
2011	83.4%	79%	85.1%	52.1%	50.7%	61.1%
2012	80.5%	78.3%	85.4%	57.8%	52.8%	62.8%
2013	79.9%	79.1%	85.8%	52.4%	51.6%	61.7%

(Source: DEECD VCAMS indicator data spreadsheet 10.6)

Children's Safety

The Report of the Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry 2012 identified that the rate of reports in a single year across Victoria is just over 30 per 1,000 Victorian children across all ages, in the Gippsland region, this rate is more than doubled at 66 per 1,000.

The significant over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in Victoria's system for protecting children was identified as being of great concern. While Aboriginal children and young people make up 1.2 per cent of the Victorian population, they constitute around 16 per cent of children and young people on care and protection orders and are nine times more likely to be in State care than others in the general population.

Number of Child Protection Report Substantiations

	East Gippsland	ATSI	Vic
2008-09	57	23	
2012-13	158	N/A	

Child protection re reports

	East Gippsland	ATSI	Vic
2010-11	72%	79%	
2011-12	76%	87%	

(Source: The Shire of East Gippsland Aboriginal Community, Early Childhood Community Profile 2009)

Children with high levels of family stress

No reporting stress/ total	EG	ATSI	Vic
2010	43/443	9.7%	13%
2011	73/477	15.3%	16.3%
2012	78/505	15.4%	17.1%

(Source: DEECD VCAMS indicator data spreadsheets 24.2)

Housing is stable and secure

Housing security is important for children's sense of safety and security. Transience and homelessness are significant risk factors for children and contribute to parental stress.

(Source: DEECD, Adolescent Community Profile, East Gippsland, 2010)

Residents in Public Housing for more than 12 months

	East Gippsland	Vic
Families with children under 8	82%	87%
Families with adolescents	81%	88%

(Source: DEECD, Adolescent Community Profile, East Gippsland, 2010)

Key Outcomes, Strategies and Success Measures

Outcome Area 1: Our Children Are Healthy, Developing Well, Safe and Secure

Objective 1.1: to increase the number of children who are developing well

Strategies

1. Facilitate relationships and provide experiences for children that allow them to meet their developmental and wellbeing needs
 2. Increase the range of inclusive community activities that offer all children age-appropriate social, physical and learning opportunities
 3. Facilitate shared health promotion strategies on activity/ nutrition/ dental
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Success measures

- Increased numbers of children attending dental health checks.
 - Decrease in child accidents and hospitalization.
 - Increase in breastfeeding rates
 - Immunisation rates increase
 - Australian Early Development Index data shows decrease in areas of vulnerability
 - Greater provision of child friendly, age appropriate community activities
-

Objective 1.2: to increase school readiness and learning outcomes for all children

Strategies

1. Facilitate training for providers to increase knowledge and expertise, and maximise opportunities which optimise the development of all children
 2. Promote school involvement in school readiness activities and school transition programs
 3. Facilitate discussions between early years providers and the primary school sector
-

Success measures

- Kindergarten participation rates remain at current or increase
 - Australian Early Development Index data shows decrease in areas of vulnerability
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- NAPLAN results show improvement in literacy and numeracy
- School attendance rates improve
- Children arriving at school are better prepared to undertake learning and social development
- Increase in number of parents reading to children

Objective 1.3: to increase support for vulnerable children and children with additional needs

Strategies

1. Increase participation and collaboration between all stakeholders to facilitate and support children with additional needs; child protection; child first)
2. Develop partnerships with children, families, communities and service providers for the planning and delivery of evidenced-based services

Success measures

- Increase in kindergarten participation rates for vulnerable children
- Decrease in repeated reports to child protection
- Decrease in waiting lists for special needs/support service
- Increase level of adoption of service standards that support vulnerable families and their children

Objective 1.4: to increase engagement of the aboriginal community and services

Strategies

1. Increase participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders children into all early years services and schools

Success measures

- Increase in completed Maternal and Child Health ages and stages checks for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island children
- Increased participation rates at kindergarten for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders children
- Increased school attendance rates for all ATSI children

Outcome Area 2: Our Families are Able to Meet the Needs And Promote the Development of Their Children

Objective 2.1: to increase the capacity of families to meet their children's basic needs

Strategies

1. Advocate that families have access to security of housing (needs work-this is only one component of the basic needs of children)
 2. Families have access to a range of services that assist in the development and maintenance of their children's basic needs
-

Success measures

Improved AEDI reports on lowered percentages of developmentally vulnerable children
Increased family participation in family support services

Objective 2.2: to increase the capacity of families to support their children's social, cognitive, physical and emotional development

Strategies

1. Build the capacity of families and the connectivity between families, children's services and communities to meet the developmental and wellbeing needs of children
 2. To increase the capacity/opportunity of parents to manage their children's developmental processes across all AEDI domains
-

Success measures

- Australian Early Development Index data shows decrease in areas of vulnerability
 - Increase in kindergarten participation rates
 - Increase in percentage children arriving at school prepared for social and learning development
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Objective 2.3: to reduce the number of families in which abuse or neglect takes place

Strategies

1. Advocate for increased resources for innovation in intervention programs
 2. Advocate for increased community awareness of the developmental outcomes for children affected by family violence
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Success measures

- Decrease in re reports to child protection
 - Increase in resource allocation for program delivery and support
-

Objective 2.4: to reduce the incidence of family violence

Strategies

1. Increase collaborative work with family violence programs
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Success measures

- Reduced incidence of family violence
 - Increase in community engagement in family violence mitigation programs
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Outcome Area 3: Our Communities are Accepting and Supportive of All Families

Objective 3.1: to increase the capacity of communities to identify, understand and respond to the diverse needs of families

Strategies

1. build the capacity and resilience of communities to be inclusive and respond to all children and families
2. provide increased opportunities for new and diverse families to connect with local communities and services

Success measures

- **Increased community acceptance of families from diverse cultural/social background**

Objective 3.2: to increase the capacity of children to be active citizens

Strategies

1. increase events and awards which recognise child friendly neighbourhoods and communities
2. provide a range of activities and events that demonstrate the active citizenry of children
3. identify networks of organisations which provide increased engagement with children across East Gippsla

Success measures

- **increased policy developments which direct the use child friendly lens in event and award planning**
- **increased recognition of the role of children in citizenry activities**
- **improved understanding of the role and responsibilities of networks of child support agencies**

Objective 3.3: to increase the capacity for child friendly communities

Strategies

1. Promote safe and interactive built environments that provide stimulating experiences for children and families
2. Implement a child friendly lens and consultation into governance services and council planning
3. Provide opportunities for discussion between system leaders and community services and children on a range of issues which shape the future of East Gippsland

Success measures

- Increased participation of children in open space planning and consultation
- Increased focus on development projects which affect children, their wellbeing and learning development

Objective 3.4: to increase acknowledgement of the rights of the child

Strategies

1. Promote partnerships with local business, government agencies and communities which identify support for meaningful acknowledgment of children's rights
2. Integrate the planning implications of the rights of a child and the East Gippsland children's charter

Success measures

- Participate in national /international "rights of the child" activities
- Audit strategic planning development for acknowledgment of the practical measures that support the rights of the child

Outcome Area 4: Our Services are Cooperative, Integrated, Inclusive and Deliver High Quality

Objective 4.1: to build an integrated and responsive service system of child and family services

Strategies

1. To increase the integration of services and encourage the use of common referral pathways and assessment Tools
2. To increase the participation of services in planning strategies which better service children and families

Success measures

increase in cross agency referral reporting

- **Increase awareness of agency capacity and inter agency referral protocols between organisations and their workers**

Objective 4.2: to increase service access for children and families

Strategies

1. Provide a range of inclusive, accessible and culturally appropriate services, activities and programs, which are responsive to the needs of all children and families

Success measures

- Increased use of service access guidelines
- Increase in the use of services by children and families of diverse social and cultural backgrounds

Objective 4.3: to increase commitment to principles of evidence based best practice in service provision

Strategies

1. Identify, promote and utilize evidence based approaches in service provision
 2. Facilitate provision of training opportunities to support evidence based practice and its balance with innovation and initiative
-

Success measures

Increased understanding of evidence based practice and its uses

Outcome Area 5: Our System Leaders Provide Advocacy, Governance and Support

Objective 5.1: to increase advocacy at local, state and federal level for rural and regional issues

Strategies

1. Advocate at local, state and federal level for the long term provision of high quality early years programs in the region, including a strategy to advocate for rural and regional factors, issues and solutions
2. Advocate for policy alignment across levels of government and service provision

Success measures

- Increased awareness of government to issues of rurality in the early years sector
- Number of representations on strategies and government policy that promote issues of rural and regional context in the early years sector

Objective 5.2: to increase collaboration between early years providers on policy development and implementation

Strategies

1. Develop and implement and integrated East Gippsland Early Years Plan based on collective impact modelling
2. Develop and refresh cross-sectoral service mapping to demonstrate service collaboration and system engagement

Success measures

- **increased collaboration and engagement in collective impact model for development of the East Gippsland Early Years Plan**
- **Increased membership of and commitment to the East Gippsland Early Years Committee**

Objective 5.3: to promote governance and implementation of East Gippsland's early years plan

Strategies

1. Facilitate a mechanism to support governance structure of East Gippsland Early Years Committee plan implementation, evaluation and reporting
2. Develop effective partnerships for governance support and engagement

Success measures

- improved governance structures in place for the East Gippsland Early Years Committee
- satisfactory completion and analysis of partnership evaluation tool for the East Gippsland Early Years Committee

Objective 5.4 to broaden engagement at all levels in planning

Strategies

1. Ensure engagement mechanisms link across Early Years planning bodies, services, families and children
2. Facilitate a collective approach to the development of practice standards and evidence based practice

Success measures

- implementation of service practice and access studies across early years services
- Adopt ongoing commitment to collective impact modelling across the early years sector

East Gippsland Early Years Plan 2014-2017

Context and Analysis Paper

East Gippsland Shire Council

The primary goal of the East Gippsland Shire Council is to achieve the best outcomes for its local community. It does this by striving to:

- Provide and support service provision
- Protect the environment and the community from harm
- Plan for the future
- Represent and advocate for the needs of the community
- Deliver open responsive and accountable governance

The East Gippsland Early Years Plan 2014-2017 expresses a vision for children 0-12 year that sets out what is to be achieved, and how progress will be measured. It affirms key strategic directions of the Council Plan with particular reference to the following:-

People

We contribute to and support healthy, resilient and connected communities

Our children are healthy developing well and safe and secure

- Our families are able to meet the needs and promote the development of their children
- Our communities are accepting and supportive of all families

Place

We promote, maintain and improve the quality of our natural and built environments

- Promote safe and interactive built environments that provide stimulating experiences for all children and families
- To increase the capacity of families to meet the basic needs of food and shelter
- Advocate for all families to have access to affordable housing

Economy

We contribute to a prosperous and sustainable region that takes advantage of economic opportunities

- To increase the capacity of child friendly communities and support children to be active citizens
- Partnerships with local business, government agencies and communities support children and families

Stewardship

Our Shire is well managed and supported by a resourceful, responsive organization

- Our system leaders provide advocacy governance and support

What is the East Gippsland Early Years Plan?

The East Gippsland Early Years Plan 2014--2017 represents the shared vision of a broad range of individuals and organisations- that every child in East Gippsland Shire Council has the best possible start in life and is supported to reach their full potential.

The East Gippsland Early Years plan gives all key stakeholders a basis for translating the national and state priorities into meaningful partnerships, practical actions and measurable outcomes.

The ‘Early Years’ is usually defined as children 0-8 years. The East Gippsland Early Years Plan has been extended to children up to and including 12 years. Planning, funding and delivery of services for children 9-12 years have historically fallen between Early Years Plans and Youth Strategies, which has often created gaps in the planning and delivery of services to address the needs of children in this age group.

When considering the ‘whole child’ within family and community life, the early years incorporates health, wellbeing, education, recreation, interactions and relationships and community belonging.

In particular, the East Gippsland Early Years Plan facilitates local government’s ability to work in partnership with local organisations and the community to improve health and wellbeing outcomes for young children by:

- increasing support for young children and their families;
- supporting vulnerable families;
- improving access to services, support and opportunities for participation amongst children, parents and families
- increasing the responsiveness of services and efficient use of other resources, by increasing service integration and collaboration; and
- promoting children as important local citizens.
- maximising resources and undertake long-term planning for children including the development and evaluation of early years services, activities and facilities while enabling Council to make more informed and strategic decisions about future needs and priorities.

Policy Context

The 2014- 2017 East Gippsland Early Years plan should be considered in the context of the current political and economic landscape both in Victoria and nationally. Australia is currently experiencing a period of economic retraction which will continue to influence strategic directions of policy development and funding for the foreseeable future.

The early years plan is aimed to be reflective of and responsive to changing government policy and funding initiatives.



The Significance of the Early Years

International and national research shows that a child’s early years are critical in shaping their future; and investing resources in the early years pays positive dividends for communities.

Investment in children’s wellbeing builds the ‘human capital’ of a strong society.

There is evidence that investing in children in their early years increases their self confidence, health and educational prospects. What happens in the early years play a very important role in brain development that affects learning, behavior and physical and mental wellbeing throughout life.

The SHARED VISION of the Commonwealth and state and territory governments is that

“by 2020 all children have the best start in life to create a better future for themselves and for the nation”

A number of policy objectives relate to this vision, including: greater social inclusion; improved outcomes for the majority of children but specifically Indigenous children and the most disadvantaged; and increased productivity and international competitiveness.

Internationally

Internationally, Early Years’ development is increasingly an important part of social, economic and educational policy with recognition that the evidence confirms investment in the young reaps rewards for whole communities. The OECD report Starting Strong II2 recommends greater attention to early childhood education and care policy, particularly in

terms of investment, in order to reap the recognised positive outcomes of such commitments.

Nationally

Investing in the Early Years – A National Early Childhood Development Strategy³ was developed under the auspices of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and focuses on all children (aged 0-8 years) having the best start in life. The goal is for children to be born healthy and have access to support, care and education throughout early childhood that equips them for life and learning, delivered in a way that actively engages parents and meets the workforce participation needs of parents.

Seven outcomes are identified where support for children and families is needed to realize the Strategy's vision:

- Children are born and remain healthy;
- Children's environments are nurturing, culturally appropriate and safe;
- Children have the knowledge and skills for life and learning;
- Children benefit from better social inclusion and reduced disadvantage, especially Indigenous children;
- Children are engaged in and benefiting from educational opportunities;
- Families are confident and have the capabilities to support their children's development; and
- Quality early childhood development services that support the workforce participation choices of families.

Current Research

A positive start in life helps children develop to their fullest. The benefits accrue to the whole society, through enhanced human capital and capability, increased productivity, greater social inclusion and reduced public expenditure in health, welfare and crime related to disadvantage over the life course.

Healthy and happy children are more likely to become healthy and resilient adults who have more equal capacity, opportunity and resources to contribute to a cohesive and prosperous society.⁴

Research has identified that children who have a poor start in life are more likely to develop learning, behavioural or emotional problems which may have far-reaching consequences throughout their lives and in turn, the lives of their children. These problems have an economic impact on society in the form of increased social inequality, reduced productivity and high costs associated with entrenched intergenerational disadvantage.

Children are also important for their future contribution to society—as the next generation of leaders, workers, parents, consumers and members of communities. Their ability to participate fully in society as adults will be largely shaped by their childhood experiences. Children who have a good start in life are more likely to develop the capabilities that will better equip Australia to compete in a global society. This will be increasingly important as our workforce shrinks due to population ageing and low fertility rates.

As a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Australia has a longstanding commitment to nurture and protect children in our society. The strategy will help ensure that children's rights and needs are at the centre of policy development and service delivery

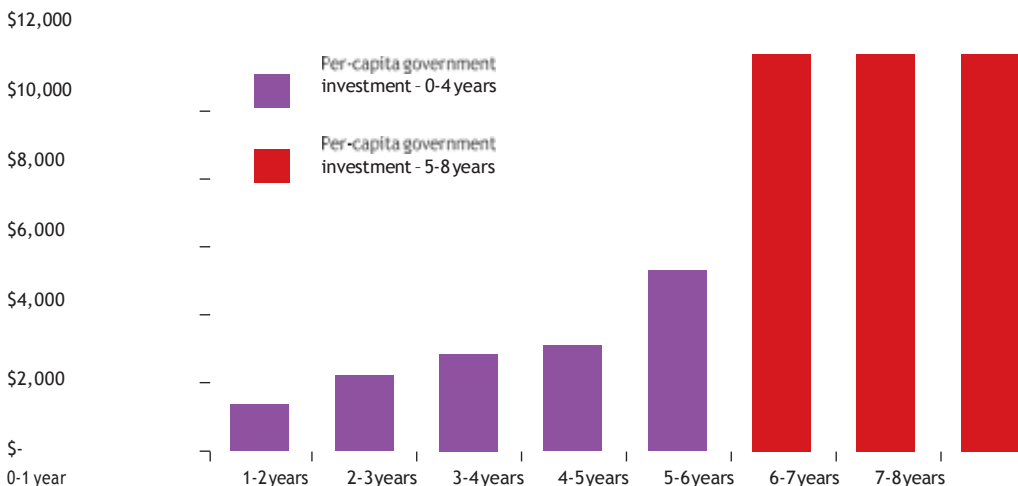
The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child spells out the basic human rights that children everywhere have: the right to survival; to develop to the fullest; to protection from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation; and to participate fully in family, cultural and social life.

Early childhood programs can offer higher returns and be very cost effective

The economic case for the importance of early childhood – aligning to the scientific case – shows that the early years lay the foundations for future productive and successful participation in society.

Economic evaluation shows that early childhood programs can be highly effective investments, repaying their costs, generating savings and producing returns to society.⁵ A synthesis of cost-benefit analyses of early childhood education programs revealed that many had a positive benefit to cost ratio, with higher rates of return from those programs targeted toward the groups likely to benefit from them most.^{6, 7}

Figure 1: Estimated 2010-11 per capita expenditure by age level⁸



The Australian Government's agenda for early childhood education and childcare focuses on providing Australian families with high-quality, accessible and affordable integrated early childhood education and childcare. The agenda has a strong emphasis on connecting with schools to ensure all Australian children are fully prepared for learning and life. Investing in the health, education, development and care of our children benefits children and their families, our communities and the economy, and is critical to lifting workforce participation and delivering the Government's productivity agenda outcome.

The **National Quality Framework** is an important reform which aims to deliver a higher standard of care for children in the critical areas of education, health and safety and will provide clearer and comprehensive information to support families to choose the best services for their child(ren).

The National Quality Standard has been designed to improve quality through:

- improved staff-to-child ratios to ensure each child gets more individual care and attention;
- new staff qualification requirements to ensure staff have the skills to help children learn and develop;
- a new quality rating system to ensure Australian families have access to transparent information relating to the quality of early childhood education and care services;
- the establishment of a new National Body to ensure early childhood education and care is of a high quality.
- universal access for every four year old to a kindergarten program for 15 hours a week, 40 weeks per year in the year before formal schooling.

The Early Years Learning Framework 9 is part of the Council of Australian Government's (COAG) Reform Agenda for early childhood education and care and is a key component of the Australian Government's [National Quality Framework](#) for early childhood education and care. It underpins universal access to early childhood education and will be incorporated in the [National Quality Standard](#) in order to ensure delivery of nationally consistent and quality early childhood education across sectors and jurisdictions as does MyTime, Our Place the framework for school aged care in Australia.¹⁰

Victorian State Government

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's Strategic Plan 2013- 2017 ¹¹ outlines the State Government's vision to support Victorians to build prosperous, socially engaged, happy and healthy lives. Victorian data which informs the Strategic Plan identifies that engagement with services is strong in the areas of newborn maternal and child health check, kindergarten participation at 97.9 percent, completion of year 12 or equivalent at 86.1 percent and by age 24, 76.5 percent of Victorians undertaking a post graduate qualification. ¹³

Victoria also performs above national average in the majority of NAPLAN test areas and has proportionally fewer children who are developmentally at risk or developmentally vulnerable as identified by AEDI data. Key drivers for improvement are:

- The Economist's 'Starting Well' 2012/13 index for early childhood education and development services (for children 3-6 years old) shows that Australia as coming 28th, and sitting in the second tier in global wellbeing rankings
- Average student achievement levels are behind those of leading countries (Finland, Canada, Hong Kong and South Korea in reading, mathematics and science, and adult literacy and life skills are below the Australian average.
- Variable degrees in outcomes and service access early, from childhood through to higher education, between metropolitan, regional and rural areas in Victoria.
- Educational and wellbeing outcomes for aboriginal children and those from low socio economic backgrounds are still poor.

Outcomes and Success Measures of the Strategic Plan

The Strategic Plan's has identified for key outcomes for improvement. These are:-

- Engagement: Increase the number of Victorians actively participating in education, training, development and child health services.
- Achievement: Raise standards of learning and development achieved by Victorians using education, training, development and child health services.
- Wellbeing: Increase the contribution of education, training, development and child health services make to good health and quality of life for all Victorians, particularly children and young people.
- Productivity: Increase the productivity of services
- These outcomes will be measured by the indicators listed in DEECD Early Years Strategic Plan: Early Years Outcomes Framework

What The

'Virtually every aspect of early human development, from the brain's evolving circuitry to the child's capacity for empathy, is affected by the environments and experiences that are encountered in a cumulative fashion, beginning in the prenatal period and extending throughout the early years.'

Jack P. Shonkoff, MD

'Ability gaps between advantaged and other children open up early before schooling begins. ... Children who start ahead keep accelerating past their peers, widening the gap ... Early advantages accumulate, so do early disadvantages ... The best way to improve the schools is to improve the early environments of the children sent to them.'

Professor James J. Heckman

Early Years Strategic Plan- Improving outcomes for all children 2014- 2020



The Early Years Strategic Plan 14 developed by Department of Education and Early Childhood Development aims to improve outcomes and better support children in the period from pregnancy up to eight years of age. The focus of the Plan is on building sector capacity in areas relation Maternal Child Health services, early childhood education and early intervention services. The Plan will also:

- build connections across state government departments
- support relationships with local government

The early years (pregnancy to eight years) are a period of rapid cognitive biological and social development. Recent advances across scientific and economic research has highlighted how important the first years of life really are in building strong foundations for lifelong health and learning, however lost opportunities are difficult to recover. From an economic perspective there is also substantial evidence to show that investing in early childhood which results in improved education and outcomes is a vital factor in economic growth, productivity and social progress. 15. Economic research indicates that a system that prevents family difficulties from escalating is more effective than a system that seeks to resolve issues after they are established. High-quality universal services can prevent social problems from escalating.

These services, provided across a broad population, are often more cost-effective per individual than later remediation.¹⁶

Supporting parents and communities to give children a great start		Early and sustained support for those who need it most	All children benefiting from high-quality learning	
A great start for every child and family	Making it easier for parents to get what their children need		Advancing children's early learning and development	World-class practice to advance learning and development
Growing parent and community capacity to support children's development	Demonstrating child-centred and community-led planning and funding through demonstration projects	Providing access to high-quality early childhood services for vulnerable children through sustained service pathways	Growing participation in early learning	Deepening early years curriculum and assessment approaches
Implementing an early years parenting strategy, mapping existing effort and identifying opportunities to strengthen services	Working with local governments to build on and strengthen local planning approaches	Exploring effective ways to address early social and behavioural issues in children	Sustaining the focus on quality early learning	Empowering our leaders to focus relentlessly on quality
Growing participation in, and expanding the reach and value of, the Maternal and Child Health Service	Implementing an Early Years Outcomes Framework for all services	Improving engagement of children in out-of-home care with early childhood services	Boosting the ability of universal services to support language and literacy development	Exploring and implementing effective strategies to enhance the early years workforce
Implementing a Breastfeeding Plan, which will better support mothers to initiate and sustain breastfeeding		Implementing a strategy to improve learning and development outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians	Linking children's learning from birth to primary school	Expecting and supporting high-quality professional practice
Using outcomes of the right@hometrial to inform how we support children and families at risk of vulnerability		Providing faster and better support for young children with a disability or developmental delay	Strengthening our focus on gifted and talented children	

EARLY YEARS OUTCOMES FRAMEWORK FOR VICTORIA: 0 – 8 YEARS

To promote understanding of, and a focus on, children’s development, and to support services’ own planning, improvement and accountability

Four Inter-related Domains

CHILD	BEING HEALTHY All Victorian children are born and remain healthy, develop positive health behaviours and achieve optimal health	BUILDING WELLBEING All Victorian children develop socially and emotionally, are resilient and have a strong sense of identity and wellbeing	LEARNING AND DEVELOPING All Victorian children learn and develop through engagement in meaningful, high-quality educational experiences	STAYING SAFE All Victorian children experience and grow up in safe environments and communities
OUTCOMES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children are born healthy • Children receive the nutrition, care, play and rest they need for healthy growth and development • Children begin to understand their own health and physical development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children are connected to their world and socially included • Children develop and sustain positive relationships • Children develop resilience and experience positive mental health • Children develop a strong sense of culture and identity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children are confident and involved learners • Children develop foundation skills for life and learning • Children engage with and benefit from quality educational opportunities and achieve positive outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children’s environments are nurturing, safe and secure • Children are protected from abuse, neglect, harm and exploitation • Children are raised in economically secure environments
INDICATORS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in the proportion of infants who are breastfed • Decrease in the proportion of low birth weight babies • Increase in the proportion of children who are fully immunised • Increase in the proportion of children who eat healthily and get the recommended amount of exercise • Decrease in the proportion of children who are overweight and obese • Increase in the proportion of children attending Maternal and Child Health Key Ages and Stages visits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in the proportion of children on track socially and emotionally • Increase in the proportion of children living in supportive family environments • Increase in the proportion of children attending services that promote positive relationships with children and adults • Increase in the proportion of families who believe their community is an accepting place for people from diverse cultures and backgrounds • Increase in the proportion of children living in neighbourhoods with good access to playgroups, parks and playgrounds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in the proportion of children on track for speech and language • Increase in the proportion of children on track for learning and cognitive development • Increase in proportion of children who are read to by a family member every day • Increase in the proportion of students achieving national minimum standards in NAPLAN • Increase in the proportion of children participating in quality Early Childhood Education and Care services • Increase in average rates of student attendance at primary school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in the number of children living in a safe and secure environment • Increase in the proportion of children attending safe and secure services • Decrease in proportion of children exposed to family violence incidents • Increase in the number of families who are economically secure • Increase in the proportion of parents who have someone to turn to for advice when having problems

Notes

- 2 OECD -Starting Strong II
- 3 Investing in the Early Years ,Australia, 2009
- 4 Australia, The Productivity Commission Inquiry into Child Care and Early Childhood Learning, 2014
- 5 Melhuish E., 2012
- 6 Lee, 2012
- 7 Kilburn. M.R. & Karoly, 2008
- 8 Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2014
- 9 COAG, Belonging, Being Becoming- The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia, 2009
Belonging, Being, Becoming- A framework for early years learning in Australia
- 10 My Time, Our Place- A framework for school aged care Commonwealth of Australia 2011
- 11 DEECD 2013-2017 Strategic Plan- State of Victoria 2013
- 12 ABS- 2012 Education and Work, Australia, May 2012, ABS Cat. No. 6227.0
- 13 Economist Intelligence Unit, 2012
- 14 (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2014)
- 15 Education at a Glance 2013: OECD Indicators, OECD Publishing
- 16 Heckman J., 2004

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