

A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

Government response to the Royal Commission
into Early Childhood Education and Care



Government of
South Australia

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FOREWORD

South Australia has a proud history as an innovator in early childhood education and development.

This government will create the next chapter in that history, through the introduction of preschool for all children from the age of three years.

The government welcomes the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care, led by the Hon. Julia Gillard AC.

The Royal Commission provided clear ideas about the best way to deliver quality preschool for all three-year-olds and four-year-olds and affirmed the benefits of doing so for our state. It recommended ways to support families in the first 1000 days of a child's life, how all families can access out of school hours care, and the flow-on benefits of this for increasing workforce participation from parents.

The Royal Commission's 43 recommendations present South Australia with an unprecedented opportunity: to create a fairer, better future for each child, and all children.

The need for action is undeniable. As they enter school, South Australian children are experiencing a concerning level of developmental vulnerability, as measured in the national Australian Early Development Census. Our children are not faring as well as their counterparts elsewhere in Australia, and these children live in families across all walks of life.

In addition, the Royal Commission heard that for too many families, information and services are fragmented and do not always support their child's development in ways that work for them.

We are going to turn that around.

How? By investing to give every child access to quality early childhood education and care from the age of three years, including more preschool hours for those who need it. Preschool will be a place that offers early learning, where children's developmental needs are identified, and where connections are made to services and information - becoming the 'backbone' for better connected child and family supports.

Many early childhood education and care services already go above and beyond to support families and communities. We will invest so that integrated support happens by design, not by chance or goodwill.

South Australia has some of the country's best early childhood leaders, teachers and educators. We are going to invest in them and invest to attract more.

This is more than three-year-old preschool. We are going to work in partnership with all stakeholders to build a universal early childhood development system that connects families to the right opportunities at the right time to support healthy child development. A system that is nation leading.

Our system will reach all children, from birth, with information and support for families and carers, who make all the difference in a child's development. It will use data and evidence to uphold quality and help us adapt over time as we learn more about child development. It will invest in early years services to help them connect, learn, adapt and improve.

If we want a fairer, better future for children before they start school, we must be ambitious.

Change will not happen by chance. We must think and act differently. We will use the tools of government, in new ways and in partnership with the sector, non-government and Aboriginal Community Controlled organisations, and broader communities. We will act as the steward of a system that is relentless in its purpose to put children first and reduce developmental vulnerability.

We have in the Royal Commission's report, a compelling picture of what our future can be. If we act now, the foundations we set will change the trajectory for children, and through them, our state.

We are going to make this happen for the children of South Australia.



Peter Malinauskas MP
Premier of South Australia



Hon Blair Boyer MP
*Minister for Education,
Training and Skills*





A NEW EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM

The South Australian government is committed to a nation leading vision for the early childhood development system that will improve the lives of thousands of children.

We have accepted an ambitious 20-year goal to guide our action: to reduce the rate of South Australian children entering school developmentally vulnerable from the current 23.8 per cent to 15 per cent.

The evidence put to the Royal Commission was clear: intervention in the early years of life can be effective in reducing vulnerability and positively influence a child's life trajectory.

Over the next decade, we will purposefully build an innovative early childhood development system that puts children and families first, where:

- **Families are seen and known** through trusted relationships with early childhood education and care providers that 'see the whole child'
- **Families are reached 'where they are'**, through services embedded within and connected to the early childhood education and care sector as a 'backbone'
- **Families have flexibility** with services meeting the practical needs of their everyday lives

There are approximately 118,000 children in South Australian aged 0-5. The system will consider every stage of early life, with children, parents and carers seeing tangible improvements and integration in the services available to support childhood development.

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A long-term ambition to help South Australia's children thrive

Previously accepted



BIRTH AND BABY

- Better access to parenting support
- Information about early childhood development and why it matters



TODDLER

- Increased access to child health and development checks
- Facilitate better access to childcare in areas of need
- Childcare that connects you to other supports



PRESCHOOL

- Universal, high-quality preschool for all three and four year olds
- 15-30 hours for most developmentally vulnerable children
- Three-year-old preschool available in early childhood education and care services, government and other settings
- Gateway to additional supports & connection to other services
- Introduce out of hours care in government preschools



SCHOOL

- Increase OSHC access across the state
- Improved quality of OSHC services
- More support for inclusion in OSHC



OUR RESPONSE TO THE ROYAL COMMISSION RECOMMENDATIONS

The Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care released its final report in August 2023. The government immediately committed to 13 keystone recommendations, and to dialogue with the Australian Government on recommendations about national settings.

The government has now accepted, or accepted in principle, all but two remaining recommendations. Alternative implementation approaches are preferred for those two. Where a recommendation is accepted in principle, this means we commit to the outcome, but the way we deliver requires further consideration and design. Implementation requires significant planning and consultation with the sector.

The Royal Commission’s report will provide guidance in coming years as we implement our vision for early childhood development, as will the sector itself, families, communities and experts.

Government will adopt a flexible approach to implementation, with careful consideration given to local needs and where we can have the highest impact, and any emerging evidence, so that we have the right focus for the system over time. This may result in refinements to specific initiatives and implementation approaches, guided by the overall intent of the Royal Commission.

The Australian Government continues to play a central role in early childhood, particularly in shaping access to, and affordability of, childcare. The South Australian government will continue to advocate for national effort to help families facing gaps in coverage and quality of childcare services.

3	A new national settlement of roles and responsibilities in early childhood education and care	Previously noted
5	Actions for the Commonwealth Government	Previously noted
42	Partnering with the National Disability Insurance Agency	Previously noted



PRESCHOOL FOR ALL SOUTH AUSTRALIAN THREE-YEAR-OLDS

Children who engage in early childhood education have better outcomes in the long term, and they are better prepared to thrive at school. All children benefit from participating in two years of high-quality early childhood education and care in the years before school.

The Royal Commission made several recommendations for how to deliver three-year-old preschool.

Government has already accepted the recommendation that children can access preschool through their early childhood education and care services at age three years. We will invest in quality preschool programs to be available across a range of service providers, to support flexibility for families, and preschool of the highest quality no matter where it is offered. Government will review this mixed model of provision in future, noting the Royal Commission's clear advice in Recommendation 15 about the conditions that should be in place before commencing a review. We will examine opportunities for preschool to have greater reach and to support continuity for families as their children enter their schooling years. Government reaffirms its policy that we aspire for every child to have access to a quality preschool program in their local government preschool in the year before full-time school.

We heard that more than 60 per cent of three-year-olds in South Australia are already attending an early childhood education and care service, which represents over 12,000 children. Offering preschool in settings where children are already receiving other early childhood education and care services supports quality, choice, and flexibility for families.

The government will invest in 15 hours of preschool for all three-year-olds, which will be rolled out in stages from 2026.

From 2026, South Australians will see early childhood education and care services progressively offer preschool for three-year-olds. Providers who meet quality and workforce requirements will offer this to children already engaging in early childhood education and care at their services. Government preschools will also phase in the availability of three-year-old preschool places from 2026. Priority will be given to regional communities and areas where there are childcare shortages, along with those parts of our state where data tells us children have more developmental vulnerability. A full rollout plan will be announced in mid 2024.

All three-year-old children in South Australia will be able to access a three-year-old preschool program by 2032, with every child continuing to have a guaranteed government preschool place in the year before school.

Government accepts or accepts in principle the Royal Commission's seven enabling recommendations about how to deliver preschool and will consider how to best support implementation in coming months.

We will invest in three-year-old preschool that upholds our strong reputation for quality. This includes support for early childhood teachers with planning time and professional learning in both government and non-government preschool settings, as well as access to quality curriculum resources.

Early childhood education and care services will be the 'backbone' of the early childhood development system. The new preschool model for three-year-olds and four-year-olds in South Australia will include:

- A teacher led quality preschool program
- Support from allied health and other professionals
- Early identification of a child's developmental needs on site, with organised pathways to interventions
- Organised family and community supports for those who need it

Our first step will be to consult on the funding model for 2026, which will define how we fund providers to deliver quality three-year-old preschool.

Our aim is for universal uptake. The government will consider investment in outreach and alternative models of learning in communities with very low rates of preschool uptake as needed to support this goal.

15	Implementing universal three-year-old preschool	Previously accepted
17	Implementing universal three and four-year-old preschool—supporting high-quality teaching	Accept
18	Implementing universal three-year-old preschool—parent fees in different settings	Accept in principle
19	A new State Government funding model for preschool and integrated early years service delivery	Accept
20	Ensuring universal uptake of three and four-year-old preschool	Accept in principle
21	Investing to grow capacity in quality preschool settings	Accept in principle
27	Alternative learning models for three-year-olds in communities with very low rates of preschool enrolment	Accept in principle





SUPPORTING CHILDREN MOST IN NEED

Developmentally vulnerable children are found in families in all walks of life. All children benefit from two years of high-quality preschool, but vulnerable children benefit more – and are likely to benefit from more hours.

At the heart of the Royal Commission’s approach is using early childhood education and care services to help tackle inequity. Two recommendations focus on children most at risk of developmental vulnerability – one a short-term strategy to reach up to 2000 three and four-year old children per annum that has been endorsed, and another to consider expanding the number of children reached in the longer term, which is also accepted in principle.

We will be the first jurisdiction to offer more hours of three-year-old preschool to those who need it. We know that one size does not fit all, so we will build a flexible system that is responsive to need.

Between 2026 and 2032 the government will put in place measures so that up to 2000 three and four-year-old children most at risk of developmental vulnerability will be able to access up to 30 hours of preschool before school. These children will be identified using the best available data insights and local knowledge, in consultation with providers and researchers.

The government will commission integrated service hubs to deliver these additional preschool hours in areas of high developmental vulnerability and will confirm models for delivery in other services. The operating model will be developed in consultation with local communities and providers.

We will act now, with two integrated service hub demonstration sites up and running before 2026. The best data and applied research will be incorporated into these demonstration sites, with operational insights informing future decisions about how to identify and offer places to more children as part of the rollout from 2026.

We will examine contemporary and innovative models for hubs as part of this work. This may include where there are existing services and facilities in a community, and how we can support local efforts in service collaboration, coordination, and integration, so children and families can find the services and connections they need, which support them.

25	Additional hours of three and four-year-old preschool—short-to-medium term	Previously accepted
26	Additional hours of three and four-year-old preschool—long term	Accept in principle



INVESTING IN ABORIGINAL CHILDREN

In South Australia, Aboriginal children can access an additional entitlement of 12 hours of preschool per week from three years of age.

The Royal Commission heard evidence of how preschool can be a warm and welcoming place for families of three-year old Aboriginal children, where they are surrounded by culture, language and the wisdom of elders.

In recognising the importance of three-year-old preschool for many Aboriginal families, the government will increase its existing offer of preschool for three-year-old Aboriginal children, in Department for Education settings from 12 to 15 hours a week from 2024.

The Department for Education will also extend its Enter for Success Strategy, through which Aboriginal children can enrol in any government school, to preschools from 2025.

We will work in partnership with Aboriginal communities, to codesign and invest in initiatives for Aboriginal children, to ensure they retain and increase the benefits of three-year-old preschool. Codesign will commence in 2024 after the SA First Nations Voice to Parliament election.

We will work with the South Australian Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation Network (SAACCON) to strengthen and progress the commitments already made in relation to early childhood development under South Australia’s Implementation Plan for the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

We know that Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCO) are best placed to provide community-led and culturally safe services to Aboriginal children. Opportunities to support and collaborate with the ACCO sector will be identified through the codesign process and considered through the design of the funding model for three-year-old preschool.

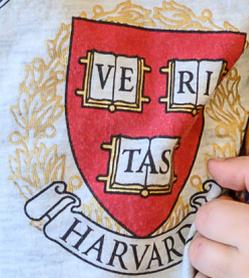
14	Strengthening the Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation sector	Accept
32	Aboriginal three-year-old preschool	Previously accepted



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HARVARD



UNIVERSITY



GROWING AND SUPPORTING OUR EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE

The early childhood education and care workforce is critical to the delivery of our vision for the early childhood system, but we are experiencing a national shortage of early childhood educators and teachers.

In South Australia, the shortage in early childhood education and care services is particularly acute, with 28 per cent of providers not having a fully qualified teacher in a designated role. Regional and remote communities continue to face exacerbated workforce challenges.

It is estimated that universal three-year-old preschool will require around 800 additional early childhood teachers, a 41 per cent increase in the total number of early childhood teachers. An additional 880 educators, and an increase in other staff such as service directors will also be needed.

The Royal Commission made four recommendations around workforce supply, quality, satisfaction, and retention. We have accepted two and two in principle.

The Government will invest \$56 million over four years in the early childhood education and care workforce. We will ensure a significant proportion of this investment is allocated to scholarships to grow the workforce. The details of these scholarships and other workforce initiatives will be designed in partnership with the sector, with consultation to begin shortly. A full workforce strategy will be released in the first half of 2024.

The government is also moving quickly to allow the registration of early childhood teachers holding a qualification recognised by Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA), including three-year degrees, for teaching children aged birth to five, to bring more existing teachers into the sector and allow specialisation in early childhood. The government will examine the optimal approach to registering early childhood teachers holding a qualification recognised by ACECQA, including a separate teacher register.

The urgent task of building the early childhood workforce pipeline, in partnership with universities, vocational education and training (VET) providers and the sector, will commence in 2024 and be driven by senior leadership in the Office for Early Childhood Development. This is fundamental to broader government workforce and skills commitments across sectors in South Australia, as the availability of high-quality early childhood education and care enables more parents to engage in work and study, having a multiplier effect on our economy.

During the rollout of three-year-old preschool the government will consider the appropriate conditions in which transitional delivery of the program by a diploma qualified educator will be permitted, while teacher numbers grow.

22	Establishing an Early Childhood Workforce Fund	Previously accepted
23	Appointing an Early Childhood Workforce Coordinator General	Accept
24	Early childhood teacher – qualifications	Accept in principle
31	Implementing universal three and four-year old preschool – the role of diploma qualified educators	Accept in principle



CONNECTING SERVICES FOR THE BEST START

Families are at the heart of healthy child development. Engaging with families early in their parenting journey is incredibly important. The Child and Family Health Service and Department for Education offer incredible support through health and development checks and the [Early Years SA app](#), but families can still find it hard to know what to do and where to find help during a child’s early years.

The Royal Commission told us families don’t always find their way into early childhood services, and particularly those with complex needs. Coordinated effort is needed to reach families with information and support about their role in their child’s development, and how to access services in their child’s early years of life. We want to create an early childhood system that ‘sees and responds’ rather than ‘sees and refers’ to a child’s needs, with strong connections between early years services.

The Royal Commission made five recommendations to reach and support more families in a child’s first three years of life. We have previously accepted two of these recommendations, and now accept one more and two in principle.

The government is already expanding the availability and uptake of child health and development checks across South Australia, which is essential to help services identify children’s developmental needs and connect families to additional supports where they need them earlier in life.

The government will improve information available to families about the importance of quality interactions for early childhood brain development through [Words Grow Minds](#), and in 2024 the Office for Early Childhood Development will launch a new website to provide clear public information about three-year-old preschool. Over time this will include how and where to find it in a local area over the course of the statewide rollout.

The Office for Early Childhood Development will have a continued focus on how to integrate systems, services, and data. This will be a collaborative process to ensure services connect in ways that put children first and make it easy for families and providers to access and trust.

The Office will also promote excellence in inclusion and support for children at risk, examining training and other supports for the sector to improve learning, participation and wellbeing of children with complex needs. This will include support for formal referral pathways into early childhood education and care services for children who are at risk of coming into contact with the child protection system.

In recognising the importance of three-year-old preschool for children in care, the government will increase its existing offer of preschool for three-year-old children in care in Department for Education settings from 12 to 15 hours a week from 2024.

8	Connecting services in the early years	Accept in principle
11	Child Development Checks	Previously accepted
12	Giving parents and carers information and support for child development	Previously accepted
13	Leveraging early childhood education and care in the first 1000 days to reduce developmental vulnerability	Accept in principle
28	Connecting children at child protection risk to early childhood education and care	Accept





IMPROVING OUT OF SCHOOL HOURS CARE

Across South Australia, in any given week, around 29,000 children aged five to twelve will access out of school hours care (OSHC), representing 21,400 families. This means just over 1 in every 6 primary school children goes to OSHC each week.

The Royal Commission told us that families are still in need of better access to OSHC to support work commitments, and there is opportunity to provide higher quality services. For families of children with disability it is even more challenging to participate in the workforce because OSHC often does not meet their needs.

Government is committed to making out of hours care more accessible for children of preschool and primary school age, to improving the quality of OSHC and to making it more inclusive for children with additional needs.

The government has already accepted the Royal Commission’s recommendation to trial different models of preschool out of hours care. In mid-2024, trials at 20 government preschools will begin. Evaluation of these trials will inform a strategy for offering this service more broadly.

The Royal Commission made 10 recommendations to improve OSHC on school sites. We have already accepted three of these recommendations and noted another one.

Work is underway to modernise OSHC qualification requirements and expand the central support provided by the Department for Education to OSHC services and schools.

To support the OSHC provider market to grow its quality service offerings, the government will provide greater central support from the Department for Education, including management of contracts to support schools, education, training, tools and resources.

The rest of the recommendations are accepted or accepted in principle, except recommendation 38.

Government is adopting an alternative implementation approach for recommendation 38. We will not move to default third-party provision of OSHC on government school sites, but will work with the sector to identify the right mix of service provision for OSHC, including what supports are needed for schools and the sector to ensure a quality service. This would likely involve a mix of third-party providers, governing council run services where effective, and alternative service approaches such as Department for Education direct provision of OSHC in some scenarios.

33	Improving access to government school OSHC	Accept in principle
34	Making space for government school OSHC	Accept
35	Modernising OSHC qualification requirements	Previously accepted
36	Supporting principals to deliver sustainable government school OSHC	Accept
37	Ensure a fit-for-purpose regulatory approach to OSHC	Previously noted
38	Change the approach to OSHC delivery on government sites – from governing council to third party provider led	Alternative implementation approach preferred
39	Increase central Department for Education support for government OSHC provision	Previously accepted
40	Planning and specialist support for inclusion at government school OSHC	Accept
41	Provision of OSHC at special schools	Accept in principle
43	Find the right model for preschool OSHC or ‘wraparound care’ on government preschool sites	Previously accepted



FACILITATING IMPROVED CHILDCARE ACCESSIBILITY

Childcare deserts persist in certain areas, with a high concentration in regional and remote areas. This constrains economic opportunities in these communities.

The Royal Commission made two recommendations about the State Government role in identifying and resolving questions of childcare accessibility. One has been previously noted, and an alternative implementation approach is preferred for recommendation 10.

The South Australian Government strongly calls for the Australian Government to prioritise a better funding model to address childcare deserts, through its response to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) and Productivity Commission inquiries.

The Productivity Commission's draft report into early childhood education and care makes clear that up to 30 hours per week of quality early childhood education and care should be available for all children aged 0-5 years, and that the Australian Government should provide additional funding to support the viability of early childhood education and care services in 'thin' markets.

Ahead of more action by the Australian Government, the South Australian Government will set out a public statement of the facilitation supports it will offer to regional communities without access to childcare, including eligibility for business case support.

9	State Government take a proactive role in identifying and resolving questions of childcare and OSHC accessibility	Previously noted
10	State Government actions to support childcare accessibility	Alternative implementation approach preferred





BUILDING A ROBUST AND RESPONSIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEM

Children and their families are currently faced with a ‘patchwork’ of services from birth to age five which are difficult to navigate. The evidence base on early childhood development is rapidly evolving, which creates a remarkable opportunity to continually create better services for children and families.

The Royal Commission made seven recommendations to improve system leadership, planning and quality. The government has already accepted three recommendations, noted one, will accept one more, and two in principle.

The government has established the Office for Early Childhood Development to steward the early childhood development system in South Australia. The Office will act on government’s behalf to organise the system to reduce developmental vulnerability. Its local teams will work collaboratively to mobilise government and non-government services in every community to deliver high quality preschool, and support the translation of cutting-edge insights about supporting healthy child development into practice. It will be charged with working systemically and locally to create the quality preschool supply we need and to support service integration and connection for families.

Data driven decisions are essential to target supports to children most in need, and to steward the system to improved outcomes. The Office for Early Childhood Development will embed data and research driven decision making approaches in the delivery of three-year-old preschool and other reforms, working closely with data experts and leading researchers, for example in the design approach to integrated service hubs. The government will carefully consider the Royal Commission’s recommendations for a new universal child development data system and conduct further scoping and consultation on the best approach in 2024 and 2025.

World-class evidence and translation into practice will be central to the way South Australia’s early childhood system delivers the greatest impact on improving children’s outcomes. A standalone research institute will not be created at this time, but the Office will seek research institutes and universities (including consortia) for this important work.

2	Legislating the Office for the Early Years to lead the early child development system	Previously accepted
4	Legislation for a new universal child development data system	Accept in principle
6	Investing in world-class evidence and translation into practice	Accept in principle
7	Improving the functioning of the Education Standards Board	Previously accepted
16	Implementing universal three-year-old preschool—local implementation teams	Accept
29	Preschool outcome measurement	Previously noted
30	A focus on improving services that are ‘Working Towards’ the National Quality Standard	Previously accepted

NEXT STEPS

We are not wasting a moment to get started on delivering our vision for a nation leading early childhood education and care system.

The Office for Early Childhood Development has been established, and detailed implementation planning is underway.

The development of an early childhood education and care workforce strategy will start immediately, and government will begin consulting with the sector from early 2024 to design the preschool rollout.

Government will announce a detailed implementation and investment plan in June 2024.



**Government of
South Australia**