



Centre for Community
Child Health



The Early Years Strategy Submission Recommendations

April 2023

Centre for Community Child Health Early Years Strategy submission recommendations

Version 1.0

The Centre for Community Child Health is a department of The Royal Children's Hospital and a research group of the Murdoch Children's Research Institute.

Centre for Community Child Health

The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne

50 Flemington Road, Parkville

Victoria 3052 Australia

Telephone: +61 9345 6150

Email: enquiries.ccch@rch.org.au

www.rch.org.au/ccch

The Centre for Community Child Health acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we work and pay our respect to Elders past, present and emerging.

Centre for Community Child Health

For over 25 years, the Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) has worked collaboratively with families, communities, practitioners, organisations and decision makers for sustainable and equitable improvements in children's health, development and wellbeing. Our purpose is to **see every child thrive**. The Centre is part of the world-class Melbourne Children's Campus that unites clinical care, research and education. We are a research group of the Murdoch Children's Research Institute, a department of The Royal Children's Hospital, and an affiliate of the University of Melbourne's Department of Paediatrics.

The evidence is clear that not all children have what they need to develop well, to be healthy now and throughout their lives. We know that:

- By the start of primary school, Australian children living in the poorest areas have three times the developmental vulnerability of those in the richest (18.5% versus 6.5%). As adults, they are 60% more likely to have two or more chronic health conditions and will die 6-10 years earlier (AEDC, 2021).
- A child's health, wellbeing and development is shaped by the complex circumstances in which they are born, live, learn and grow. These circumstances are not equally distributed across society, meaning many children experience disadvantage that impacts the opportunity they have to thrive. See Figure 1 (Goldfeld et al., 2018; Moore, 2017; O'Conner et al., 2019).
- Many Australian children and their families experience barriers to accessing affordable, inclusive, high-quality health and social care, early education and care, and schooling (Beatson et al., 2022).
- Solutions exist that, when combined, can change the conditions in which children are raised and improve child development outcomes (Honisett et al., 2022; Molloy et al., 2019).

The early years are the time when investment into prevention and early intervention is most effective and cost-effective (Heckman, 2023; O'Conner et al., 2019; Strong Foundations collaboration, 2019). When every child can reach their full potential and thrive, we create healthier, vibrant and more prosperous communities for everyone.

Given the above, we welcome the establishment of an overarching National Early Years Strategy ‘to ensure that all children, wherever they live, enjoy the same opportunities to learn, develop and thrive.’ We support the key considerations of the Discussion paper: Commonwealth Government focus, a focus on breaking down silos, relationships with other Commonwealth Government strategies, how the Commonwealth connects to broader supports in the early years, international obligations, strengths-based, child and family centred, First Nations, respectful of diversity and inclusivity and Data.

Our submission takes into consideration:

- our multidisciplinary team’s expertise in children’s health, development and wellbeing
- significant early years research and evidence
- the current early years environment including the multiple sectors, departments and services such as health, social, education, legal, and disability
- the central role of the Commonwealth Government
- the need to move quickly so that we can see improvements for children within five years.

Our emphasis is on prevention, early intervention and **redressing inequity and disadvantage to deliver the greatest benefits to children now and into the future.**

We propose five key recommendations that are fundamental to ensuring every Australian child has what they need to thrive.

Centre for Community Child Health recommendations	
Recommendation 1 <i>Advance national leadership and governance</i>	1.1 Ensure a truly national overarching Early Years Strategy that unifies and builds upon existing national policy, strategies, and programs
	1.2 Develop a National Childhood Guarantee that is embedded in a sufficiently robust legislative framework, e.g. an Act, that commits to ensuring that every child in Australia has the conditions and services they need to thrive and anchors the approach for longevity to ensure time for substantial and thoughtful policy gains
Recommendation 2 <i>Enable data and evidence for learning and improvement</i>	2.1 Develop an Early Years Dataset linked to the National Childhood Guarantee to ensure that our national commitment is measured and met through both system and population outcomes
	2.2 Embed a Performance Monitoring Framework across the early years system to measure quantity, quality, and participation in early years services
	2.3 Build capacity and capability across the early years sector to collect and use all forms of effective evidence
	2.4 Invest in GenV, Australia’s largest child and parent nationally representative consented cell-to-society cohort, to speed up research and translation

Recommendation 3 <i>Innovate in place</i>	3.1 Invest in national coordination and support to improve the quality, sustainability and scaling of Integrated Child and Family Hubs
	3.2 Invest in the piloting of stacked services in ‘social innovation zones’ in 20 communities to address systemic inequity
Recommendation 4 <i>Strengthen universal early years health services for prevention and early intervention</i>	4.1. Trial innovative funding models to increase access to community paediatricians and multi-disciplinary paediatric health care teams
	4.2 Invest in the co-development, implementation and evaluation of an integrated primary care led model to better detect and respond to family adversity early
Recommendation 5 <i>Address the social determinants and create the conditions for thriving children and families</i>	5.1 Invest in a trial of an Early Years Boost: test the impact of increasing income supplements for families with young children on family social and economic wellbeing as well as on child development
	5.2 Use existing universal early years services to identify and connect families experiencing or at risk of poverty to financial wellbeing services
<i>Additional considerations to improve outcomes for children who experience the most disadvantage</i>	A.1 Incorporate the voice of children and families at all levels of the early years system - a key component for thriving children and families is agency. A.2 Build workforce capacity to have the knowledge and skills to support children to thrive this includes relational practice and in data and evidence for continuous improvement.