

Royal Commission *into*

Early Childhood Education & Care

Interim Report

April 2023





**The Royal Commission
acknowledges the
traditional custodians of
the land that is now South
Australia and respects
Aboriginal cultural identities,
practices and beliefs.**

**We recognise that
Aboriginal people have
strong and continuing
connections to their
traditional lands, cultures,
heritage and history.**



Royal Commission *into*
Early Childhood Education & Care

Interim Report

April 2023

© Government of South Australia 2023

All material presented in this publication is provided under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 Australia license (www.creativecommons.org/licenses).

For the avoidance of doubt, this means that this license only applies to material as set out in this document. The details of the relevant license conditions are available on the Creative Commons website as is the full legal code for the CC BY 4.0 AU license (www.creativecommons.org/licenses).

2nd Edition

Released 21 April 2023

Correcting minor errors in formatting and graphics

ISBN 978-099461835-1



Royal Commission *into*
Early Childhood Education & Care



Table of contents

MESSAGE FROM THE COMMISSIONER	1	PART TWO DEFINING THREE-YEAR-OLD PRESCHOOL	40
<hr/>		<hr/>	
INTRODUCTION: GROWING AN EARLY CHILD DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM	2		
<hr/>			
South Australia—seizing an opportunity to lead in a changing world	2	The challenge of defining preschool	40
<hr/>		<hr/>	
PART ONE WHERE ARE WE NOW?	6	The elements in defining a three-year-old preschool program	42
<hr/>		<hr/>	
Early learning in South Australia today	6	Defining expected outcomes from three-year-old preschool	43
<hr/>		<hr/>	
Growing an early childhood development system—data	8	Measuring expected outcomes from three-year-old preschool	45
<hr/>		<hr/>	
The value and purpose of early childhood education and care	16	The qualifications of who delivers the three-year-old program	49
<hr/>		<hr/>	
South Australia’s preschool system	20	The nature of the three-year-old program	56
<hr/>		<hr/>	
South Australia’s long day care system	24	The developmental needs of three-year-olds	60
<hr/>		<hr/>	
The Commonwealth’s impact on South Australian early childhood education and care	27	Format of the three-year-old program (duration, composition of groups, ratios)	62
<hr/>		<hr/>	
Comparing South Australia’s early childhood education and care system to other states	30	Layering supports	68
<hr/>		<hr/>	
Additional supports for children and their families in the current early childhood education and care system	33	Determining quality	71
<hr/>		<hr/>	
Summary of findings from Part one	37	Community-specific early learning models	75
<hr/>		<hr/>	
		Where to for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander three-year-old preschool?	77
		<hr/>	

PART THREE:
**DELIVERING
THREE-YEAR-OLD PRESCHOOL 81**

An overview of different delivery approaches for three-year-old preschool	84
Delivering increased supply—the role of State Government in setting up new services	88
The recommended approach in detail	92
Monitoring our progress towards universal participation	99
Reducing barriers to enrolment	100
Supporting the change	102
Investment in additional capacity	103
Fees for parents	106
A national approach to funding for preschool?	108
Getting the funding to services right	111
Looking beyond South Australia	113
Timeframes	115
Where to from this Interim Report?	118

RECOMMENDATIONS 120

OPINION 128

Perspective: Our kids by Prof Melissa Wake 128

Children’s cognitive development—a vision for the future by Dr Holly Baines 132

TERMS OF REFERENCE 136

APPENDICES 140

Appendix 1:
Glossary of Terms 140

Appendix 2:
How the Royal Commission has engaged 141

Appendix 3:
Summary of YourSAy consultation
October 22 – February 23 143

Appendix 4:
Roundtable Members 148

Appendix 5:
Key data received by the Commission 149

Appendix 6: Dates 150

References 152

Table of figures

Figure 1. Developmental vulnerability across Australia from 2009 to 2021	9
Figure 2. Preschool delivery in South Australia	13
Figure 3. How many South Australian children attend long day care by age?	13
Figure 4. How many South Australian children attend long day care by age and by socio-economic status?	14
Figure 5. Developmentally on track—South Australia’s children across five domains of early child development, from 2009 to 2021	15
Figure 6. The impact of disadvantage on the development of South Australian children, from 2009 to 2021	18
Figure 7. Decline in enrolments in government preschool	21
Figure 8. How different states deliver preschool	31
Figure 9. The qualifications of South Australia’s early childhood education and care workforce in two different settings	33
Figure 10. Difference in long day care workforce, by country/metropolitan	52
Figure 11. Difference in long day care workforce, by provider type	52
Figure 12. Difference in long day care workforce, by size of the provider	52
Figure 13. Expanding our understanding of a preschool program	69
Figure 14. How South Australian services rate	71
Figure 15. Delivering three-year-old preschool	92
Figure 16. Estimated contribution of funding to preschool across jurisdictions	108
Figure 17. Estimated Commonwealth funding required to equalise Child Care Subsidy access for children in preschool, 2021	109

Her Excellency the Honourable Frances Adamson AC
Governor of South Australia
Government House
ADELAIDE SA 5000

14 April 2023

Your Excellency

On 16 October 2022 I was invested with the powers of a Royal Commission to inquire into Early Childhood Education and Care in South Australia and consider opportunities to support families and children in the critical early years of a child's development.

I now present to you an interim report of the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care which focuses on this specific term of reference:

- *How universal quality preschool programs for three and four year olds can be delivered in South Australia, including addressing considerations of accessibility, affordability, quality and how to achieve universality for both age cohorts. Consideration of universal three-year old preschool should be undertaken with a view to achieving this commencing in 2026.*

A Final Report of the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care will be provided to you in August 2023.

Yours sincerely



Hon Julia Gillard AC
Royal Commissioner





Message from the Commissioner



This interim report is written about and for our State's children. There are around 20,000 children born every year in South Australia; ¹ and each year preschool age children move to our State. Each of these children is born with their own unique genetic inheritance into a family with its own dynamics and its dreams for their child's future. Each child has the right to grow, learn and thrive.

Since being appointed to lead this Royal Commission in October last year, I have had the privilege of working with an incredibly high quality Secretariat. I have also had the honour of meeting and hearing from passionate researchers, educators, carers, service providers, families and community members. I thank them all and in doing so note that I look forward to continuing our work together.

At each stage of the Commission's work, we have had at the forefront of our thinking what we can do as a State, as a caring community, to best support each child. Specifically, the Terms of Reference for the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care are to inquire into three areas; the role of early childhood education and care to support the first 1000 days of life, universal quality preschool for three and four-year-olds, and greater access to out of school hours care for preschool and primary school aged children

This Interim Report focuses on three-year-old preschool as a major reform planned for South Australia from 2026.

The report makes findings and in principle recommendations only on three-year-old preschool, and we are seeking feedback on these findings ahead of a Final Report.

Formal submissions will be accepted via the Royal Commission's website until 19 May 2023.

The Royal Commission's Final Report will include findings against the breadth of the Terms of Reference and will be released in August 2023.

As you read and consider this Interim Report, you will find it canvasses a number of complicated matters like the emerging scientific research, technical questions about data collection and analytics, funding structures, service models, Commonwealth / State relations, indicators of disadvantage and many other questions. All of these areas require sophisticated thinking.

But I hope you also gain from this Interim Report a sense of the opportunity before our State to be a global leader in early childhood education and care and to better fulfil our moral obligation to all of our children by enabling them to have the best possible start in life.

Hon Julia Gillard AC

Royal Commissioner into Early
Childhood Education and Care



INTRODUCTION: **GROWING AN EARLY CHILD DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM**

South Australia—seizing an opportunity to lead in a changing world

The science is clear; the first five years of a child's life are a period of rapid growth and development, with 85-90 per cent of brain development happening in this time.² Children learn from birth³, and experiences and settings during the early years have a significant influence on later life health, development and academic success.⁴ Where a home environment is nurturing, with language and learning and positive interactions, children acquire skills and dispositions for learning that have been found to benefit later academic performance and life outcomes.⁵ Where a home environment has challenges ('risk factors') such as poverty or violence, it can have a direct impact on a child's brain development, in turn affecting their ability to learn generally and in a formal school environment.⁶ While the focus of the Royal Commission is on early childhood education and care, it is important we keep in mind the broader opportunity to grow an early child development system, of which education and care is only a part. An early child development system is one that supports each child to develop to their full potential by bringing together all the things we know matter.

Investing in and supporting babies and children and their families in the early years is good for them and good for South Australia. The dividends for the State are long lasting because a positive start in the early years has an impact on learning, health, work and personal characteristics throughout adult life.

However, what is currently scientifically known is just the start of a coming revolution in our understanding of the early years. Each year, scientists have a better understanding of the impact of a range of factors on healthy early child development, including:

- genetics, encoded in the DNA of each individual;
- epigenetics, meaning the way genes are expressed in an individual, often affected by an individual's environment;
- nutrition, which has now been shown to have a specific impact on brain development, as well as an impact on physical health generally;
- gut microbiome, meaning the unique set of micro-organisms in each child's gastro-intestinal tract;
- neurology, which deals with the brain, spinal cord and nerves;
- the biological impacts of stress, exercise, exposure to the outdoors, parent interactions (including parenting style and parental mental health), sleep and more.

Multi-disciplinary work across all of these fields is expanding the frontiers of scientific knowledge and will enable us to develop an increasingly precise answer to the questions ‘what experiences matter most, at what points, in a child’s early years?’⁷

This new knowledge from the laboratory is being matched with insights from large-scale cohort studies,⁸ including those focused on what is known as implementation science, which aims to answer the questions— ‘what works?’ and ‘how can we make things work at scale?’

As part of the Royal Commission’s work, we asked two scientists leading projects at the forefront of this kind of multi-disciplinary work to give us their perspective on where knowledge of early child development could take us over the next ten to twenty years.

Professor Melissa Wake is leading GenV, a whole-of-state research project which is open to all babies born in Victoria over two years from mid-2021. The large-scale project will provide the community, researchers and government with population-wide insights into the health and wellbeing of young children.

Dr Holly Baines is leading 1kD at Wellcome Leap, a multi-disciplinary, multi-research team project that is aiming to develop accurate, scalable, early screening methods to predict executive functioning in the first 1000 days of a child’s life, using neural imaging, computer simulations and much more.

Their imaginings of what we might know in the next ten years are provided at the end of this report. They are inspiring, but also daunting for policy makers who must make decisions in the uncertain present.

At the same time these new insights are emerging, better joined-up data platforms and analytics are evolving to the point where population wide data can better inform who needs what help in the early years.

For example, in partnership with national research networks and State Government agencies, the BetterStart Group at the University of Adelaide has built the Better Evidence Better Outcomes Linked Data (BEBOLD) platform. BEBOLD holds de-identified data on over 500,000 South Australian children and young people who were born since 1991, tracking their interactions with the health, social, education and justice systems. Using this data, BetterStart have prepared a model for the Royal Commission that is able to predict 38.5 per cent of the children who will go on to be identified as developmentally vulnerable at age five using 23 routinely recorded administrative data points. In some geographic areas, the model can predict more than two thirds of the children who will go on to be developmentally vulnerable.

The power of using this predictive data in a systemic way could be life changing. Instead of waiting until a child presents at school with developmental issues, the model could help us identify and provide timely and effective additional supports to that child.

The Commission’s work recognises the fast rate of scientific progress and the increasing power of data analytics. It is also being undertaken against the backdrop of governments in Australia and around the world reviewing their early childhood education and care policies and structures, as a result of this new science and data, and the need to address the concerns about the cost and accessibility of child care, which have labour market participation consequences, especially for women.

Of particular relevance to this inquiry, the Australian Government is currently developing an Early Years Strategy and has commissioned both the Productivity Commission and the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission to independently review the early childhood education and care sector, with a focus on accessibility, affordability, developmental outcomes and pricing structures.

Changes to family assistance legislation that take effect in July 2023 will improve the affordability of childcare, increasing the Child Care Subsidy to up to 90 per cent for some families. The Productivity Commission will specifically consider options to increase the Child Care Subsidy further, with a view to improving Australia’s economic growth and productivity through increasing the workforce participation of women.

These pieces all intersect with the work of the Royal Commission.

This dynamism creates both a challenge and an opportunity.

The challenge is that any system-wide decisions made now can quickly become out of date because of the changes in scientific understandings, improvements in data analytics and reform of key policy settings.

But we believe that this challenge is far outweighed by the opportunity for South Australia to lead the world in the translation of the best of new science into its early childhood education and care system.

This is not new for South Australia. South Australia is used to being a leader in policy debate and innovation. South Australia has a history of being curious and informed. Programs including Thinkers in Residence have opened South Australia up to new ideas in areas such as housing and homelessness, renewable energy and climate change, modern manufacturing and early childhood education and care. The State's public service has shown its ability to respond to new ideas with innovative delivery that changes lives.

High quality education and research is already happening at our internationally recognised universities. Opportunities are likely to increase with the prospect of two of our universities combining strengths and merging in the near future.

The State is home to innovative research at the SA Health and Medical Research Institute (SAHMRI) located in its iconic headquarters in Adelaide's expanding biomedical precinct. Research at SAHMRI has focused on improving health equity for vulnerable communities, preventing chronic disease, exploring innovative treatments for cancer and supporting health outcomes for children.

For all the new insights emerging in scientific research, there is little evidence and few examples of how to translate these new ideas into practical settings for families and children, such as in the formal and informal environments in which they learn.

For example, the Commission has heard that, in relation to preschool, there is no clear evidence about the optimal amount of time, the best program configuration or the most appropriate pedagogical approach, meaning the methods and practices used by the early childhood teacher, for different cohorts of children.

Clearly, there is a need to build a better bridge between the science and what is happening in a child's life experience, especially as the quantum of research findings will keep growing. To take one example, we do not yet have good longitudinal information on the impact of screen time on children, but ultimately there will be robust studies in the area. Currently, there is no established mechanism to translate those findings into the best possible actionable steps for teachers and families to take. What is required is the ability to trial the possible approaches in a time efficient way and then get the most effective ones out into the hands of policy makers and care givers.

South Australia has the opportunity to build the bridge, both shaping and riding the wave of emerging scientific understanding of the early years and increasingly sophisticated data analytics. The State is well placed to do this, with a deeply rooted tradition of placing a strong value on early learning and thought leadership in the sector.

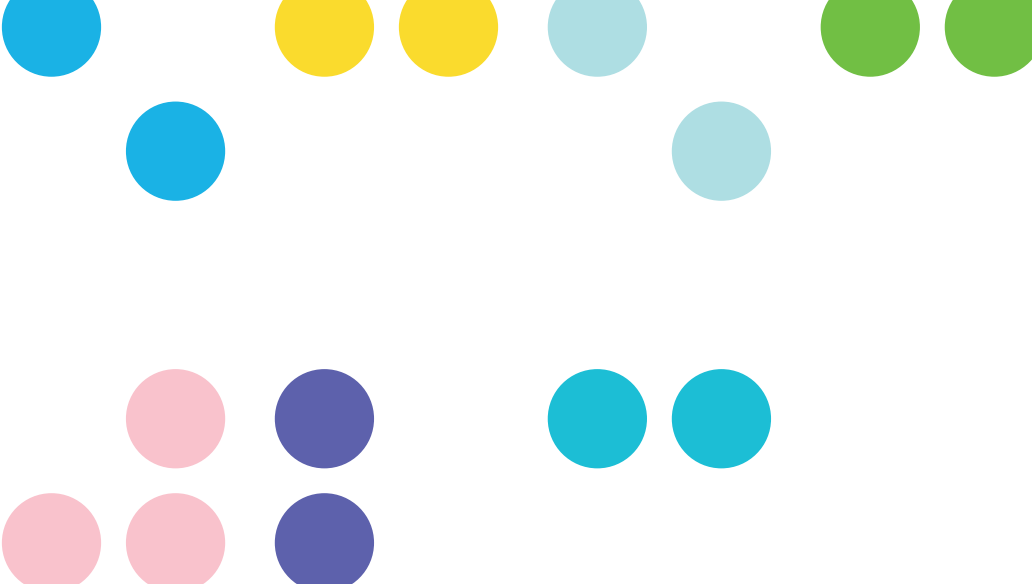
The South Australian government can invest in an early child development system that grows and adapts with increasing knowledge and understanding – a 'learning system' – and demonstrate to the nation and the world what can be achieved for children by being at the leading edge of research translation into everyday practice.

The work of Dr Fraser Mustard and Professor Carla Rinaldi as Thinkers in Residence continues to influence our early childhood education and care sector, and the Royal Commission has heard from many stakeholders that this work must not be forgotten.

This can be combined with a nascent but exciting local capability to bring together new ways for government, researchers and the community to use data to support better outcomes for children and families.

The Commission has heard evidence about how the South Australian government, in partnership with researchers, lived experience advocates, non-government service providers and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, has deployed linked data analysis to powerful effect in providing support to the most vulnerable families in the Child and Family Safety System.⁹

In the context of building this bridge, our population scale is a valuable asset. South Australia is the right size to be at the forefront of developing ideas about what works. Our State can be home to an early childhood sector that is defined by a culture of caring and learning.



In the next phase of our inquiry, we will challenge South Australians to consider ‘what will it take for South Australia to lead on early childhood education and care in a changing world?’

The Commission will continue to seek evidence on the elements that might be required to make this reform agenda successful. It might, for example, include legislative reform that embeds the learning entitlement of children. This could be paired with a long term funded research agenda using our established research community at SAHMRI and the universities, which positions South Australia in the sphere of international research through global outreach structures. Improvements in the quality and use of data to evaluate the impact of reforms in public health and child development could lead to a system that learns and adjusts, disrupting disadvantage and changing the lives of future generations.

Against this background, this Interim Report details recommendations around one key piece of a renewed system of early childhood education and care in South Australia, namely the rollout of three-year-old preschool. In mapping the way forward, every endeavour has been made to show how three-year-old preschool could be part of a system of continuous learning and contribute to a vision of South Australia leading the world in early childhood education and care.

In this context the Royal Commission has formed two overarching policy questions for this Interim Report:

What should be the learning and development entitlement of every three-year-old South Australian child?

and

What is the central aim of three-year-old preschool and what are the secondary but still important aims?

The recommendations in this report start to answer these questions but should be viewed as ‘in principle’ recommendations which may be amended or built upon in the Commission’s Final Report.

They are provided here at the mid-point of the Commission’s inquiries to give the community the opportunity to gain this insight into the Commission’s thinking and respond to it.

We want readers of this Interim Report to share our sense of excitement about what we could achieve together. Our State could be at the forefront of taking the best of new knowledge from around the world and testing and trialling how it could be put into action. The evidence gained would then be used to keep what is being offered to our children at the leading edge and to enable others to learn from our example. We hope this is a vision which inspires.



PART ONE

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

Early learning in South Australia today

The history of early childhood education in South Australia starts with the deeply embedded ways of learning in place in Aboriginal families for thousands of years before colonisation. The Commission acknowledges these methods of transmitting knowledge, culture and belonging are still vibrant today.

Kindergarten as a formal construct started in South Australia in the 1870s and long day care soon after.¹⁰ It was the German educator, Friedrich Froebel, who first suggested that children are ‘seeds in need of nurturing and tendering’. He coined the term ‘kindergarten’, derived from ‘child garden’, suggesting that society needs to provide settings that give young children a place to play and learn.¹¹

Today, South Australia has almost 400 government preschools and around 450 long day care services.¹² There are a number of other settings in which children experience early learning and care out of their home environment including family day care, early learning centres, children’s centres and facilitated play groups. Almost all South Australian children are in these settings at some point in their lives and many children have experience with multiple services before school.¹³

For convenience, we refer to all of these services as the early childhood education and care system. However, the Commission has heard evidence that the use of the term ‘system’ is not appropriate because the word implies the various settings are interconnected and working together, and this is not currently the case. To take one practical example, if a child is in long day care for part of the week and in a separate preschool for part of the week, information to support the learning and care of that child in the different settings is not shared. In Parts 2 and 3, we explore what needs to be done to ensure that we truly have a **system** as opposed to a patch-work of services and settings.

This current range of services and supports is underpinned by a significant investment made by parents, the State and Commonwealth governments, and, in some cases, local government.¹⁴ While this Interim Report is primarily focused on three-year-old preschool, there is significant and increasing overlap between preschool and other forms of early childhood education and care (notably long day care), meaning it is necessary to understand and describe the funding arrangements for both kinds of activities.



LONG DAY CARE

Predominantly funded by the Australian Government via Child Care Subsidy that is applied to service fees and reduces the out-of-pocket cost for families. Eligibility for the subsidy is based on income and activity (that is, work or study level) of a family, with different levels of subsidy for different income or activity levels. The Productivity Commission inquiry will have regard to the activity requirements for Child Care Subsidy as well as affordability and accessibility more broadly. Child Care Subsidy also applies to other forms of care like family day care and Out of School Hours Care, and in 2021-22, Commonwealth funding of \$562m went to eligible services in South Australia. Increasingly generous terms of Child Care Subsidy make it likely more families will use these services. This will have the effect of increasing the Commonwealth Child Care Subsidy coming into South Australia in the future.

PRESCHOOL

Currently provided to most children in the year before school (with a mid-year intake commencing in 2023). Predominantly funded by the South Australian government through direct provision of places in government preschool. Programming and delivery of preschool must be by a degree-qualified early childhood teacher. The average cost to the South Australian government of providing government preschool is around \$11,500 per child. Parent fees are not compulsory in government preschools and average \$122 per child per term. South Australia has signed the Preschool Reform Agreement with the Commonwealth, which is worth around \$28.2m to ensure 15 hours a week of preschool for all four-year-old children. Around \$6.2m goes directly to 250 long day care and non-government preschool services that have signed a funding agreement with the State to provide preschool in their setting.

Growing an early childhood development system—data

These kinds of government investments in the early years are critical, but so too is understanding the impact of that investment. Without agreeing what is important and measuring against outcomes, families, governments and society cannot know if efforts and investment are being directed in the right places.

The Commission has heard about the value of the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC), a three-yearly data collection exercise, which commenced in 2009, to understand the development of children in the year they start school across five domains (physical, social, emotional, language and communication). AEDC data is an important source for governments and communities to see and track the development of children to inform policy and practice.¹⁵

The last AEDC was held in 2021 and shows that in South Australia, 12.7 per cent of children were developmentally vulnerable in two or more of the domains, against a national average of 11.4 per cent.¹⁶

At a community level, some parts of South Australia are even more vulnerable. Because the AEDC has been running since 2009, we can also start to see trajectories of change both at state and national levels. Figure 1 shows there has been little change (in fact a slight increase) in developmental vulnerability in South Australian children since 2015.

In 2021, across all five domains, there were proportionally more South Australian children developmentally vulnerable than the national average.¹⁷

As in other states, there is a strong correlation between socio-economic status and developmental vulnerability, with children from poorer families more likely to be developmentally vulnerable than children from richer families. This reflects a long-established truth in public policy; that the social, economic, environmental and cultural surroundings in which people live have profound impacts on their health. If you live in a neighbourhood where fresh food is expensive and hard to find, where there is little safe, open space for playing outside, and where there is limited access to health care, then it is likely you will have poorer health outcomes.¹⁸

In South Australia, the Child Development Council (CDC) is established under the *Children and Young People (Oversight and Advocacy Bodies) Act 2016* with its primary function being to prepare and maintain an Outcomes Framework for Children and Young People. The CDC is chaired by Dr Victoria Whittington who has told the Royal Commission about the importance of data collection to understanding how our children and young people are faring.¹⁹ In general, the CDC has concluded, South Australia's children are faring well.²⁰

However, Dr Whittington told the Commission that population data for children under the age of five is lacking, making it harder for government to make informed policy and program decisions.²¹

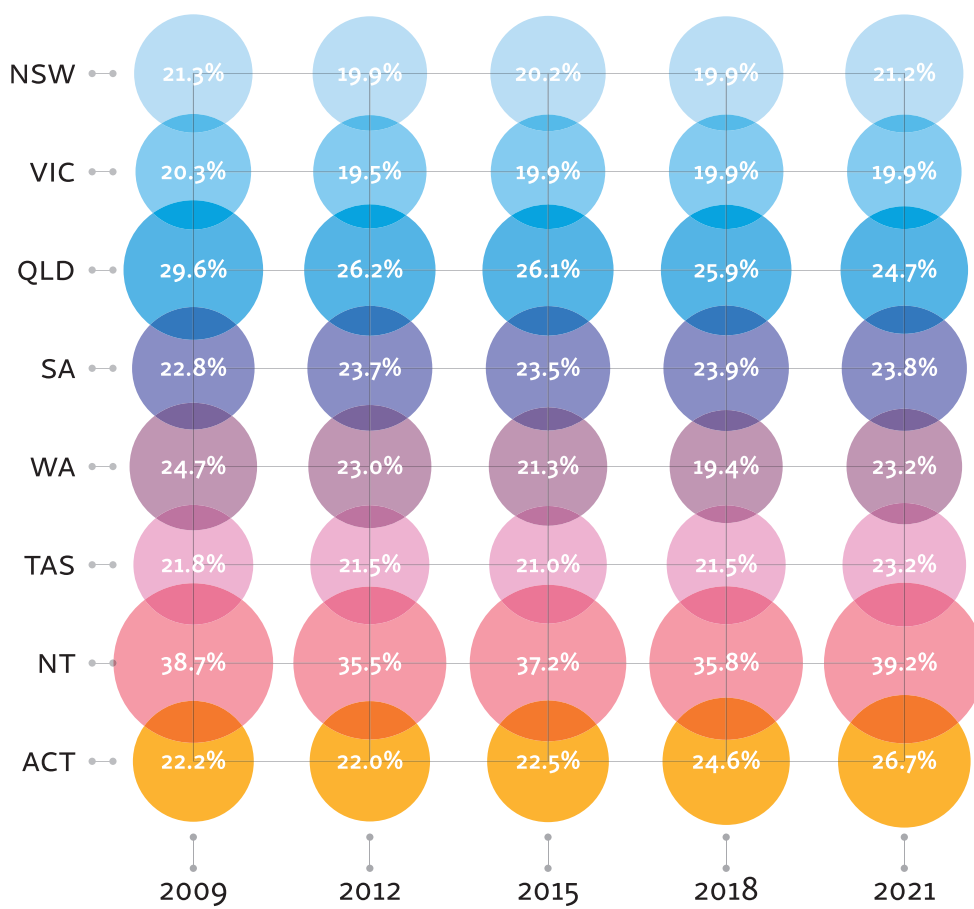


Figure 1. Developmental vulnerability across Australia from 2009 to 2021

Proportion of children who are developmentally vulnerable on one or more domains of the Australian Early Development Census, 2009 to 2021

Source: Australian Early Development Census (2021)



Regular health and development checks are an important part of supporting parents and caregivers in the early years. Child and Family Health Service (CaFHS) are able to conduct these checks and provide advice on health and development stages. These are recorded in the 'Blue Book' provided to all parents of newborns in South Australia. Currently checks are available soon after birth, at 6-9 months, 18-24 months and again at preschool²² but there is limited formal contact between families and CaFHS in between, and the extent to which families access the checks varies.²³

The Commission notes the South Australian government is investing \$16.7m a year (indexed) from next year, to implement two new checks (12 months and three years) and ensure universal uptake of all checks. This will increase the opportunity to detect developmental delays and offer support to children and families.²⁴ At a population level, child development checks present an opportunity for governments to consider what this data can tell us over time about our early years system and how we can improve it.

At an individual level, child development checks can ensure a child receives the right support at the right time to facilitate their development. For example, a child might be referred to a speech pathologist and that extra support could ensure they are no longer developmentally vulnerable in language and communication at the time of school entry.

However, even with the addition of the new child development checks, the Commission believes there is much that needs to be done to truly build an early child development **system** and one key to doing so is building a comprehensive child development data set. In coming to this view, the Commission has relied on the expertise of Professor Katina D'Onise, a public health expert in Wellbeing SA about what it would take to build such a system.²⁵

Professor D'Onise has explained how such data systems are used in public health care. For example, in cancer care joined-up data systems function at three levels to improve care. In order to best treat a patient, data about that patient is shared between the clinicians, allied health professionals, nurses and others who are attending to that patient.

De-identified data, which withholds the names or other information of patients, is then gathered across the whole patient cohort meaning, for example, that health professionals and researchers can track whether the number of people who survive the cancer is increasing and what treatment and other changes have led to the improvement.

In addition, de-identified data is seen by clinicians, providing comparison rates so practitioners can have a feedback loop about their standards of care against a relevant benchmark, highlighting areas for improvement.

Professor D'Onise carefully explained how clear governance rules (including legislation where appropriate), developed in partnership with those with lived experience, covering elements such as systems design, secure storage, ease of use by those who compile and rely on the data, are all vital to making sure the system works as intended, protects privacy and does not lead to stigma.

The Commission has also heard evidence from Dr Rhiannon Pilkington, representing the BetterStart Child Health and Development Group at the University of Adelaide, about the high number of child protection notifications in South Australia, with one in three children notified by age ten. Dr Pilkington noted that while many of these notifications are unsubstantiated and do not require a child protection response, they do provide government with important information about developmental vulnerability.²⁶

Children with just one child protection notification before the age of five have a 150 per cent greater risk of developmental vulnerability than children with no notifications before the age of five. For children with three or more notifications, the risk of developmental vulnerability is more than doubled. Through years of research into the BEBOLD dataset, Dr Pilkington has suggested that de-identified incorporation of this notification data into linked data sets should be considered a public health data resource which can inform planning and delivery of early years services.

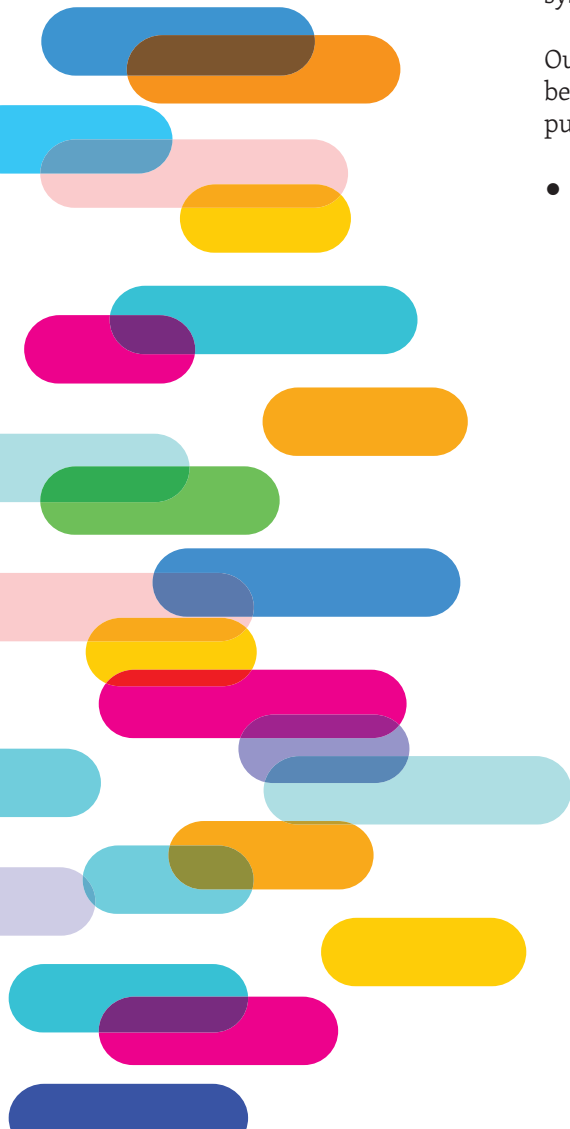
In line with our vision of South Australia having a system of early childhood education and care that best supports children and is always improving and leading, it is the view of the Commission that an integrated child development data set and system should be established by the South Australian government. This new system should build on the child development check service, with supporting infrastructure and governance to ensure secure and ethical use of the data for the benefit of South Australian children into the future. This, combined with other data sets such as those identified by Dr Pilkington, should form the basis for a new early child development system that learns as it grows.

Our view is that this system should be backed by legislation and the purposes could include:

- Allowing a child and the child's family to seamlessly navigate the early childhood education and care system receiving the supports needed at the right time. For example, if a child development check flagged an area of concern, the information would flow through to the child's preschool teacher so that their educational delivery was tailored in a way that best helped the child learn. Parental consent and understanding of identified data that is held and shared and why, would be pivotal.

- Making available de-identified data at a population level for service planning and evaluation and research.²⁷ For example, in a regional town, child development checks may show growth in the number of children showing significant development delays in a particular domain. With that information to hand, the local early childhood education and care services could work together with parents and the community to better support children.
- Enabling well designed research studies about what best works for children and their families.
- Enabling service providers to reflect on the standard and quality of their work and strive for improvement.

The Commission specifically notes and accepts the advice given to us that a data system like this will only work if it is used for improvement purposes and it is not an input to funding decisions or any form of punitive action. The Commission intends to keep building on these interim findings in our Final Report and we welcome further feedback.



Findings

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE EARLY YEARS

South Australia's children are in general doing well.

Children in families with a lower socio-economic status are much more likely to be developmentally vulnerable than their peers from families of a higher socio-economic status. However, there are developmentally vulnerable children in all socio-economic cohorts.

Experiences in the early years shape life trajectories.

The home environment, and in particular the nature of parent interactions²⁸ with a child are the primary determinant of a child's development in the early years.

The developmental richness of the home environment, and the quality of parent/caregiver interactions can be improved with assistance.

The collection of new comprehensive child development data based on the planned revitalisation of child checks is an opportunity to give insight into the development of children under five and will be discussed further in the Final Report.

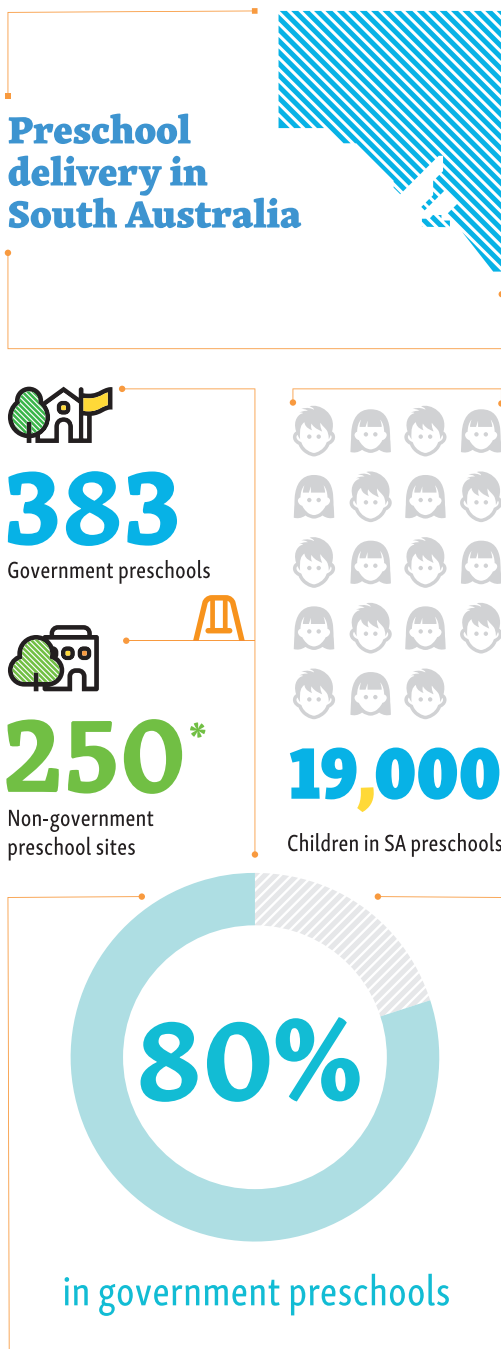


Figure 2: Preschool delivery in South Australia

*250 non-government preschool sites receive funding under the Preschool Reform Agreement to deliver preschool in the year before school

Source: Department for Education (2023)

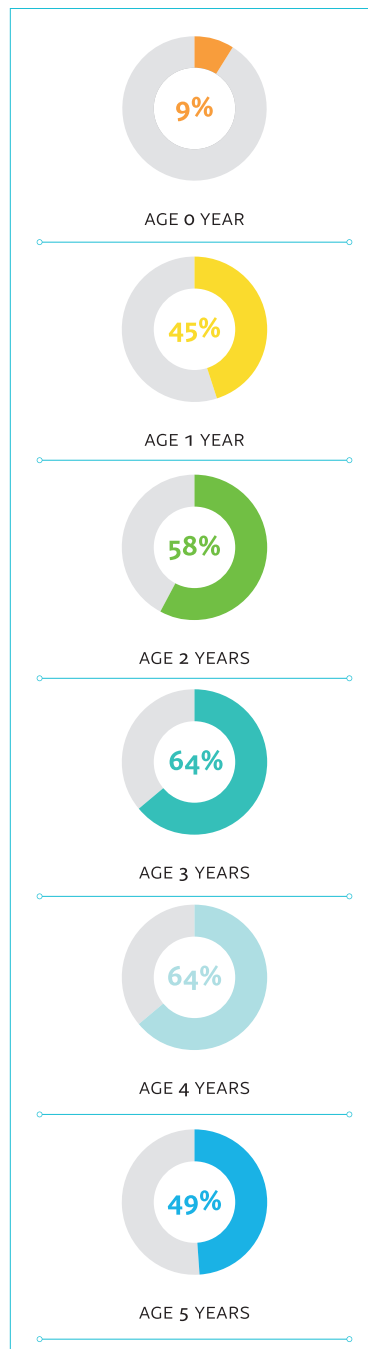


Figure 3: How many South Australian children attend long day care by age?

The proportion of South Australian children attending long day care in FY2022, by age

Source: Deloitte Access Economics (2023) *Mapping long day care and non-government preschool in South Australia*

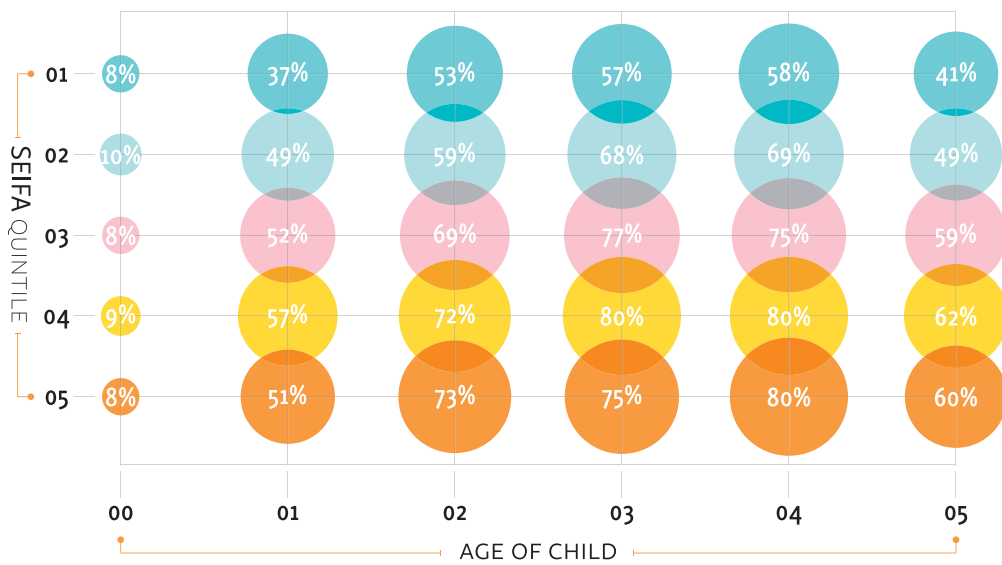


Figure 4: How many South Australian children attend long day care by age and by socio-economic status?

The proportion of South Australian children attending long day care in FY2022, by age and by Socio Economic Index for Areas (SEIFA) quintile

Source: unpublished Deloitte Access Economics analysis on behalf of the Royal Commission

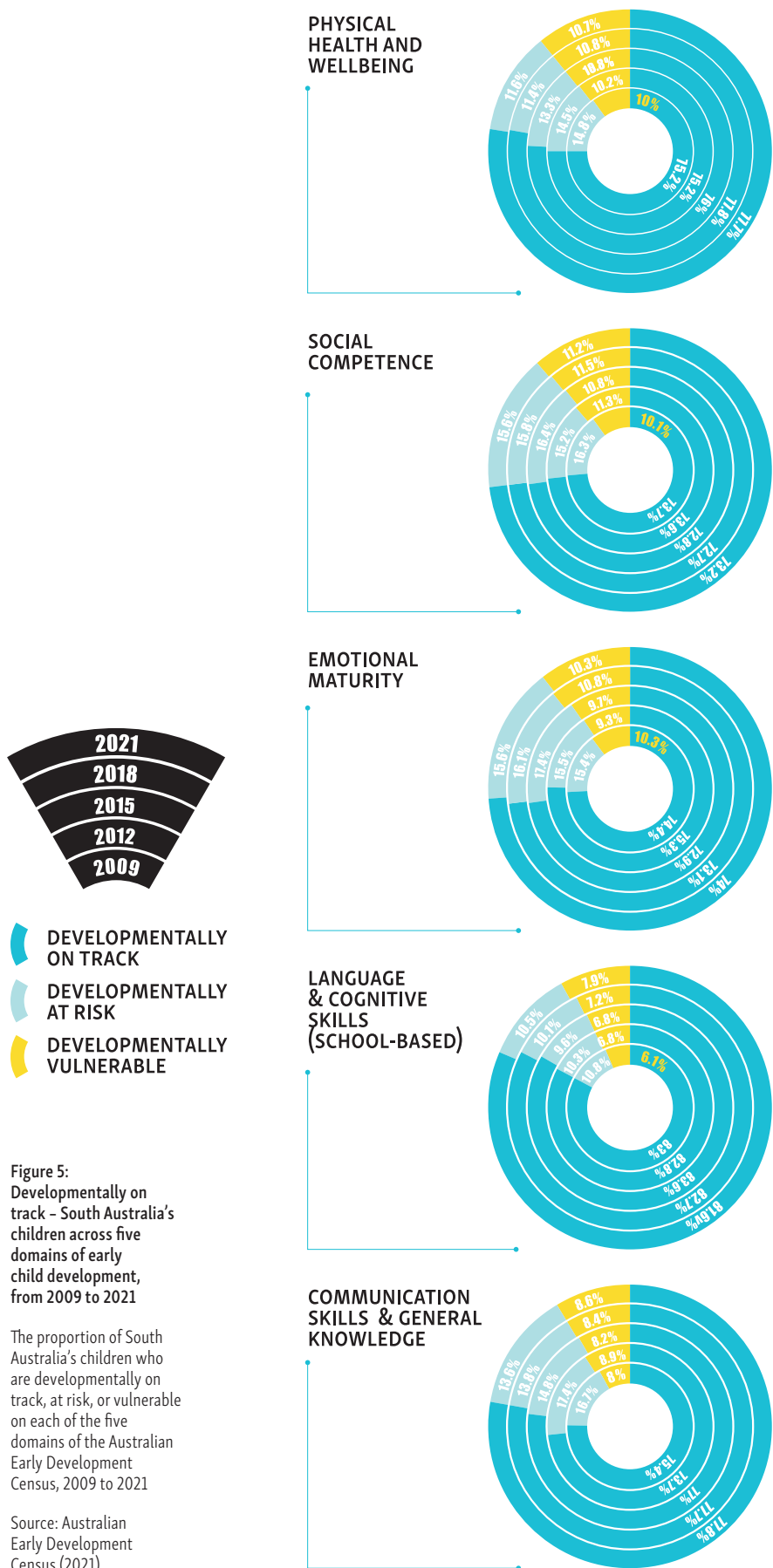
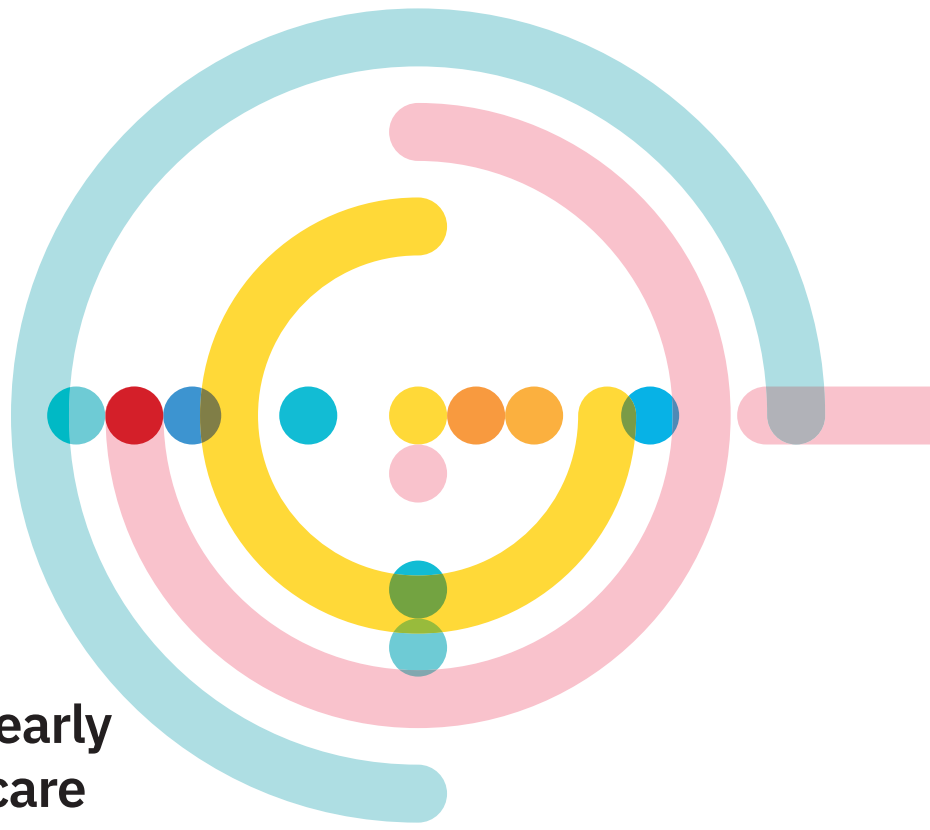


Figure 5:
Developmentally on track - South Australia's children across five domains of early child development, from 2009 to 2021

The proportion of South Australia's children who are developmentally on track, at risk, or vulnerable on each of the five domains of the Australian Early Development Census, 2009 to 2021

Source: Australian Early Development Census (2021)



The value and purpose of early childhood education and care

Early childhood education and care is not only important to child development and education, but critical to economic participation for families, particularly women.²⁹ The Grattan Institute has found that among Australian women in their 30s and 40s, part time work is the most common pattern of employment, and that child care – its cost, availability and quality are key barriers to working.³⁰

To understand the evidence behind the value of early childhood education and care, the Commission engaged the University of South Australia to undertake a literature review and an academic pulse survey to gauge the strength of current evidence. The resulting paper *Rapid review of the literature and results of an academic pulse survey to determine the evidence behind preschool for three-year-old children*³¹ is available on the Commission's [website](#), and the Commission thanks Professor Sally Brinkman and her colleagues at the University of South Australia for this important piece of work.

The academic literature suggests that high quality early childhood education and care benefits all children in terms of developmental outcomes and predispositions to learning and there are notable long lasting benefits for children from families living with disadvantage.³²

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) noted in its report *Starting Strong – key OECD indicators on early childhood education and care* that there are lifelong benefits both on cognitive and socio-emotional development, making a generational difference to life trajectories, increasing equity of learning outcomes and reducing poverty.³³ Regardless of target cohort, the literature is very clear that quality is important to ensuring positive impacts.³⁴

However, while this literature is illuminating and useful, there is much we do not know about the best ways of providing early childhood education and care. While some studies and policy experts do support two years of preschool, there is more work to do on understanding the benefits and impacts of universal preschool for three-year-old children on developmental and long-term outcomes for all children.³⁵ Indeed, it is in filling this knowledge gap that South Australia could play a leading role.

Even with the evidence in its current form, many countries are moving to expand preschool, either in targeted or universal ways.³⁶

Overall, the strongest evidence exists for positive impacts from early childhood education and care in the cognitive domains, for part-time programs of two to three years duration, noting that at-risk children may benefit from starting in a full-time program.³⁷

In the context of early childhood education and care being good for all children, and even better for disadvantaged children, Associate Professor Brigid Jordan informed the Commission of the benefits of an intensive early childhood education and care trial in Melbourne that targeted highly disadvantaged families.³⁸ Improvements were seen in IQ, language and social emotional development of participating children. This particular trial targeted very high needs children living with significant adversity, in a way that exceeds universal offerings. This ability of early childhood education and care to disrupt disadvantage is important to the Commission.



Research in the United Kingdom by Professor Siraj has found the importance of high-quality preschool for disadvantaged children where parents had lower education levels, and that risk factors including poverty can affect long term outcomes for children, but that high quality preschool can be a protective factor for disadvantaged children.³⁹

An example of a wider reaching and lower intensity support program that targets participation by children from vulnerable families is the Goodstart ‘Increasing Access and Participation Program’, which uses a specific Family and Community Engagement Worker to partner with agencies, engage in outreach with families and support transition into early learning.⁴⁰

To ensure the value of early childhood education and care for disadvantaged children is realised, it is vital that services are accessible. The Commission has heard about the importance of addressing barriers to early childhood education and care, particularly for families living in disadvantage. Barriers include unemployment, substance abuse, involvement with child protection and family violence, as well as place of residence (where there are limited services), social norms (and views around the role of mothers), cost of services and hours of operation.⁴¹ There is a discussion of evidence relating to how to overcome barriers later in this Report.

Professor Goldfeld has told the Commission that improving development outcomes for children requires combining (‘stacking’) multiple service types including, but not limited to, early childhood education and care, to increase effectiveness. Professor Goldfeld’s work in the *Restacking the Odds* project has focussed on five evidence-based platforms and programs to boost children’s health, development and wellbeing:⁴²

- Antenatal care
- Sustained nurse home visiting
- Early childhood education and care
- Parenting programs
- Early years of school (reception to year 3)

As noted in the submission of Thrive by Five,⁴³ currently in Australia, there is no **universal backbone** that holds these services together, making it easy for every family to know where and how to access them. The Commission addresses how to build this backbone later in this Interim Report.

To better understand the early childhood education and care sector in South Australia, and the intersections across the sector, the Royal Commission engaged Deloitte Access Economics to bring together a range of datasets, and gather new data via a sector survey on the long day care and non-government preschool sector in early 2023 (published on the Royal Commission’s [website](#)).

One of the findings of that analysis is that long day care, and the early childhood education and care sector more generally, may provide more of a universal backbone for families with children under preschool age than is usually understood to exist by policy makers. With nearly two thirds of children in long day care by age three, and with most long day care centres facilitating access to a range of non-education and care services, including parenting programs and health and development services, it is clear that the early childhood education and care sector is playing a significant and unrecognised role in the early years.

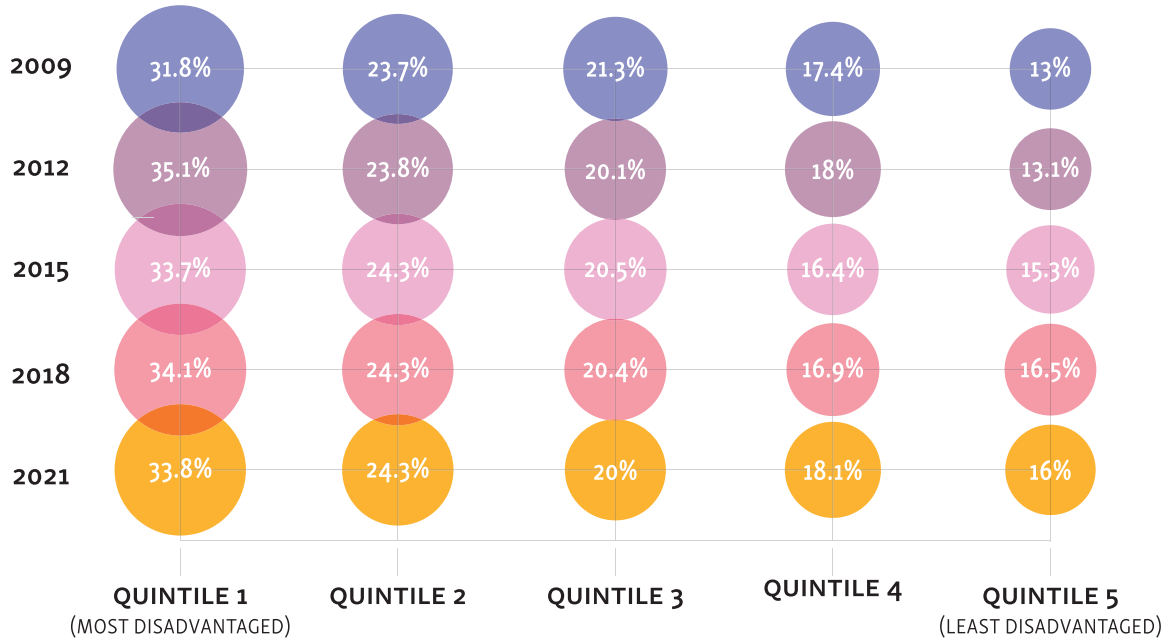


Figure 6: The impact of disadvantage on the development of South Australian children, from 2009 to 2021

The proportion of South Australian children who are developmentally vulnerable on one or more domains of the Australian Early Development Census, by Socio Economic Index for Areas (SEIFA) quintile, 2009 to 2021

Source: Australian Early Development Census (2021)

Findings

THE VALUE AND PURPOSE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

Preschool, and early childhood education and care more broadly, make an important contribution to healthy child development.

It is one of five key elements of a successful early childhood development system, which includes: prenatal care/maternal and child health (including home visiting); paid parental leave; parenting supports; early childhood education and care; and wrap around services to support families with greater needs.

All children benefit from participating in two years of high quality early childhood education and care in the years before school on a part time basis.

Vulnerable children benefit more from two years of high quality early childhood education and care in the years before school and are likely to benefit from attending more hours.

Children with one risk factor are less likely to access early childhood education and care. Risk factors have a cumulative impact on early childhood education and care access; the more risk factors, the less likely a child is to access early childhood education and care.

To ensure universal uptake, active efforts are required to remove barriers to access to early childhood education and care for vulnerable children.

Preschool, and early childhood education and care more broadly, play an important role in supporting families as the first formal teachers and educators of their children.

Currently, families receive information and support from State Government for their child's development at birth (through maternal and child health systems) and at age four (when children attend preschool). In between birth and aged four, many families access long day care, but from the perspective of the State and Commonwealth governments, there is no universal inter-connected system that facilitates families accessing the right opportunities at the right time to support healthy child development.

South Australia's preschool system

South Australia has long valued early childhood education and care for children in the years before school.⁴⁴

All South Australian children are eligible to access 600 hours of preschool in the year before full-time school (generally at age four). Aboriginal children or children under guardianship are able to access an additional entitlement of 12 hours per week from the age of three years.⁴⁵

Most children receive their entitlement through a government preschool (may be a standalone preschool, on a school site, or as part of a Children's Centre), or, less commonly, through a long day care provider (may also be known as an Early Learning Centre) that provides a preschool program. While it is not compulsory, around 90 per cent of South Australian children enrol in preschool,⁴⁶ and of those, the majority (historically around 80 per cent) attend a government service.⁴⁷

Regardless of setting, preschool for children in the year before school is currently defined as being 'delivered by a degree qualified early childhood teacher'.⁴⁸ The Commission has heard evidence from both government and non-government preschool settings that delivery of a preschool program by an early childhood teacher to mixed groups comprising three and four-year-old children is already happening to varying degrees.⁴⁹

Of the 383 government preschools, 170 operate 'full time', which is where there are two groups of children attending across five days per week, others operate only part time with one group of children attending.⁵⁰ The sessional hours of government preschool tend to be offered as either two days one week and three days in the second week, two and a half days each week, or less commonly, as two longer days per week.

The Commission notes a meaningful decline in government preschool enrolments as a proportion of the total year before school population over the last five years, falling from a high of 81.3 per cent in 2018 to 75.7 per cent in 2021.⁵¹

This may be in part due to the hours being hard for working families. School hours can also present challenges for

Year	Enrolments in government preschools of children in the year before full time schooling	Estimated population of children in the year before full time schooling	
2017	16,462	20,966	78.5%
2018	16,530	20,323	81.3%
2019	15,814	20,178	78.4%
2020	15,420	20,671	74.6%
2021	14,530	19,192	75.7%

Figure 7 : Decline in enrolments in government preschool

Source: Internal Royal Commission analysis, using Report on Government Services (ROGS) (2023) Table 3A.17 'Children enrolled in a preschool program in the state-specific year before full time schooling, by sector';

SA Department for Education (2022).

working families given the school day is shorter than common working day lengths. However, at school, it is possible for families to access before and after school care through the Out of School Hours Care (OSHC) program. There is no generally available OSHC equivalent in government preschools, although the Department for Education advises 2021 data shows 82 government preschools are located near a service that may provide care before and after their preschool session. However data on use of those services by preschool children is not collected.⁵²

Non-government long day care providers tend to assert that their longer hours of operation, along with quality programming (including the delivery of preschool by a degree-qualified teacher), are supporting the shift to these settings for preschool.⁵³

For those children accessing preschool in a long day care setting, the South Australian Department for Education provides additional funding to services as part of universal access arrangements (now called the Preschool Reform Agreement). In 2023, almost half (221) of long day care services were funded to offer preschool to eligible four-year-olds.⁵⁴ The data also shows there are 32 non-government preschools in operation,

mostly associated with independent or Catholic schools, supporting around 1100 children.⁵⁵ Universal access funding ensures a qualified early childhood teacher is delivering the program regardless of setting.

Feedback from community members in the Commission's YourSAy survey (Appendix 3) around choice of preschool suggests that the lack of OSHC was a key factor in family decision making, along with session days and times, service location, ability to support school transition and educational approach.

Concerningly, there is an absence of authoritative data to confirm the exact proportion of South Australian children enrolling in preschool and other forms of early education in the year before school.

The South Australian Department for Education is able to identify all children in a State Government funded preschool and in the 250 long day care services and non-government preschools that have Preschool Reform Agreement funding.⁵⁶

However, the South Australian Government does not have access to Commonwealth-held Child Care Subsidy data which identifies the children that are accessing early childhood education and care in all other long day care (231) or family day care services.

So despite South Australia having access to one of the most comprehensive, linked data architectures in the nation, the South Australian Government is not able to identify, among other things, the demographic characteristics, location and connection to other services of children who are not enrolled in preschool in the year before school, and is therefore unable to target active enrolment efforts.⁵⁷

The Commission also notes that there are gaps in data on attendance at preschool. These gaps are also a priority of the current Preschool Reform Agreement, which requires development of new enrolment and attendance measures.⁵⁸

The non-government sector mapping delivered for the Commission reports that children in long day care attended on average 19.6 hours per week in early 2023,⁵⁹ although how many of those hours were spent with a degree-qualified teacher is unclear.

Data from the South Australian Department for Education on attendance at government preschools in the year before school in 2021 indicates that on average, children in South Australia attended 13.2 hours per week of preschool, against the entitlement of 15 hours per week. This varied across local government areas, ranging from 11.3 hours per week in outback SA up to 14.1 hours per week in the Campbelltown local government area.⁶⁰

The Commission supports the work underway to improve data collection and our ability to measure attendance in order to better understand the impact on outcomes, and also at a site level to ensure services are supported in engaging families where children are regularly failing to attend. Such data would be one input to the integrated data system discussed above.



Findings

SOUTH AUSTRALIA'S PRESCHOOL SYSTEM

Most South Australian four-year-old children receive their preschool entitlement through a Department for Education run preschool.

Some South Australian four-year-olds receive their preschool entitlement at a long day care centre (sometimes attached to a non-government school, sometimes called an Early Learning Centre).

67 per cent of Aboriginal children access a government preschool at age three.

Usually (but not always) long day care will be accessing government funding under the Universal Access National Partnership / Preschool Reform Agreement. This funding ensures the preschool program is delivered by a four-year qualified early childhood teacher.

There is a lack of authoritative data to confirm the exact proportions of children enrolled in preschool and/or early childhood education and care in the year before school.

The data shortfalls make it hard to identify areas where children are not enrolled for the purpose of targeting families for active engagement.

There is a lack of quality data about how many hours of preschool children attend, although what data there is suggests that many children do not attend for their full 15-hour entitlement a week.

Many families choose to enrol their four-year-olds in both a long day care and a government preschool. This demonstrates that there are families who value Department for Education services over and above long day care.

The proportion of children enrolled in Department for Education preschools has been declining significantly over the past five years, falling from a high of 81.3 per cent in 2018 to 75.7 per cent in 2021.

The distinction between long day care and preschool is increasingly blurred. This is a result of factors such as: increasing quality requirements in long day care, the growth in self-identified Early Learning Centres (long day care sometimes attached to non-government schools with an educational emphasis and often greater use of teachers), and government efforts to increase uptake of preschool by making preschool programs available in more long day care services.



South Australia's long day care system

Long day care is a significant part of the early years system, supporting more than 58,000 South Australian children and their families each year.⁶¹

The [Deloitte sector mapping](#) has painted a rich picture of South Australia's long day care sector across service types, sizes and locations; telling us about the children they teach and care for, the services they run, the way they connect to communities and about the workforce who invest so much of their time and care into our children.


The Commission extends particular thanks to the 69 per cent of long day care and non-government preschool providers who took the time to respond to the survey. The data and insights provided are of ongoing value to the work of the Commission.

When asked about the learning in which these children engage, 45 per cent of services reported that their three-year-old children are already in a program that meets the current definition of preschool (that is, the program is being delivered by a qualified early childhood teacher). This is interesting to the Commission when thinking about what preschool for three-year-old children might look like in the future.

Almost 80 per cent of long day care services are in metropolitan Adelaide, and one third of all services in the State are run by seven providers in South Australia. Small providers run 60 per cent (n=267) of services, and 39 per cent of those are not-for-profit.

The sector mapping also found that:

- 53 per cent of all providers are private for-profit, compared with a national average of 69 per cent
- there is a reasonably high use of casual and temporary staff by providers of all types and sizes, particularly in the city, with almost 40 per cent of metropolitan services reporting they use this staffing type
- not-for-profit services have lower average hourly fees and pay above award wages much more commonly than for profit services, with only 24 per cent of the not-for-profit workforce on award wages, while 74 per cent of the private for profit workforce are on award wages
- 43 per cent of services are standalone (a mix of for profit and not-for-profit), and these services have lower average hourly fees, and higher rates of pay significantly above award wages, compared with services run by providers who have multiples sites.



The Commission notes data that told us about workforce retention and found that standalone providers are most likely to have staff with more than 15 years experience in the sector, which speaks to the importance of connection between families and staff. Of those services with staff of shorter tenures, many were new and still establishing their workforce. While new services are important to improve access, it does take time to establish community connections and quality in workforce, and this is an important factor for policy makers to consider.

The Commission notes that of the 64 per cent of four-year-old children enrolled in a long day care setting, around 60 per cent also attend a government preschool.⁶² Analysis of Child Care Subsidy data shows that long day care services reporting a high degree of overlap with government preschool (those with more than 80 per cent of four-year-olds attend government preschool in addition to their long day care enrolment) have a similar level of average hours purchased compared to those with a low degree

of overlap with government preschool (those with fewer than 20 per cent of four-year-olds attend a government preschool in addition to their long day care enrolment). This suggests that many children attending government preschool do so ‘on top’ of their long day care enrolment, rather than ‘instead of’.

As noted by Professor Carla Rinaldi in her *Thinkers in Residence* report, this leads to a situation where children experience a greater number of transitions in their daily lives than is common in other jurisdictions.⁶³ (Although it is worth noting that analysis of the Child Care Subsidy data also shows that the vast majority of children only attend one long day care service, with only 2-3 per cent of all children accessing more than one long day care in a given month). A number of submissions received by the Royal Commission noted the importance of reducing the number of transitions children experience each week.⁶⁴

Findings

SOUTH AUSTRALIA'S LONG DAY CARE SYSTEM

South Australia's long day care system is diverse and provides a range of differentiated offerings for local communities.

There are some meaningful distinctions between for-profit and not-for-profit operators, particularly in relation to workforce conditions and tenure. On other metrics, the distinction between large and small providers is more meaningful.

One consequence of the provision of government preschool in South Australia is that a large number of South Australian children have a number of transitions between different settings in their daily lives in the year before school.





The Commonwealth's impact on South Australian early childhood education and care

The Commission is closely following reforms to early childhood education and care policy at the national level. The National Quality Framework sets out the national approach to regulation, assessment and quality improvement for early childhood education and care and out-of-school-hours care across Australia (including national legislation, the National Quality Standard and the Early Years Learning Framework) and has been noted by many stakeholders as an important piece of supporting architecture for early childhood education and care in Australia.

This report has already noted the changes to family assistance legislation to commence in July 2023 that will increase the Child Care Subsidy and change the activity tests for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. It is the view of the Commission, informed by our Expert Advisory Group, along with many of those who made submissions and took part in roundtables, that removing the remaining activity test is a strong lever that can support greater engagement in early childhood education and care by disadvantaged children.

Put simply, it is the most disadvantaged children from non-working households who tend to be excluded from access to sufficient hours for preschool because parents do not meet the requirements of the activity test, which is based on parental work or study.

While supporting the principles of affordability and accessibility, in the Commission's stakeholder roundtables the sector has acknowledged that the increased demand that will follow from more affordable child care will be a challenge for the capacity and workforce shortages already being experienced across the sector both in South Australia and nationally.

The Commission will consider workforce supply over coming months, including how to ensure sufficient supply to provide for the implementation of three-year-old preschool.

The current Preschool Reform Agreement commits to four years funding to support universal access to preschool in the year before school across Australia.

It also commits jurisdictions to participating in a reform agenda around outcomes measurement and improvements in collection and quality of participation data.⁶⁵

The Commission is interested in the idea that outcomes measurements for preschool programs can be an indicator of quality. They could also provide important data for a system that strives to always be improving and learning.

The Commission also notes the Closing the Gap targets to increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children enrolled in preschool in the year before school to 95 per cent by 2025, and the South Australian efforts outlined in the State Implementation Plan to meet this target.⁶⁶

Alongside these important initiatives, the Productivity Commission's inquiry into the early childhood education and care sector commenced on 1 March 2023 to look at options that improve or support:⁶⁷

- affordability and access,
- developmental and educational outcomes for children,
- economic growth, including workforce participation,
- outcomes for children and families experiencing vulnerability and/or disadvantage,
- efficiency and effectiveness of government investment in the sector.

The Commission notes the outcomes of our inquiry will be considered by the Productivity Commission in terms of the potential interaction of findings, along with reforms underway in other states including New South Wales and Victoria.

This work is occurring in parallel with the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) inquiry into the child care market, which again will impact the sector in South Australia with regard to price settings, viability, quality and profits.⁶⁸

Finally, the Commission notes that while some jurisdictions are proceeding with implementing universal access to two years of preschool (from age three), and this report focuses specifically on three-year-old preschool as a reform for South Australia from 2026, the current universal funding arrangements for preschool are limited to four-year-old preschool.



Findings

THE COMMONWEALTH'S IMPACT ON SOUTH AUSTRALIAN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

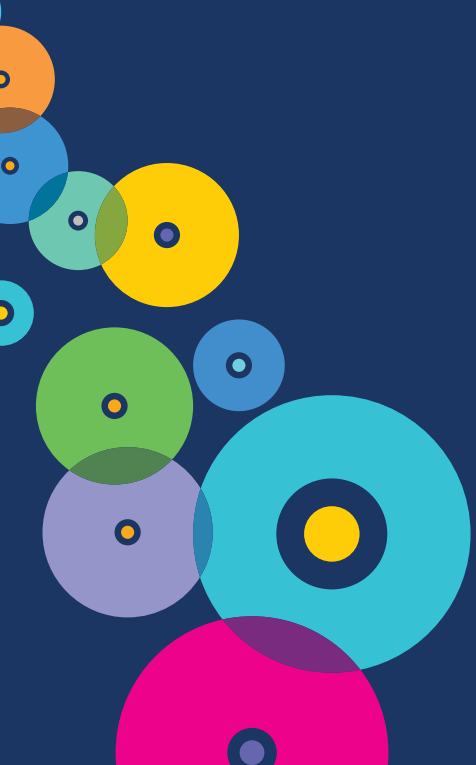
Changes in Commonwealth policy coming into effect in 2023 will make access to early childhood education and care cheaper (by increasing the Child Care Subsidy) and more widely available (by changing the activity test for eligibility for Child Care Subsidy for Aboriginal children).

This will increase the number of South Australian children attending early childhood education and care and the number of hours they attend.

The Productivity Commission is likely to recommend further changes that will again increase the number of children attending early childhood education and care and the hours they attend.

With more families using long day care, and long day care becoming as cheap as preschool for some families, the decision-making for those families for whom convenience and cost is the determining factor in enrolling in a government preschool will change.

Irrespective of the implementation model chosen for three-year-old preschool, it is likely that in the future, as a result of changes to the Child Care Subsidy, more families will choose centre-based preschool in long day care centres for their four-year old preschool program.



Comparing South Australia's early childhood education and care system to other states

Early childhood education and care has evolved over South Australia's history under different discourses; over time, views about universal rights to early childhood education, the role of women, child development and economic investment in the nation's future, have all influenced early childhood policy settings.⁶⁹

Today in South Australia, children and families have access to a range of early childhood education and care settings, though choice in some parts of South Australia is more limited.⁷⁰ The issue of accessibility and 'child care deserts' will be the subject of a public hearing in April 2023 and will be considered in detail in the Commission's Final Report.

South Australia has had in place near universal provision of preschool for much longer than many other jurisdictions. In 2008, when the first Universal Access National Partnership was signed, enrolment rates were 12 per cent nationally. In South Australia, that rate was 87 per cent.⁷¹

South Australia also has a history of provision for three-year-old preschool for Aboriginal children and children in care that predates moves by other jurisdictions in this area.

South Australia's distinct history is reflected in the different make up of its early childhood education and care settings.

As previously noted, about half of long day care centres in South Australia offer preschool that is funded under the Preschool Reform Agreement (formerly Universal Access National Partnership).⁷² However, in the year before school, South Australia's system differs markedly to states like New South Wales and Victoria, where most children access preschool in long day care settings or non-government or local council provided sessional kindergartens, as opposed to South Australia's significant government preschool program.⁷³

In fact, for almost half of long day care centres in South Australia, 60 per cent or more of their four-year-old children also attend government preschool, and where a long day care centre offers preschool, 45 per cent of families attending that site will choose government preschool for their child.⁷⁴

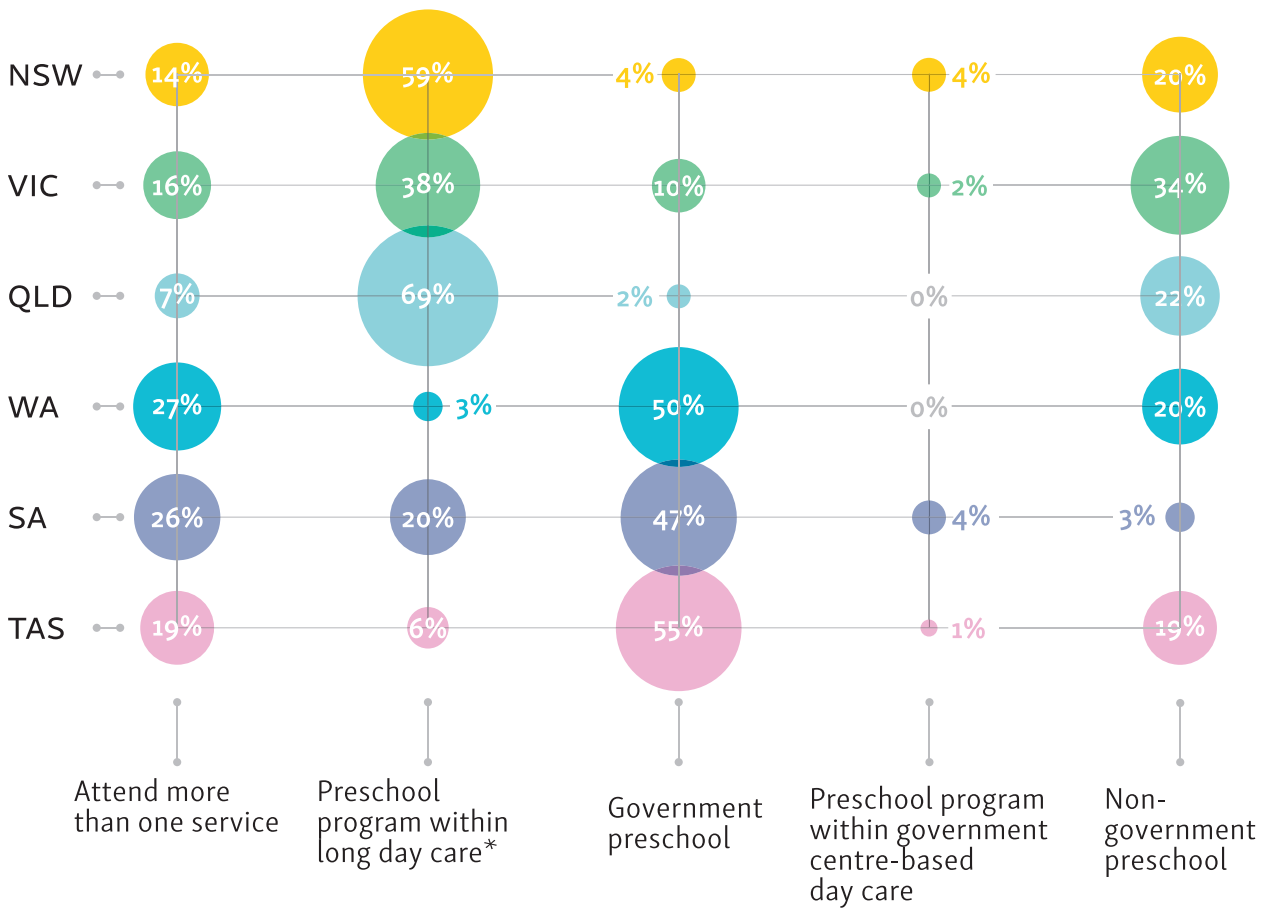
Figure 8, adopted from the 2020 review of the Universal Access National Partnership prepared for the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Education Council clearly shows the difference in dominant preschool provider type across Australian states and territories.⁷⁵

Figure 8: How different states deliver preschool

The proportion of children in the year before full-time school attending preschool, by setting

* Non-government centre-based day care

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2022) Preschool Education



In the context of three-year-old preschool, this is interesting to the Commission, as 64 per cent of three-year-old children are already in long day care in South Australia⁷⁶ and families' preferences about preschool for their three-year-olds are not clear.

One of the major shifts in the national early childhood landscape has been the 2022 New South Wales and Victorian commitments to offer universal 'pre-prep' (Victoria) or 'pre-kindergarten' (NSW) along with three-year-old preschool.⁷⁷ Billed as a workforce participation commitment, the agenda includes common elements of:⁷⁸

- 30 hours / 5 days a week of early learning in the year before school, and 15 hours a week for three-year-olds, with the year before school reconceptualised as more akin to a school year (hence 'pre-prep'),
- very low fee or fee free offerings to families,
- state governments stepping in to play a more active role in supply and demand, including trialling new models and direct service delivery in known child care deserts.

Both states have begun rolling out their significant investment in infrastructure, workforce development and policy reform. Universal pre-kindergarten pilots are starting in New South Wales from July 2023, and three-year-old preschool has started to rollout in Victoria.

It is notable that in some ways, the South Australian Government has taken steps towards offering a full-time program in the year before school with the reintroduction of mid-year entry to full time schooling. From 2024, children born between 1 May and 31 October, will be eligible for six terms of reception rather than the usual four.

This school-based provision of full-time learning has some similarities to the format of the New South Wales reform, which has a focus on increasing on-school-site provision of universal, full-time education in the year before school, with the explicit intention of making life easier for working families.

Findings

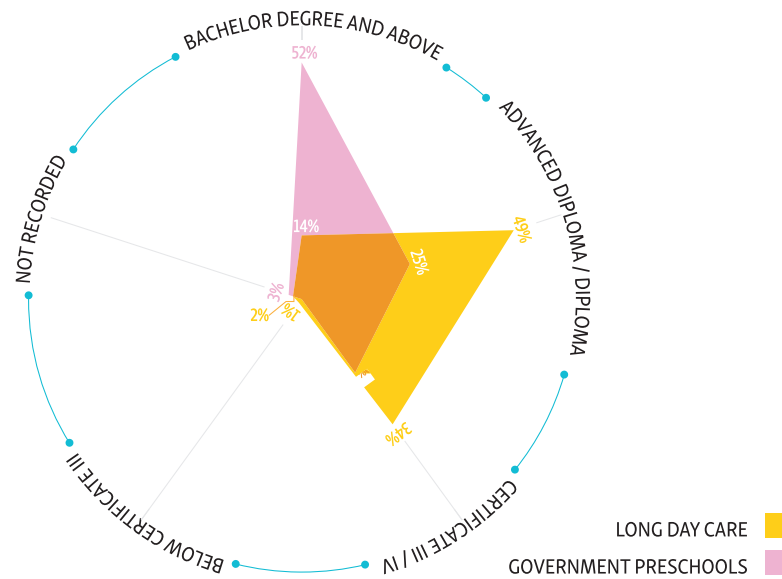
COMPARING SOUTH AUSTRALIA'S EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE SYSTEM TO OTHER STATES

Differences in the structure and composition of South Australia's early childhood education and care system mean that while lessons can be learned from the experience of other jurisdictions such as New South Wales and Victoria in implementing three-year-old preschool, their change models cannot simply be replicated in South Australia.

Figure 9: The qualifications of South Australia's early childhood education and care workforce in two different settings

* Centre-based day care

Source: unpublished Deloitte Access Economics analysis on behalf of the Royal Commission



Additional supports for children and their families in the current early childhood education and care system

The value of early childhood education and care as an intervention mechanism to disrupt disadvantage and identify developmental vulnerabilities is clear.⁷⁹ However, the Commission has heard from families and services that the opportunity to provide support for children experiencing disability or developmental delay in early childhood education and care is challenging.⁸⁰

There is a clear distinction in the supports available to children in the government preschool system versus children receiving their preschool in long day care centres.

In relation to workforce, government preschools in lower socio-economic areas are funded to have a lower teacher : child ratio (1:10) than provided for by the National Quality Framework (1:11). Further, as a result of the leadership and staffing structure, the government preschool workforce is much more highly qualified than the long day care workforce.

When it comes to additional supports, government preschools have access to departmental support that can help preschools understand the needs of children, as well as directly deliver support services.⁸¹ In addition, preschools have access to the Inclusive Education Support Program (IESP) and to allied health and specialist educational services through Student Support Services (SSS), while the system operates Inclusive Preschool Programs along with specialised preschools such as The Briars.⁸²

The State Government also operates 47 Children's Centres, which were established in South Australia in 2005 and were recommended to continue as an ongoing investment in early childhood by Dr Fraser Mustard as part of his Thinker in Residence work in 2007.⁸³ Children's Centres have a range of family and allied health supports available at different levels across different centres. Some will run playgroups, parenting support programs or provide referrals to supports where there is a need.⁸⁴ (There will be additional discussion of the role of Children's Centres, and other integrated service models, in the Final Report.)

The Commission has heard from Ms Catherine Cavouras, Director at Taikurrendi Children's Centre in southern Adelaide about the crucial role the Centre plays in engaging community, connecting children to their community, and supporting parents and families who are experiencing vulnerability or disengagement.⁸⁵



THE BRIARS PRESCHOOL

The Commission has heard evidence from Mr Gordon Combes, Director at The Briars Preschool, a specialist preschool for children with disability located in metropolitan Adelaide, which supports families from across South Australia.⁸⁶

The Briars plays a unique role in South Australia's early childhood education and care system. It supports around 40 enrolled children and their families with specialist education and care, provides short term support for other families with children who have significant additional needs, while also performing outreach and capability building supports to other preschools.

Many of the educators at The Briars are highly qualified in special education, but also possess skills to support the care needs of those children (for example, to support safe movement, eating and drinking). Mr Combes described to the Commission the importance of vocation at The Briars. People work there because they are skilled, experienced and passionate about their roles. Staff ratios are higher than in other preschool settings at two educators for every six children.

Mr Combes also showed the Commission a short video of the physical space at The Briars, and children engaging in learning and relationship building. The Commission extends its thanks to Mr Combes for talking to us about the important work done by his team at The Briars supporting children with disability and their families.

In non-government settings, there are fewer mechanisms that support inclusion. It is predominately the Inclusion Support Program (ISP) funded by the Commonwealth, which has been established to support children with additional needs to participate in early childhood education and care.⁸⁷ In South Australia, Gowrie SA is a funded Inclusion Agency under the ISP, that works with other early childhood education and care services to build capacity and capability, to embed inclusive practice, and address barriers to inclusion that children and families may experience.⁸⁸

Families have told the Commission that finding an ‘inclusion aware’ early childhood service is hard and takes time. Families of children with disability have received responses from services providers such as: “sorry we are not equipped for your child” and “we are unaware of the paperwork involved in getting supports or funding to support your child”.⁸⁹

However, when they do find the right service for their child, the benefits for all children at the service, educators and the child with disability are significant. Families told the Commission of their deep appreciation of services that are ‘inclusion aware’ and who value diversity among the children with whom they engage.⁹⁰

In addition to programs funded and administered by the State or Commonwealth government, the Commission has uncovered enlightening and surprising evidence about the unfunded work that is done by early childhood education and care providers across the government and non-government sectors. Many providers assist children and families to access supports and services that are outside the usual understanding of what education and care might encompass.

In 2021, for example, the State Department for Education undertook a mapping exercise in relation to the range of universal and targeted programs government preschools offer in addition to preschool.⁹¹

This exercise found that most government preschools offered between one and four additional services or activities per year, with most targeted at children or their families. Services include speech pathology, health and parenting support, and playgroups.

Many of the programs offered in government preschools were funded partly through the preschool’s Resource Entitlement Statement, while 25 per cent of sites accessed parent fees (service-wide or program) specifically as a source of revenue for support programs.⁹²

Similarly, the sector mapping of non-government early childhood services identified an unexpected number and breadth of supports offered by long day care providers to

their children and families. These are offered directly by services, or more commonly are facilitated through third party providers. The report suggests that almost all services identify needs and offer direct supports or referrals where they can, with an average of 8.3 additional activities reported to be offered either directly or through a third party in 2023.⁹³

While this is encouraging, there is more room to improve data in this area and understand the level and type of supports and the effectiveness of referrals, noting stakeholders have told the Commission about extensive waiting lists or the high cost of private supports.

The Commission has heard, in particular, that the support needed for the most vulnerable families comes in the form of ‘the glue’ that teachers or directors provide in connecting families and children to what they need.⁹⁴ It is this ‘glue’ that is often unfunded, with warm referrals, community outreach and time spent with families being hard to define under funding guidelines for support programs.

The Commission acknowledges the often unfunded and unnoticed work that early childhood educators and services are doing to engage those difficult to reach and vulnerable families, working to ensure equity of access to—and outcomes from—early childhood services.

Findings

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS FOR CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES IN THE CURRENT EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE SYSTEM

Department for Education preschools have access to a range of supports including allied health professional support and targeted funding for interventions and adjustments for students with a disability.

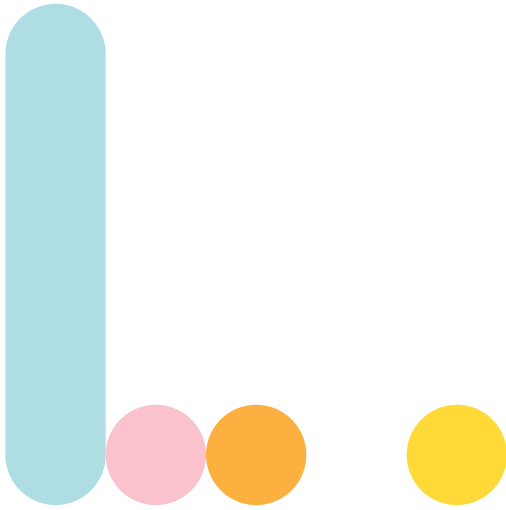
Around 15 per cent of children in Department for Education preschools receive allied health services from Student Support Services.

In addition, \$12 million is provided to government preschools for additional supports for children with a disability each year. This equates to an average of \$800 per child enrolled.

Long day care and non-government preschool providers have more limited access to additional supports.

Most Department for Education preschools, non-government preschools and centre-based preschools in long day care centres provide support for families to connect to non-education and care programs and services including supports to parents, health and development supports, and connection to community.

According to respondents of the long day care and non-government preschool sector survey, 72 per cent of long day care providers offer access to NDIS services (either directly or by facilitating access on site), while a similar proportion of providers offer access to allied health services. These will be further discussed in the Commission's Final Report.



Summary of findings from Part one

In response to its call for submissions, the Commission has heard from a wide range of experts, organisations and South Australians about the purpose of three-year-old preschool.

These submissions were striking in their near unanimity that the design and implementation of universal three-year-old preschool should be driven by the interests of children, and that questions of workforce participation should be a subsidiary consideration.

In the face of this overarching level of agreement, there was an interesting diversity of views about whether the primary purpose of three-year-old preschool is to support every South Australian child's healthy development, or to redress disadvantage.

This reflects the evidence received that disadvantaged children benefit more from high quality early childhood education and care.

However, it is also true that *all* children need support to grow and thrive. The Commission has heard evidence that developmental vulnerability is growing fastest in higher socio-economic areas in South Australia.⁹⁵ Further, all children have a right to grow and learn.

Ultimately, the Commission takes a position described as 'progressive universalism'. The universal system exists to support every child's healthy development – but it should provide progressively more support where it is needed to redress stubborn patterns of disadvantage.

In coming to a conclusion about key elements of the design of three-year-old preschool, the Commission has been encouraged by experts and stakeholders to identify guiding principles.

Conversations with the Commission's Expert Advisory Group, as well as consistent themes in the three-year-old preschool and first 1000 days roundtables, have been particularly influential in informing the Commission's views on the principles that should underlie the design of three-year-old preschool.

A number of submissions, for example those of Educators SA and Thrive by Five, drew together the collective voice and wisdom of practitioners in South Australian early childhood education and care to reflect what works. These are apparent in principles (a) to (d) outlined below, which capture a consensus about what a good preschool system does.

Other submissions encouraged the Commission to seize the sense of opportunity that comes with the South Australian Government's bold commitment to invest in a new universal entitlement for our three-year-olds.

This call to vision and ambition is reflected in principles (e), (f) and (g), which provide impetus to use this opportunity to reimagine a future system that moves past the stalemates and fragmentation of the current system, and builds toward a truly universal child development system.

Recommendation 1

That the purpose of providing universal three-year old preschool is to support every South Australian child's healthy early development and learning, so that they can thrive, now and in the future.

An effective system of universal three-year-old preschool will also redress the disadvantage experienced by too many South Australian children.

How the system is designed and delivered will also influence the choices made by families about whether to access the system for their child and their own workforce participation.

While important, support for workforce participation should be a focus of the broader early childhood education and care system (not simply preschool), as well as the provision of Out of School Hours Care. This will be discussed further in the Final Report.

Recommendation 2

That the following principles underpin the design and rollout of universal three-year-old preschool.

- a. The offering should be universal, but not necessarily uniform, and that the offering reflects the different needs of different communities and families,
- b. Active steps should be taken to ensure full participation of all children in three-year-old preschool,
- c. Three-year-old preschool should support equity for children and families, providing additional supports as required to reduce disparity in outcomes,
- d. The system should support families to be able to access a diversity of offerings dependent on their needs and interests,
- e. The system should allow for continuous learning and adaptation, building in mechanisms such as data collection, community input and support for growth and learning at every level of the system,
- f. While stewardship of the early childhood education and care system is shared with the Commonwealth (as the predominant funder), the State Government should be clear about the characteristics of the early childhood education and care system it wants to operate in South Australia and make decisions that support it,
- g. The State Government should embrace the role that early childhood education and care can play as a 'backbone' universal infrastructure for early child development.



A FIRST LEARNING OPPORTUNITY

The opportunity to build an early childhood development system that can learn and evolve does not need to wait until the roll out of three-year-old preschool from 2026.

The Commission has engaged in conversations with leading researchers Prof Ragan Petrie, Prof Marco Castillo, Prof Sally Brinkman, Prof John Lynch and Dr Rhiannon Pilkington to imagine trial designs that could be undertaken next year.

The question of what works to enrol under-served and highly vulnerable three-year-olds in early childhood education and care, and the impact on outcomes for these children, is one that could be the subject of early rigorous trial and research.

The Commission has received evidence about the Goodstart model for enrolling vulnerable children. As a not-for-profit social enterprise, Goodstart employs Family and Community Engagement Workers (FCEWs) in South Australia to take referrals of children at risk, and families doing it tough, and do the administrative leg work of connecting families to the Child Care Subsidy and building a trusting relationship to foster a family's engagement in the process of enrolment.

If the child is eligible, they also support the collection of evidence and application processes to access the Additional Child Care Subsidy (enabling up to five days of fee free access to centre based early learning with no activity test). FCEWs support families

to enrol in Goodstart centres and aim to ensure teachers and educators are well equipped to support children and families, including through understanding the foundations of trauma informed practice and ensuring individual children have customised orientation plans that meet their unique needs. They also work to embed regular attendance patterns and provide ongoing support to secure ongoing access to the Additional Child Care Subsidy or other services where appropriate. This focused approach is delivering results with strong retention of children experiencing vulnerability.

Goodstart and BetterStart researchers at the University of Adelaide have also developed a unique partnership to develop an enhanced longitudinal research dataset to investigate the impact of quality early learning on a range social, health, development, and education outcomes. As part of this well-established world-class research project, Goodstart families have been asked to consent to their child's de-identified information being linked to the de-identified, BEBOLD platform. This will support future analysis of outcomes for this cohort of children as they grow up.

There are a number of opportunities to leverage the Goodstart and BetterStart research partnership now and into the future. We can learn from the existing model that supports children in vulnerable circumstances, test for scalability, and trial the model in other parts of the centre based early learning sector. This could be accompanied by a research program to evaluate longer-

term child development outcomes as children who have been to early learning at Goodstart move into school.

For example, we could test and learn from the process and impact of current Goodstart approaches alongside a program to scale additional support for children in vulnerable circumstances within Goodstart centres. To explore scalability based on other child care providers, the Department for Education could engage coordinators to do similar work (taking referrals, connecting families to Child Care Subsidy / Additional Child Care Subsidy, doing a warm handover and follow up) with selected community children's centres.

Testing current approaches with Goodstart and introducing new approaches to community children's centres would provide important information such as:

- the cost of reaching highly vulnerable children
- which service elements make the most difference to conversion of referrals to enrolment and attendance, alongside duration of attendance
- children's outcomes once they reach school.

Early outcomes of the trial would be available to inform elements of the three-year-old roll out from 2026.

PART TWO

DEFINING THREE-YEAR-OLD PRESCHOOL

The challenge of defining preschool

In Part 1, the Commission made findings in relation to the value and purpose of early childhood education and care and noted the distinctive configuration of preschool in South Australia.

Part 2 of this report will define what is meant by three-year-old preschool.

‘Preschool’ is a term that has been in common usage for many years and, as a result, it is easy to assume we have a shared understand of what it means. No doubt we can all endorse the words:

“Preschool is about the ordinary and extraordinary moments. Children are learning all the time”⁹⁶

However, in terms of a more precise definition, in conversations at stakeholder roundtables, as well as in submissions received the Commission has heard overlapping but not entirely convergent understandings of what three-year-old preschool means.⁹⁷

Perhaps this is unsurprising given the distinction between long day care and preschool has blurred. Indeed 45 per cent of long day care services responding to the Commission’s sector survey advise that they are already offering a program for their three-year-old cohorts that meets the current definition of a four-year-old preschool program (i.e. is delivered by a degree qualified Early Childhood Teacher).⁹⁸

There is nevertheless a sense that preschool is something distinctive, over and above usual early childhood education and care delivered by long day care.

Some of the quality factors that might distinguish preschool from a usual early childhood education and care program are being canvassed in an Issues Paper commissioned by the Royal Commission and written by Early Childhood Australia. Based on conversations with a range of expert informants, the Issues Paper will identify and seek feedback on what are termed

‘setting-specific factors’ for quality preschool. That is, it seeks to identify those factors that are unique to a setting (such as long day care, or school-based preschool, or standalone preschool) and which have been identified as important by expert informants to ensuring the delivery of a quality preschool program in that setting.⁹⁹

The Issues Paper will also test the edges of what can reasonably be called ‘preschool’, with a view to thinking through what ensuring universal access to three-year-old preschool might look like, in a country like Australia where, for example, there are families and communities living in very remote or isolated settings.

However, some of the divergence around defining three-year-old preschool has been more foundational than simply imagining what preschool means in different settings.



A number of interlocutors have encouraged the Commission to look beyond the four-year-old preschool program in defining what three-year-old preschool will look like.

Even the use of the word ‘preschool’ in relation to three-year-olds is contested, with a number of participants, including members of the Commission’s Expert Advisory Group, urging the Commission to reimagine the commitment to three-year-old preschool as a commitment to respecting the rights and interests of three-year-old children in growing and learning, rather than a commitment to a particular program.

As the Commissioner noted in discussions with the three-year-old preschool roundtable, the challenge of defining three-year-old preschool is that the conversation is caught somewhere between a *delivery mechanism* (e.g. ‘a learning program delivered by a four-year-qualified Early Childhood Teacher in a group setting’) and an *outcome* (e.g. ‘children grow into confident, curious learners’).¹⁰⁰ This is made more difficult by the particular challenges with outcomes specification and measurement in the early years identified below.

The purpose of the Interim Report is to specify and model the implications of different implementation approaches for three-year-old preschool (e.g. delivery via government preschool only, delivery via long day care only, or delivery via a mixed model) to allow the process of planning for the delivery of three-year-old preschool from 2026 to commence.

In that context, the Interim Report makes a series of in-principle findings and recommendations about the essential ingredients of a three-year-old preschool program (that is, the delivery mechanism) to enable the detailed consideration of different implementation approaches.

However, the Commission anticipates that in response to this Interim Report, as well as in response to the Call for Submissions relating to the role of early childhood education and care in the first 1000 days, and further inquiry planned into early childhood education and care workforce supply, there will be further iteration of how three-year-old preschool is described and defined.

Further, and more fundamentally, in line with the principle articulated in Recommendation 2 (*‘That the system should allow for continuous learning and adaptation, building in mechanisms such as data collection, community input and support for growth and learning at every level of the system’*), it is the Commission’s view that any elements identified as ‘essential’ for a preschool program should be held consciously, but lightly. We should always be prepared to adapt and respond as the evidence base grows about what best leads to the overall outcomes we are seeking from three-year-old preschool.


The elements in defining a three-year-old preschool program

In South Australia, preschool is currently defined as a program 'delivered by a degree qualified early childhood teacher, registered with the Teacher's Registration Board of South Australia, that at a minimum, meets National Quality Framework qualification requirements with a teacher : child ratio of 1 to 11'.¹⁰¹

In defining a three-year-old preschool program, the Royal Commission has considered the following elements:

- defining and measuring expected outcomes from three-year-old preschool
- the qualifications of who delivers the program
- the nature of the program (pedagogy – the professional practice of educators, and curriculum – the content of what is being taught)
- the format of the program (duration, composition of groups, ratios)
- the layered supports intrinsic to the program
- quality of the program.

These are discussed in turn below.



“All children learn through play-based language learning experiences and live the languages and cultures that are available in their community as part of the everyday, that they are all participants in, rather than just observers of, linguistic and cultural diversity”

Roundtable participant



Defining expected outcomes from three-year-old preschool

At one level, asking what outcome we want from three-year-old preschool is really asking who we want to be as a society. What kind of citizens does South Australia want to nurture? What are the qualities, dispositions, attitudes and skills South Australians seek to promote and grow? What are the things South Australians want to minimise?

The Commission has heard, for example, from the Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People that three-year-old preschool should play a role in nurturing the development of an anti-racist, inclusive next generation of South Australians.

This resonates with the aspiration expressed by Carla Rinaldi for building a learning community in South Australia where early childhood education and care inspires cultural, philosophical and economic change for the country, and where difference is a welcome and enriching part of learning.¹⁰²

The Commission is aware that the South Australian Department for Education is undertaking a state-wide engagement process to develop a Purpose Statement for Public Education, to build a greater shared view around

what the community wants from public education (including preschool).¹⁰³

Societies make and remake themselves in the dialogues they have about these issues. The ongoing heat of public debate about curriculum content shows this is an area of democratic discussion and disputation.

This Royal Commission does not view it as appropriate to pre-empt the finding of the Purpose Statement and has not been tasked with defining the community South Australia should aim to be.

Rather, the Terms of Reference direct the Royal Commission to make inquiries:

RECOGNISING that research on each childhood education makes it clear how crucial the years before school are to the rest of a child's life;

AND that around 90 per cent of adult brain development and growth occurs in the first five years of life;

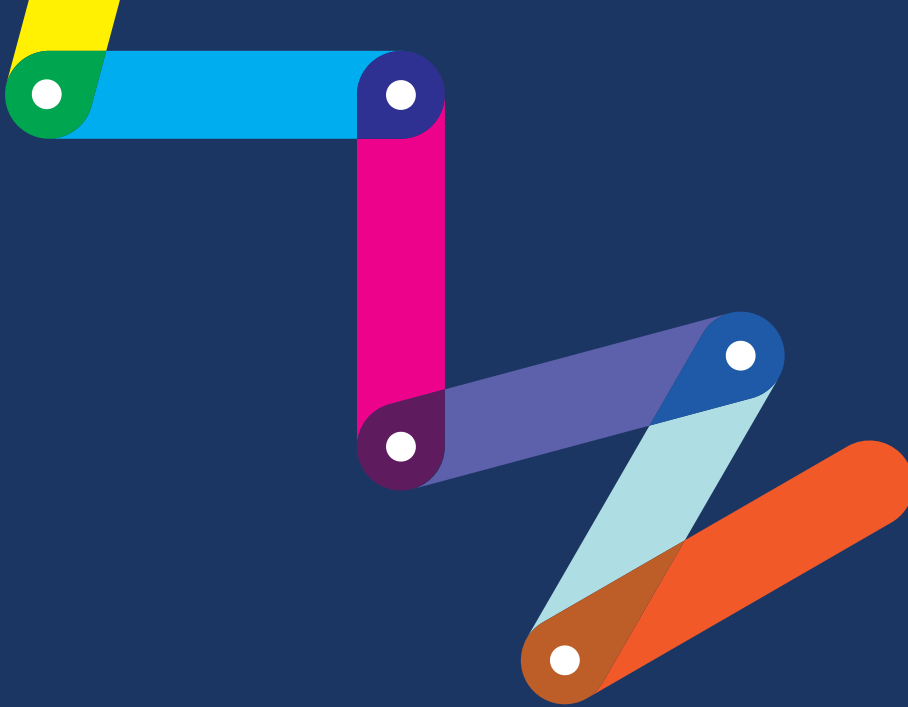
AND that nearly a quarter of South Australian children are behind on at least one domain, and 13 per cent are behind on at least two domains on the Australian Early Development Census;

AND that there is a strong link between the socio-economic status of a family and the developmental vulnerability of children when they start school.

In this context, in Part 1 of the Interim Report, the Commission has endorsed the notion that the primary purpose of universal three-year-old preschool is to support healthy child development and learning so that children can thrive and grow, with the system being a lever to redress the disadvantage experienced by too many South Australian children.

This resonates strongly with the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration, which sets the vision for a “world class education system that encourages and supports every student to be the very best they can be, no matter where they live or what kind of learning challenges they may face”.¹⁰⁴

It is also consistent with what the Commission has heard from families and caregivers about the things they value in preschool, including the opportunity for learning, the preparation for school and the chance to build social skills and friendships outside the home.



Findings

In defining preschool, it is important to recognise that communities may have different aspirations for learning and development outcomes for their children, which reflect their values and circumstances.

A DISCUSSION OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND MEASUREMENT

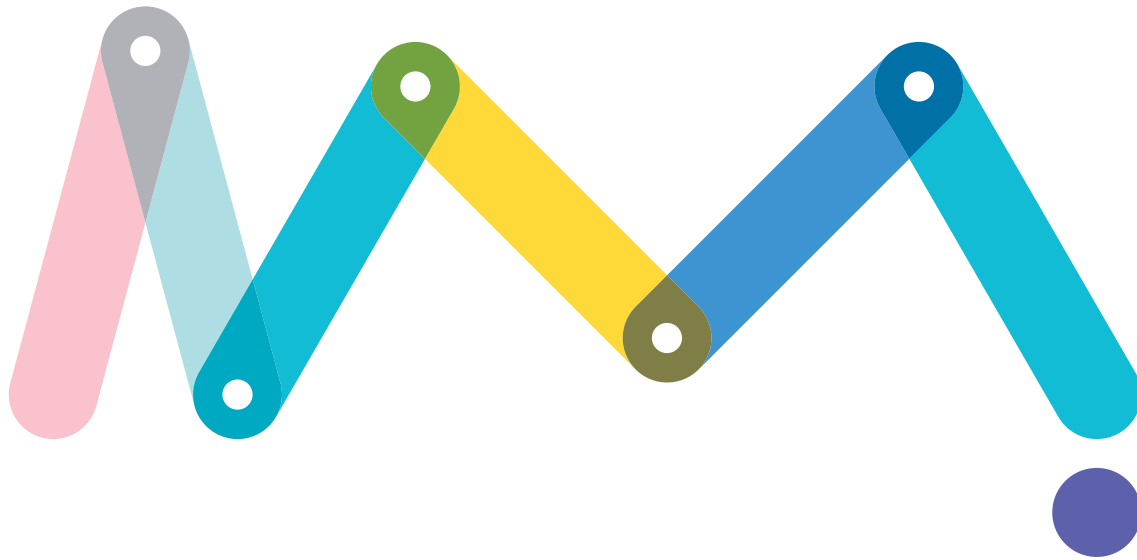
Professor Sally Brinkman has provided the Commission with the following guide to understanding the issues in relation to child development and measurement.

Children develop at different rates on each of the various developmental domains. For example, children generally start to crawl from six to ten months of age. This is considered the normal developmental age range for this ability, and the entire period during which it can appear is considered on course for healthy development. The rates and patterns of development during the early years are highly variable, however, and not all children who are doing well are doing the same thing at the same time.

Although there is individual variation, on average children who show healthy development will tend to have more positive outcomes through school compared to those who have shown early developmental delays.

Child development checks can help to identify any delays to maximise the opportunity for early intervention and supports. These checks tend to be undertaken at key ages consistent with developmental milestone expectations. These child development checks can be contrasted with the kind of assessment whose aim is to support educators in following a child's learning progression (known as formative assessment).

These assessments are generally undertaken regularly, with the purpose of allowing Early Childhood Teachers to understand the next steps/activities that can be done to extend a child's learning along a particular learning progression.



Measuring expected outcomes from three-year-old preschool

Defining the outcomes of three-year-old preschool in terms of healthy child development and learning leads to the question of whether healthy child development and learning can or should be measured.

Assessment of individual learning is already part of the early years system where the National Quality Standard requires assessment for learning and quality improvement planning.¹⁰⁵

There are however no consistent or standardised assessment measures used in preschool.¹⁰⁶ At a population level, developmental outcomes are only measured every three years via the Australian Early Development Census in the first year of primary school.

There have been divergent views expressed to the Commission about measuring outcomes in preschool. Some stakeholders are supportive,¹⁰⁷ and others have referred to the risk of 'schoolification' of preschool children or 'speeding up' learning for three-year-olds.¹⁰⁸

Almost all submissions note a range of features of early child development that make it particularly challenging for measurement. For one thing, children develop in bursts, and so measurement at a single point in time does not give a particular insight into a child's overall development.

There is also a wide range of normal development at any given age and being at the bottom or the top of this 'normal range' does not provide meaningful information about whether a child's development is on track.

As Professor Brinkman told the Commission, there is a normal age range in which children learn to walk, but whether a child walks at the early or later end of this range is not predictive of whether they will grow up to be an elite marathon runner. It would be a waste of effort to spend time measuring and comparing data about when precisely a child walks within this normal range.

However, it is also clear that there are outcomes measures that matter. Executive functioning, for example, describes the mental processes and skills which allow us to plan, focus, remember what we have to do, and deal with lots of different tasks at the same time. Executive functioning is highly predictive of how children will operate at school, with children with poorer executive function less likely to succeed in a school environment.

There is therefore a need for care in measuring outcomes in preschool.

Yet there is significant value in measuring outcomes as well.

In conversations with the Commission's Expert Advisory Group, two consistent themes emerged.

Firstly, the role outcomes measurement can play in providing teachers with a clear picture of a child's learning, allowing early identification of potential areas requiring additional intervention or support. This kind of measurement can enrich discussions with families about play-based learning activities they can do in the home with their children, as well as surfacing the need to access specialist services like speech pathology.

Secondly, the need to understand cohort and population level outcomes to inform better decision making and investment at a system level. This means data collection, linkage and governance, to contribute to system learning over time.

Both functions are integral to building a system that learns, the key opportunity identified by this Royal Commission.

PRESCHOOL OUTCOMES MEASURE MINISTERIAL EXPERT ADVISORY GROUP

Nationally, the *Preschool Reform Agreement* commits the Commonwealth, States and Territories to progress work on a preschool outcomes measure for four-year-olds.

The work will need to address two kinds of questions: Which outcomes measure(s) should be used? And how should an outcomes measure be implemented?

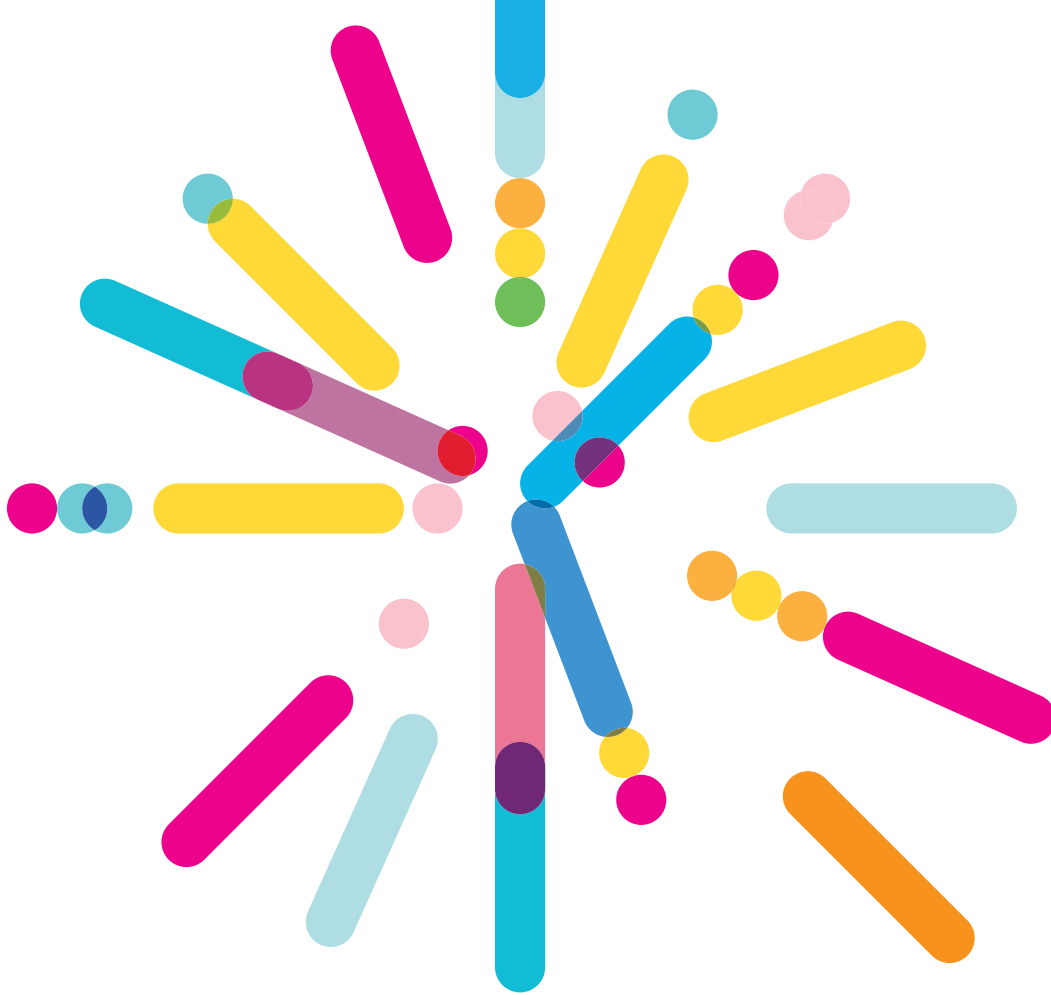
Choosing an existing outcomes measure (or building a new one) will require jurisdictions to consider things like:

- which areas of a child's development and learning matter most to future outcomes and success;¹⁰⁹
- how to make outcomes measurement culturally respectful and inclusive¹¹⁰; and
- how measurement can describe the progression of learning over time, in a way that reflects the nature of development described above.

How outcomes measurement might be implemented raises equally important, and thorny, questions, such as:

- whether measurement is used in accountability mechanisms for jurisdictions,
- how data is governed (who owns it, who can see it, at what level of aggregation, and for what purpose?) and
- the implications for teacher and service workload at a time of significant challenge.

To support this work, the Australian Government has established an Expert Advisory Group on Preschool Outcomes Measurement to consider and provide evidence-based advice on the ways that preschool can improve or impact transition to school, the feasibility of measuring those elements and whether there are tools already used in Australia or overseas that may be used.



Given the ongoing expert work happening nationally to progress preschool outcomes measurement, the Royal Commission will not make detailed recommendations about specific measures.

Rather, the Commission offers the following observations about this area.

First, the Commission strongly endorses the position that outcomes measurement should not be about pushing down a curriculum to young children. At any age, learning can be fun. However, there is a special joyful blend of learning, play and fun in early childhood which should not be undermined.

Second, in light of the challenges associated with individual variations in development, one mechanism for ensuring the accuracy and utility of outcomes measurement in the early years is a focus on assessment of learning and development over time, by considering a child's progress along identified learning progressions within identified domains of capability.¹¹¹ This is a promising approach and aligns with the development of learning trajectories discussed below.

Third, outcomes measurement in the early years must use an observational methodology, with a teacher using their skills and judgement to assess a child's progress. To the maximum extent possible, outcomes measures viewed as valuable for population wide data should seamlessly integrate into what a teacher would be observing and assessing as part of their usual professional

practice in the best interest of each child. Any attempt to use this data for high stakes decisions like funding or publicly comparing one service against another would significantly undermine this interaction between teacher and child and must be avoided.

While views on the benefits of preschool outcomes measures do vary, it seems likely that under the national Preschool Reform Agreement, to which South Australia is a party, there will be moves to establish an Australia wide outcomes framework. This provides South Australia with the opportunity to be active in shaping this framework and the potential to participate in any pilots or trials which facilitate its development.

Findings

MEASURING EXPECTED OUTCOMES FROM THREE-YEAR-OLD PRESCHOOL

There are a range of views about how and whether to measure the impact of preschool on the learning and development of children.

That means great care must be taken to ensure outcomes measures support children in their learning and development, and through population level data enables policy and quality improvements.

Recommendation 3

That the State Government seek to actively shape the emerging national approach on preschool outcomes measurement, including, in accordance with the vision of South Australia being a leader in early childhood education research, volunteering to be involved in any trials or pilots.

In doing so, the State Government should advocate that the measurement approach should support two objectives: understanding and informing its early childhood investments at a population level; and supporting teachers and services to ensure they can support a child's progress and monitor quality improvement of their practice.

In addition, the State Government should require that the results of outcomes measurement should not be published at a service level, and should not be used in funding or regulatory decision-making processes relating to individual services. Rather, objective quality measures (such as the NQS) should be published and used for the purpose of informing community choice and for government decision making.

On timing, the State Government should press for nationally agreed outcomes measurement being available in time to be embedded in the roll out of three-year-old preschool from 2026.

If the intergovernmental processes do not acquit the above outcomes, South Australia should design and adopt its own preschool outcome measures.

The qualifications of those who deliver the three-year-old program

There is strong consensus and clear evidence that qualifications matter when it comes to preschool program quality.¹¹² The Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) is the independent national authority that assists governments in administering the National Quality Framework. It administers qualification requirements for the early childhood sector, including for degree-qualified early childhood teachers, approved qualifications for other educator roles and competencies for teachers and educators.¹¹³

As previously noted, the South Australian government requires that for long day care services to access Preschool Reform Agreement funding, the program must be delivered by a degree-qualified early childhood teacher.

It is also important to note that learning happens continuously from birth, so preschool programs are one opportunity for learning, but not the only opportunity.

Early learning happens at home with parents as first teachers, and children accessing quality early childhood education and care are learning every day from quality educators, even when not specifically engaging in a preschool program.



TEACHER QUALIFICATIONS AND REGISTRATION

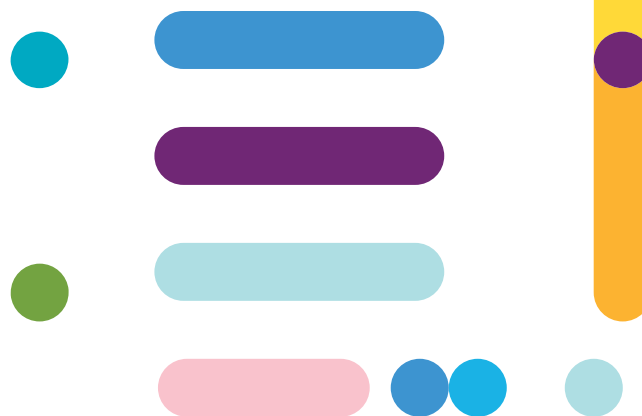
The National Quality Framework (NQF) establishes the qualification and educator ratio requirements for early childhood education and care settings.

At a minimum, the NQF requires at least 50 per cent of educators to be diploma qualified or higher (or actively working towards a diploma qualification). All other educators must be at least Certificate 3 qualified early childhood educators (or actively working towards that qualification). Finally, a service must provide access to an early childhood teacher (ECT).

In South Australia, early childhood teachers must be registered with South Australia's Teacher's Registration Board before they can be employed as a teacher in an early childhood setting. The SA Teacher's Registration Board will only accredit teachers holding a four-year degree that qualifies a teacher to teach children from birth to eight years old (referred to as a 'birth-8' degree).

Initial Teacher Education (ITE) courses are accredited by regulatory authorities. The intention of accredited ITE is that graduates enter the teaching profession with both the academic skills and personal characteristics to become a successful teacher.

The University of South Australia and Flinders University both offer a four-year degree in early childhood teaching from birth to 8.



Educator qualifications are a marker of quality¹¹⁴, and the Commission has heard from a range of sources that higher qualifications in educators are strongly associated with improved child outcomes.¹¹⁵

The Commission has also heard that the South Australian Teacher's Registration Board currently recognises only the birth to 8 early childhood education degree.¹¹⁶ South Australia's universities do not offer a birth to 5 degree because of this limitation¹¹⁷, and there are educators with birth to 5 early childhood degrees who are unable to teach in South Australian preschools.¹¹⁸ The ability of teachers with birth to 5 degrees to qualify as early childhood teachers is mixed nationally with, for example, Victoria registering teachers with a birth to five degree qualification. It is the view of the Commission that the State Government should pursue a national conversation on the registration of early childhood teachers, with a preference for national consistency as much as possible.

Teaching staff at the University of South Australia have also told the Commission that within the early childhood ITE degree, there is a heavy focus on the primary school curriculum (70 per cent), with less content focussed on the birth to five cohort.

Stakeholder roundtable members have suggested teachers who are qualified in birth to 8 teaching tend to prefer to work in primary schools, possibly due to the focus on the primary curriculum; and that the supporting infrastructure at a primary school compared to a standalone sessional preschool potentially influences the choices of those entering the profession.¹¹⁹

The Commission also notes it is not only the qualifications of an educator that support children, but the quality of the interactions between educator and child.¹²⁰ Quality interactions are likely to be supported by stability, where educators have the opportunity to form secure, reciprocal relationships with children over time; a quality area of the National Quality Standard (NQS).¹²¹

Ratios are another tool that can support quality interactions with children and learning opportunities, noting that the Commission has been told in stakeholder roundtables that while a ratio might be 1:11 or 1:10, many services engage a team approach of teachers and educators that support groups of children.

The sector mapping undertaken for the Commission gives new insight into the workforce composition and challenges in the long day care sector in South Australia. As noted earlier in this report, standalone providers, not-for-profit providers and non-metropolitan services are more likely to have staff with long standing experience in the sector.

For those who choose to work in early years settings, unions and other stakeholders have noted the difference in pay and conditions between a teacher in a government preschool compared to one in a non-government long day care setting, and this is a strong influence on workforce attraction and retention.¹²²

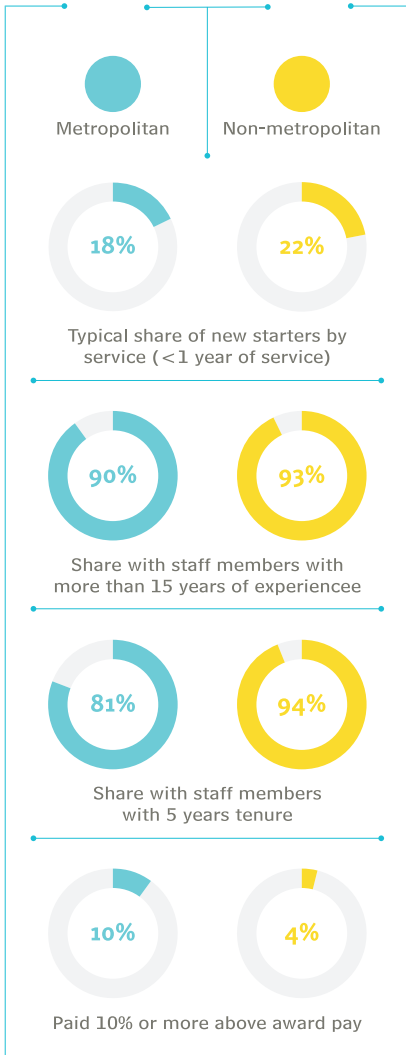
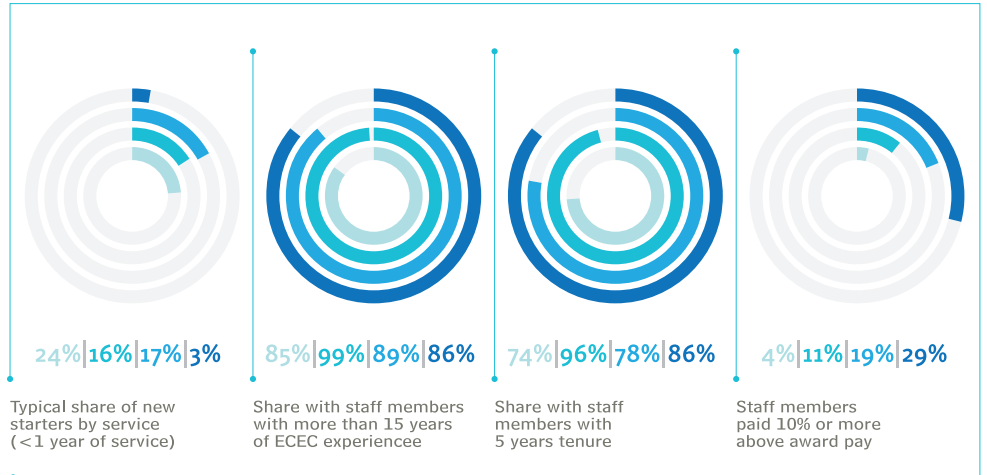


Figure 10 (top): Difference in long day care workforce, by country/metropolitan

Figure 11(top right): Difference in long day care workforce, by provider type

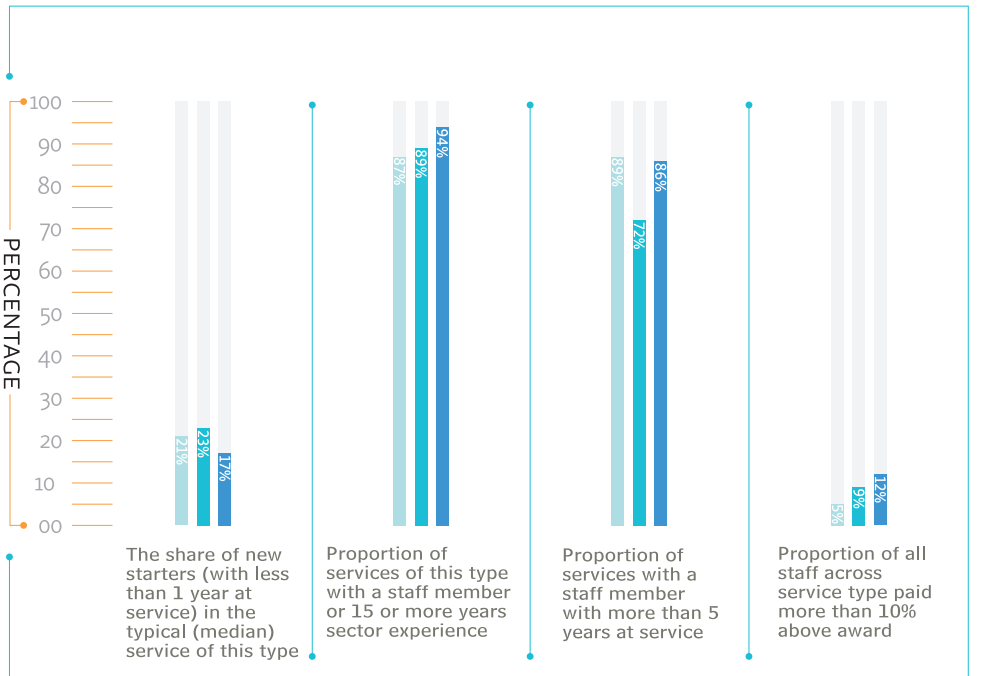
Figure 12 (bottom right): Difference in long day care workforce, by size of the provider

Source: Deloitte Access Economics (2023) Mapping long day care and non-government preschool in South Australia. Commissioned report for the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care.



LEGEND

- For profit
- Not-for profit
- Schools
- Other



LEGEND

- Large provider
- small-medium
- Standalone

Deloitte Access Economics (2023) Mapping long day care and non-government preschool in South Australia

The National Quality Framework is very clear about the workforce requirements for a provider to meet, including meeting specified ratios and having a workforce with the required qualifications. However, services that cannot meet those requirements at a particular point in time (because, for example, their early childhood teacher has left the service), can apply for a waiver from the State regulator to continue operating.

South Australia's regulator is the Education Standards Board (ESB). The ESB has advised the Commission of the large increase in waiver applications by the sector (268 per cent increase between 2019 and 2022), with an average of 160 waivers in place at any point in time, mainly due to shortages in early childhood teachers.¹²³ The Commission notes ongoing work by the ESB to manage risks to children's education and wellbeing that arise from waivers of this nature.

The workforce challenges, including registrable degrees, workforce pipeline, impact of policy changes to improve affordability, and workforce retention will be considered by the Commission in hearings in May 2023. This will include consideration of:

- the supply pipeline of degree-qualified teachers, including accelerated pathways,
- innovative options for supporting higher rates of achievement of early childhood education and care qualifications (certificate, diploma and degree) and
- the relative ability of individual state governments to directly increase the supply of early childhood teachers.

In advance of the Commission's consideration of these workforce supply issues, and noting the purpose of this Interim Report, it is critical to note that the timeline for achievement of universal three-year-old preschool will depend on workforce supply. The Commission has heard concerns about growing workforce shortfalls as a result of increased demand for early childhood education and care that arise from changes to the Child Care Subsidy, as well as NSW and Victorian commitments to expand hours of four-year-old preschool.

While there are opportunities to think innovatively about workforce supply and configuration, we must not compromise on quality. The Commission has heard from Associate Professor Catherine Nielson-Hewitt about models of high-quality professional learning that have been shown to improve the quality of programs and child outcomes.¹²⁴ It is the view of the Commission that piloting innovative models of educator configurations with substantial and deliberate learning could have a two-fold benefit of supporting children and program delivery along with lifting quality overall.

Findings

The professional skills and judgement of staff with higher qualifications make an important contribution to quality delivery of preschool.

A preschool program is defined as one delivered by a degree qualified early childhood teacher.

The Teachers Registration Board of South Australia will only accredit early childhood teachers who hold a Birth to 8 qualification.

The Commission has heard significant concerns about this limitation, including a lack of focus on early child development in the Birth to 8 qualification; the inability of teachers living in South Australia with Birth to 5 degrees to be employed as early childhood teachers; and the Birth to 8 degree facilitating greater transfer of preschool early childhood teaching workforce to primary schools, exacerbating workforce shortages in long day care providers and preschools.





Recommendation 4

That in the period prior to universal achievement of three-year-old preschool, while workforce supply is being developed, the State Government should trial different configurations of early learning programs delivered by Diploma qualified educators (for example, with practice supervision, with additional professional learning, with different ratios, with coaching and so on). This should be followed by a review of the quality of practice and a rigorous assessment of the different outcomes.

Recommendation 5

That the State Government note the Commission will hold further hearings and seek further submissions on the matter of the registration of teachers with a Birth to Five degree as early childhood teachers. It is possible this will result in a recommendation for the Teachers Registration Board to accredit Birth to Five teaching degrees.

The nature of the three-year-old program

There is agreement among researchers and practitioners that play-based approaches balanced with educator direction are highly effective ways to support children's learning.¹²⁵

This is reflected in the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF), which recognises children as competent learners who will learn through play, as well as through intentional learning that is directed by educators.¹²⁶ The Commission has heard from experts including Professor Siraj that educators play an important role in enabling the environment for learning, which includes a strong focus on directing and supporting learning through play.¹²⁷

However, as evidenced by the literature review commissioned by the Royal Commission, researchers continue to debate the best approach to early childhood pedagogy.¹²⁸



“A commitment to 3-year-old preschool acknowledges the significance of this life stage for future life outcomes and enacts children’s rights to quality early childhood educational experience.”

Roundtable participant



CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY

In addition to the importance of play, the strongest consensus among stakeholders about pedagogy emerged in relation to culturally responsive pedagogy.

The literature on the key elements that comprise culturally responsive pedagogy is still emergent, however it is clear from both the literature review and views expressed in submissions that effective pedagogy must respond to the particular cultural rights and needs of children, most notably (but not exclusively) in relation to Aboriginal children.

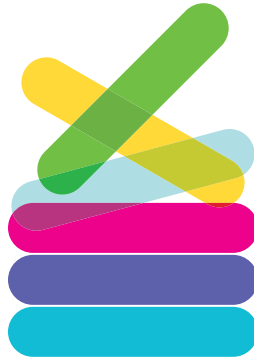
Culturally responsive pedagogy is only one of a suite of approaches recognised as making a service culturally appropriate for Aboriginal families.

The Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care – National Voice for our Children (SNAICC) submission urges the Commission to consider the opportunity to strengthen protective factors for Aboriginal children through early childhood education and care, for example, by having early childhood education and care providers protect and promote cultural identity. SNAICC argues this can be achieved by prioritising Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) as deliverers of early childhood education and care, as well as requiring mainstream services to be culturally safe and responsive to Aboriginal families, including through having meaningful partnerships with local ACCOs.¹²⁹

The South Australian Department for Education also told the Commission of the value of culturally relevant practices, appropriate teacher training, including building an Aboriginal workforce, and noted higher participation of Aboriginal children when services are run in partnership with communities.¹³⁰

Supporting this, the South Australian Aboriginal Education Strategy includes the goal of having an early childhood education and care system that is culturally appropriate, and which builds on the strengths of Aboriginal nations and their cultures.¹³¹

The Commission notes current efforts underway to strengthen the Aboriginal community-controlled sector including in early childhood care and development as part of Closing the Gap.



At this stage, the Commission does not have sufficient evidence before it to make any findings or recommendations in relation to particular pedagogical approaches for implementation of three-year-old preschool.

This is one area where the commitment to be a system that learns will be important, and the State Government should continuously review the evidence in this space to ensure it is adopting and promoting best practice.

In addition to pedagogy, there is a need to consider whether particular content (or, to use the term more familiar from school settings, curriculum) should be included in the three-year-old preschool program.

The Early Years Learning Framework is described as a learning framework *‘which outlines principles, practices and learning outcomes that guide educational leaders and educators in their curriculum decision-making, and assist them in planning, delivering and evaluating quality programs in early childhood and school age settings.’*¹³²

The framework and its supporting documents help educators to plan their educational program and practice, but the Commission notes that individualised planning for all learners is the responsibility of preschool teachers and educators, and the EYLF does not provide detailed advice or resources to support learning in particular areas or for particular ages (for example, ages three to five).¹³³

In recognition of this, the South Australian Department for Education advises in its submission that it has been developing new curriculum resources across the five domains measured in the Australian Early Development Census: social, emotional, language, cognitive and physical. These resources will be released in 2023 to support teachers and educators of preschool

aged children in the context of children spending up to two years in preschool.

According to the Department, “these resources will provide guidance to teachers and educators in applying appropriate levels of stretch and challenge as well as focussing on developing foundational life skills. A bank of learning trajectories will be available for educators to enable them to analyse through teaching what is happening for a child and what the next step is for them.”¹³⁴

In terms of articulating what is different about preschool from ‘usual’ early childhood education care, the Commission is influenced by the idea that one feature of what makes preschool ‘preschool’ is a more consciously articulated pathway of learning, perhaps with a focus on particular learning areas.

The Commission asked the Expert Advisory Group for advice about learning areas that could be prioritised for this more conscious articulation. In particular, the Commission is interested in areas of child development that have a strong predictive connection to later outcomes, and play an important role in supporting a child’s lifelong learning.

The discussion at the Expert Advisory Group has identified oral language and literacy, as well as executive functioning, as key areas of interest, both because of their predictive impacts on later life outcomes (in particular for disadvantaged children), and because stronger evidence exists about the learning progressions in these domains which can support teacher practice.

Oral language and literacy as a measure aligns with the research which tells us that language skills can be enhanced by participating in early childhood education and care and predict later educational, social and economic outcomes.¹³⁵ The Expert Advisory Group

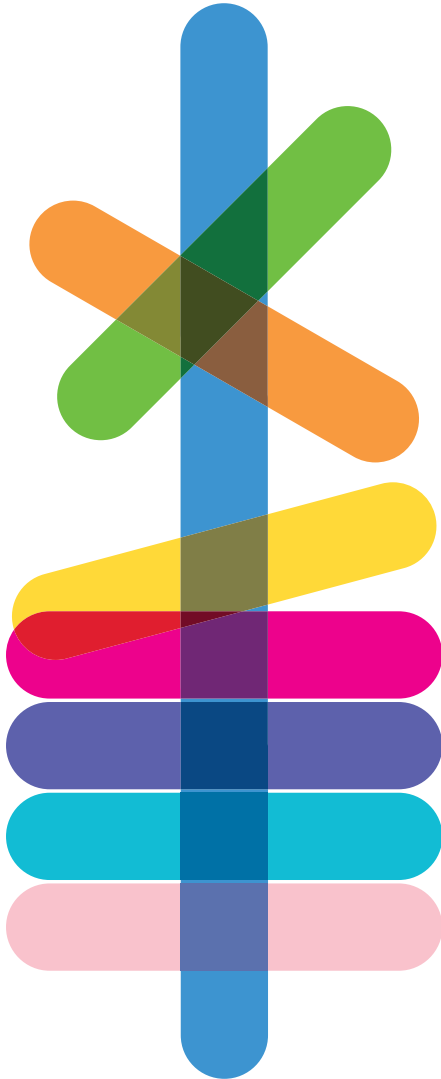
noted that there are age-appropriate ways to measure oral language and literacy in preschool aged children, and that these measures are predictive.

The Commission notes that in dealing with oral language and literacy, and in preschool generally, care needs to be taken to ensure that the learning methods and the general environment are culturally inclusive and sensitive to all children from diverse backgrounds, including those who speak a language other than English at home.

Executive functioning can be considered as a group of cognitive capabilities that contribute to self-regulation, including impulse control and the ability to follow set tasks and shift attention to keep on task.¹³⁶ The Expert Advisory Group has noted the evidence that children who can self-regulate are better able to engage in learning, and this executive functioning is both a predictor of outcomes and presents an opportunity for positive disruption if delays are present.

The effective introduction of curriculum resources in the form of learning trajectories, such as that being developed by the Department for Education, should be linked to the provision of validated tools for formative assessment. Formative assessment supports teachers and educators to understand a child’s journey on a given learning trajectory or progression, and to shape the next learning experiences.

The Commission notes that there is a connection between the national work on outcomes measurement identified above, and the need discussed in this section for greater specificity in relation to preschool curriculum.



Importantly, continuous improvement of both curriculum and assessment practices will require ongoing investment in early childhood teachers. As noted in the 2019 *NSW Preschool Assessment Study: Review of formative assessment practices in early childhood settings*, the successful adoption of new formative assessment tools requires an investment in supporting professional learning for teachers and leaders, and needs careful consideration of how to ensure that teachers have time to plan their teaching.¹³⁷

Lack of State Government support for professional learning of early childhood teachers in the long day care and non-government preschool sector has been a consistent theme of submissions received by the Commission.¹³⁸ The Commission has also heard about the importance of good professional development in delivering quality, which is in turn connected to workforce satisfaction and lower staff turnover.¹³⁹

The Commission notes a range of ways in which the State Government could support professional development of early childhood teachers if it wished. These range from directly providing professional learning through to mandating specific planning time and professional learning requirements for early childhood teachers if a service wishes to access State Government funding to deliver preschool.

Such considerations overlap considerably with questions of workforce supply, with submissions from organisations such as Goodstart noting that the inequity in conditions (including non-instruction time) between teachers in long day care and the government preschool and school sector is a key driver of the flow of early childhood teachers from long day care.¹⁴⁰

The employment conditions of early childhood teachers and how to meet their professional development needs will be explored further in the Final Report as part of a discussion in relation to workforce supply. However, the Commission does find that continuing professional development is a necessary component of enabling best practice and quality improvement.



The developmental needs of three-year-olds

The Commission asked stakeholders how (if at all) preschool should be different for three-year-old children compared to four-year-old children. There is broad agreement that preschool at any age must be high quality, delivered by a degree qualified early childhood teacher, guided by the EYLF.¹⁴¹ However as already mentioned in this report, practitioners feel strongly that three-year-olds are not four-year-olds and pedagogical approaches need to reflect this.

The Commission has also heard from long day care stakeholders who already support three-year-old children. They have suggested that while curriculum might differ according to age and developmental stages, models of delivery should be inclusive, and that the daily routines of early childhood education and care (routines, mealtimes, relaxation time) are an equally important part of the curriculum of learning for children.¹⁴²

The Commission has heard views like “there should be no difference in the pedagogical approach at preschools, other than the abilities of each child in the setting”.¹⁴³ That is, the priority should be consistent pedagogy that is appropriate and centred on the growth and development of an individual child, and which is focussed on the outcomes for that child.

The SA Preschool Directors Association suggest that the developmental differences in three-year-olds will need an appropriate curriculum and pedagogical practice to ensure that both three and four-year-olds are supported appropriately. It is also important to value the ‘here and now’, to ensure three-year-old preschool is a year of age-appropriate learning. While in a general sense, all learning by children before school helps them as they move into school, three-year-old preschool should not be defined as an extra year dedicated to being prepared for school.¹⁴⁴ Support around factors like emotional regulation for three-year-olds may also be higher.¹⁴⁵

The Commission notes the importance of acknowledging that three-year-olds are not four-year-olds and will have different needs to their four-year-old peers. The Commission has also heard about importance of diverse curriculum and delivery and the need to ensure that educators have the time and ability to plan, critically reflect, and support the individual needs of children.¹⁴⁶

Findings

While there is near universal acceptance of the importance of a play-based, culturally responsive approach, there is a lack of consensus on the effectiveness of more specific pedagogical approaches.

One feature of what makes preschool 'preschool' is a more consciously articulated pathway of learning.

There is evidence that oral language and literacy, and executive functioning, are important areas for learning in the two years before school.

Quality preschool programs are developmentally appropriate. For three-year-olds, this means they take account of the differing stage of development of three-year-olds.

Recommendation 6

That the State Government identify, evaluate and provide evidence-based tools for improving pedagogical approaches in preschool.

Recommendation 7

That the State Government continue to develop curriculum material for use in three and four-year-old preschool which builds on the Early Years Learning Framework.

Recommendation 8

That the State Government reflect the range of developmental needs of three-year-olds in implementing three-year-old preschool, including by developing professional learning for early childhood educators and teachers on early child development, with emphasis on the capabilities of three-year-olds and four-year-olds.





Format of the three-year-old program (duration, composition of groups, ratios)

Preschool formats are to some degree influenced by where they are delivered in terms of days and hours of delivery.

The current model of 600 hours of preschool per year (15 per week) was introduced in 2008 under the National Partnership on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education. Prior to that, South Australian children were accessing 12 hours per week of preschool in the year before school at high levels.¹⁴⁷ This report has previously discussed the challenges in understanding attendance compared to enrolment, and the Commission notes that individual families will have a different view of optimal hours for their child and their circumstances. As noted in the University of South Australia's literature review for the Royal Commission, the service system needs to be flexible and of sufficiently high quality to support this.¹⁴⁸

Government preschools tend to deliver programs over two days a week/ three days a week on a fortnightly rotation, or two longer days per week. As discussed earlier in this report, this might see a 'full time' preschool supporting two standalone groups of children across five days. Hours are well established, and only offered during school terms. Access to wrap around long day care or some other form of additional care, like a preschool version of OSHC, is relatively limited for children attending government services, and will be the subject of detailed discussion in the Final Report

Long day care (including family day care and other providers) will provide greater hours of access per week over more weeks per year, and learning will happen throughout a child's entire time in long day care. However, providers only need to ensure an early childhood teacher is delivering preschool programs for 15 hours per week under universal access provisions.

The hours of government preschool means that many four-year-old children attend both a government preschool and a long day care each week, to support family work commitments. Submissions to the Commission have discussed the challenges noted by Professor Carla Rinaldi for young children who have multiple transitions between services as part of their daily or weekly routine.¹⁴⁹

The Commission's sector mapping has found that approximately half of four-year-old children in long day care in South Australia also attend a government preschool.¹⁵⁰ Even with the recent decline in four-year-old children enrolling in government preschool, this data speaks to the choices that many families make about children's education and care balanced with work and other commitments.

Given that over 60 per cent of three-year-old children in South Australia are in long day care, we are yet to know what preferences families might have for accessing universal preschool at age three. If families make similar decisions at three as they do at four, we might see more children experiencing those transitions between services, and learning in more than one setting.

One critical unknown is understanding which children are not engaging in any early childhood education and care at three or four years old. The Commission is very aware that the data we have captured so far does not include those children who are at home, or in informal care and learning environments.

The need for children to build trusting, reciprocal relationships with educators in long day care and preschool settings has been raised by many in their advice to the Commission, with a particular focus on the developmental needs of three-year-olds.¹⁵¹

There is some agreement that an additional year of preschool may provide additional time for a child to feel secure and form relationships with educators and peers, reducing transitions, and supporting their learning.¹⁵² However, the Commission notes that while this is logical, no evidence has been presented to the Commission that directly links this to a child's development outcomes.

Ms Jane Lemon, an early childhood practitioner with extensive experience in preschool and education has told the Commission of anecdotal advice that the increased preschool hours from 12 to 15 per week resulted in a greater demand on preschool space which was previously used for services like playgroups.¹⁵³

For this Interim Report, the Commission is using the following terms:

Duration: hours per week (or days per week); weeks per year¹⁵⁴

Composition of groups: ages of children; consistent attendance vs different days in any given week

Ratios: teachers and educators per number of children

The Commission understands that some Children's Centres and department preschools will offer playgroups, occasional care and parenting programs, but the nature, frequency and timing of those additional services differs across centres according to demand and ability of the centres to facilitate them. Stakeholder roundtables have talked to the Commission about the value-add that playgroups bring for families who might otherwise not engage in early childhood education and care. Welcoming environments in supported playgroups expose children to learning and social experiences, and provide parents and caregivers a community of support that they might not have access to at home. The Commission has heard anecdotally that previously disengaged families who participate in playgroups often then go on to greater engagement with supports and early learning participation. The Commission will further inquire into this question in the Final Report in association with looking at the first 1000 days.

There is very little specific evidence on the value that 15 hours has provided over 12 hours per week in South Australia, although there is general consensus that some preschool benefits all children, and more hours probably benefit children from disadvantaged families.¹⁵⁵

Some stakeholders have suggested that all children should have an entitlement to more than 15 hours of preschool per week (and that some already are accessing that in long day care settings), especially more vulnerable children.

This is supported by evidence from Associate Professor Jordan about intensive early childhood education and care trials for vulnerable children in Melbourne.¹⁵⁶ Goodstart have told the Commission that three days per week provides more opportunity for children to achieve the full 600 hours across a year, and that disadvantaged children would benefit from up to five days.¹⁵⁷ Further, Goodstart provided evidence that according to its internal data, attendance and retention are improved when an offering is of three days compared with two days. Similarly, Gowrie SA suggest that three days per week (27-30 hours) is an ideal amount of time for three-year-olds to engage in a preschool program, and mixed age groups provide learning opportunities for younger and older children.¹⁵⁸

When measuring attendance, Goodstart consider weekly attendance on at least two consecutive days per week as the ideal rate of participation. The Effective Preschool, Primary and Secondary Education (EPPSE) study in the United Kingdom has found that longer duration (years before school) provided better development outcomes in areas including language, pre-reading and early numeracy, but that part time hours were just as beneficial as full time.¹⁵⁹



In their 'Starting Better' Report, the Centre for Policy Development recommends two years of preschool and three days a week of early childhood education and care to support learning and working families.¹⁶⁰ The Early Learning and Care Council of Australia (ELACCA) recommend that every three-year-old be entitled to up to five days per week of early childhood education and care.¹⁶¹

Clearly, views on patterns of attendance, consistency and the question of consecutive days vary, and there is still much for policy makers to learn. Indeed, the paucity of evidence is concerning and should be a priority for research within South Australia as part of its commitment to leading on learning about early childhood education.

It should also be noted that the evidence base about what best works will always interact with the choices made by families about access, hours and duration, which will be influenced by cost, availability and family circumstances, as well as the aspiration that a family might have for their preschool aged child.

The evidence shows that today, in addition to some three-year-olds accessing preschool programs in long day care, many government preschools engage with children from age three, with Aboriginal children, children under guardianship or with disability able to access 12 hours of preschool per week. Intake dates also mean that some children start in the months before they turn four in the year before school.

In her appearance before the Royal Commission, Ms Catherine Cavouras of the Taikurrendi Children's Centre in southern Adelaide talked about rolling intakes of Aboriginal three-year-old children and how three- and four-year-old children are equally engaged across the centre. Taikurrendi uses flexible

approaches to ensuring three-year-olds are supported to transition to preschool and individual planning for children's learning ensures educators connect with each child and their family.¹⁶² So while individual approaches are taken to children's learning, they are not separated according to age as members of the Taikurrendi community.

In light of the mixed evidence and views provided, it is the view of the Commission that the minimum duration of the three-year-old preschool program, should be equal to the four-year-old entitlement of 600 hours per year, which implies at least 15 hours per week, forty weeks a year. Equalising entitlements accords with the evidence base, to the extent research is available, and has an operational convenience for settings which will run mixed age preschool, with tailoring within the three- and four-year-old age group for the individualised needs of children.

As the system rolls out there should be continuous evaluation of whether this benchmark is appropriate in light of the evidence about enrolment, actual attendance and the impact on learning outcomes.

The Commission will describe the 600 hours per year as 'the universal three-year-old preschool entitlement' and 'the universal four-year-old preschool entitlement'.

Earlier, the Commission has stated its view that universal should not mean uniform and it accepts the evidence that children at risk of development delays will benefit from an additional preschool entitlement. The following issues therefore present for resolution in the design and operationalisation of three-year-old preschool:

- Who should be entitled to access additional hours;
- How many additional hours should be accessed; and
- How should this additional entitlement be operationalised.

In answering the first question, the Commission specifically refers to findings in Part 1 about the need to unite early childhood education and care services into a system, with appropriate data connections and sharing. One goal of the building of this system should be to better enable the appropriate targeting of the additional preschool entitlement.

However, even while the work to build the data connections and uniting the system is being done, we do have access to evidence that is probative of who to target; for example, the evidence of Dr Rhiannon Pilkington that both socio-economic disadvantage and child protection notifications correlate with children being assessed at age five as developmentally vulnerable in one or more domains in the Australia Early Development Census. The Commission also notes that being developmentally vulnerable at age five is correlated with poorer lifetime outcomes. Evidence also exists and is currently being relied upon to offer additional preschool entitlements to Aboriginal children, children with disabilities and children under guardianship.

This means that principles around who should access the extra entitlement can be discerned, including socio-economic status, identifying as Aboriginal, having a disability, or contact with the child protection system. This is not an exhaustive list and other sources of evidence may show that an extra entitlement would also benefit refugee children and/or children whose first language is not English who are at risk of developmental delay.

Clearly, the total child population that fits into one or more of these categories is large but, over time, with a better data system, it may be possible to be more precise in targeting recognising that not every child in the groups described above is at risk of developmental delay.

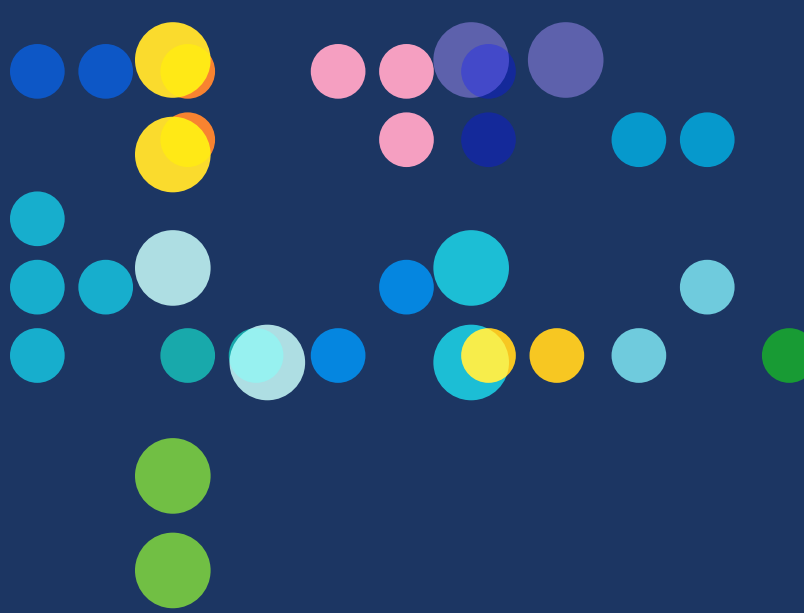
However, even with improved data, the capacity needs of growing preschool places to enable access under the universal three-year-old preschool entitlement, plus targeted additional access, will be large. In prioritising roll out, regard should be had to the principle of progressive universalism, so those with the greatest needs access their universal entitlement first. Even as the complete universal roll out is being undertaken, approaches to the roll out of the extra entitlement should be being trialled and evaluated.

Regardless of how effective data sources are in relation to identifying need, it is always important to incorporate the knowledge of local service providers. Therefore, there should be a capacity for directors of preschools and long day care centres incorporating preschool to make recommendations about children who will benefit from the additional entitlement.

In terms of the number of hours that needs to be made available, the Commission has heard evidence from Associate Professor Brigid Jordan about a highly intensive model of early education for 30 hours a week, for 50 weeks of the year, for the most disadvantaged families, including those who are at risk of having children removed. This has been trialled in Melbourne and additional trialling is now underway in Victoria and NSW.

The Commission supports South Australia building on this and other emerging evidence sources regarding the number of hours needed to combat disadvantage to design three-year-old pre-school options that can be made available for up to 30 hours per week.

The Commission notes that it is likely the most effective models will involve additional hours in both three-year-old and four-year-old preschool offerings and that system capacity will need to expand in both age ranges.



THE PRACTICALITIES OF HAVING A THREE-YEAR-OLD AT GOVERNMENT PRESCHOOL TODAY

The Commission has heard anecdotal views that having a different level of entitlement for three-year-old children (currently 12 hours) doesn't always translate to difference in practice.

For example, a preschool might have mostly four-year-old children attending, with a smaller number of three-year-old children who are entitled to their preschool program.

In practice, the three-year-old child attends preschool the same as their four-year-old friends. While their individual learning and development might be different, the service does not separate or single out those three-year-olds. In fact, if they need to be onsite for 15 hours a week, they are welcome to be there.

However, there are self-care and wellbeing considerations that might look different for three-year-old children. They might need more support to rest, use the toilet (or have nappies changed) and they might need more reminders to eat and drink independently.

Preschools that support mostly four-year-old children, or which are not part of a long day care service will need to consider how they will practically support more three-year-old children in the future.

Findings

The current national standard of 15 hours of preschool in the year before school reflects a national policy process that sought to specify a single service model across a number of jurisdictions.

There is no clear evidence regarding which is more important in driving outcomes from preschool: the frequency of attendance (e.g. number of days per week) or the hours of attendance (e.g. total number of hours per week), and whether this varies by cohort.

There is no clear evidence whether quality preschool programs should be delivered separately or to a mixed group of three and four-year-olds.

There is no clear evidence about the impact of consecutive days and consistent groups in preschool outcomes.

Some submissions spoke to the importance of reducing the number of transitions children experience in their daily lives. While this is logical, there is limited evidence before the Commission enabling this benefit to be quantified as against the benefits of other arrangements (such as accessing a Department for Education preschool program that may be of higher quality than available in their long day care).

Some submissions spoke to the benefit of preschool teachers having a continuous relationship with a child over two years, often as part of the same peer group. While this is logical, there is limited evidence before the Commission enabling this benefit to be quantified as against the benefits of other arrangements (such as maintaining attendance in long day care at age three with fewer weekly transitions, prior to entering a Department preschool at age four).

Recommendation 9

That the minimum duration of a three-year-old preschool program be 600 hours per year, or 15 hours per week for 40 weeks a year. This universal three-year-old preschool entitlement mirrors the universal four-year-old preschool entitlement.

Children at risk of developmental delay should be able to access additional hours and days of three and four-year-old preschool up to 30 hours per week for the most at risk.

The Commission specifically invites feedback about the targeting of this extra entitlement, what would be needed to maximise take up and how roll out should acquit the principle of progressive universalism.

Recommendation 10

That, as part of implementing consistent outcomes measurement, the State Government continue to build the evidence base of the following, with a view to informing future program design:

- a. The impact on attendance and outcomes of 15 hours versus two days with shorter hours, with a view to considering whether 15 hours is the appropriate use of government preschool hours at age four if clear evidence emerges;
- b. The best method of targeting additional hours/days for children who require additional support at age three or four;
- c. The impact of consecutive days on attendance and outcomes;
- d. The impact of consistent groupings on outcomes;
- e. The impact of transitioning between different settings in a child's daily life;
- f. The benefit of two years of preschool with a stable cohort.



THE ROLE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE IN THE FIRST 1000 DAYS

The Commission is also examining the role of early childhood education and care in a child's first 1000 days.

Stakeholder roundtables have discussed the social determinants of health, the significant impact of poverty and disadvantage on child development outcomes, the diversity of families in today's South Australia, including our very multicultural community, and the need for effective universal services to ensure families are included and supported to participate.

The Commission will be hearing from more experts and practitioners in coming months and will discuss this in the Final Report.

Layering supports

For preschool to be an inclusive and welcoming place for all children and their families, some children and families need additional support. What this support looks like will be different for every family, on any given day.

As noted in Part 1, current supports in government preschools include the Inclusive Education Support Program (IESP) for children with disability, Student Support Services (SSS) for multidisciplinary supports (including allied health), and specialised programs for children with disability, high support needs, or specific speech and language needs.¹⁶³ However, such supports are not available to children attending preschool in non-government settings.

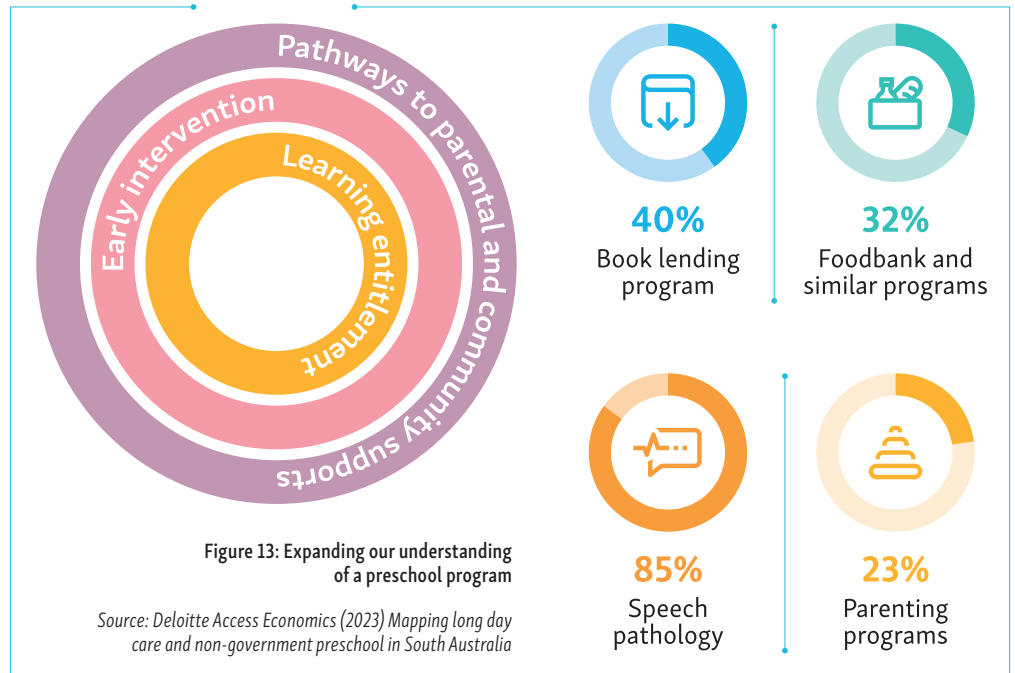
The Commission received many submissions noting the importance of the provision of layered support, including allied health professional support, in preschool.¹⁶⁴ Speech Pathology Australia went so far as to suggest that educational teams in preschool/early childhood education and care should include speech pathologists as core members.¹⁶⁵

The call for universally available layered supports in early childhood education and care, with access to allied health professionals, specialist educators and targeted additional resourcing for children requiring extra support, is supported by an emerging literature,¹⁶⁶ and was strongly supported by the Expert Advisory Group.

However, the Commission notes the opportunity to build an evidence base in relation to the best mechanisms for the universal delivery of allied health services in early childhood education and care settings. For example, the current literature is unable to provide clear direction on where a model of direct intervention by a speech pathologist with a small group of children might be more effective than a model where a speech pathologist coaches the primary educator working with children on a daily basis, and vice versa.¹⁶⁷

In considering where there has been reform to preschool inclusion support, some stakeholders look to Victoria,¹⁶⁸ where there are a range of programs including funding to support access and participation, pre-purchased places for vulnerable or disadvantaged children and a rural base rate of funding for eligible services.

In particular, stakeholders have encouraged the Commission to look at Victoria's School Readiness Funding. This is a program that provides all preschool providers with funding to purchase from a 'menu' of resources to support children, address disadvantage in flexible ways, buy in allied health services or provide supports to parents. The primary aim is to address the impacts of educational disadvantage for young children, with a menu that can be searched according to priority areas, program, delivery type, cost and the strength of the underpinning evidence.¹⁶⁹



Findings

The Victorian model of school-readiness funding provides a model of layering support in non-government preschool, with allocation of funding to sites for the purchase of services from a pre-determined menu of options.

There is an opportunity to build the evidence of what works in providing layered supports in early childhood education and care, noting significant gaps in the current evidence base.

The Commission has heard evidence that current rates of uptake of child development checks in South Australia are low, meaning children are missing opportunities for early intervention.

These supports include cultural diversity and inclusion programs delivered by Aboriginal organisations.

In addition to the provision of layered supports, a number of submissions noted the importance of child development checks in the early years and called for the provision of child development checks in preschool.¹⁷⁰

As discussed in Part 1, the Commission notes the opportunity available to the State Government as a result of the significant increase in funding to child development checks from next year.

The features of effective models for early childhood education and care (including but not limited to preschool) to provide layered supports for children and families will be further detailed and discussed in the Final Report.

The Commission recognises that some interventions and supports will be funded by the Commonwealth (e.g. Inclusion Support Program, National Disability Insurance Scheme). The Final Report will provide commentary on this.

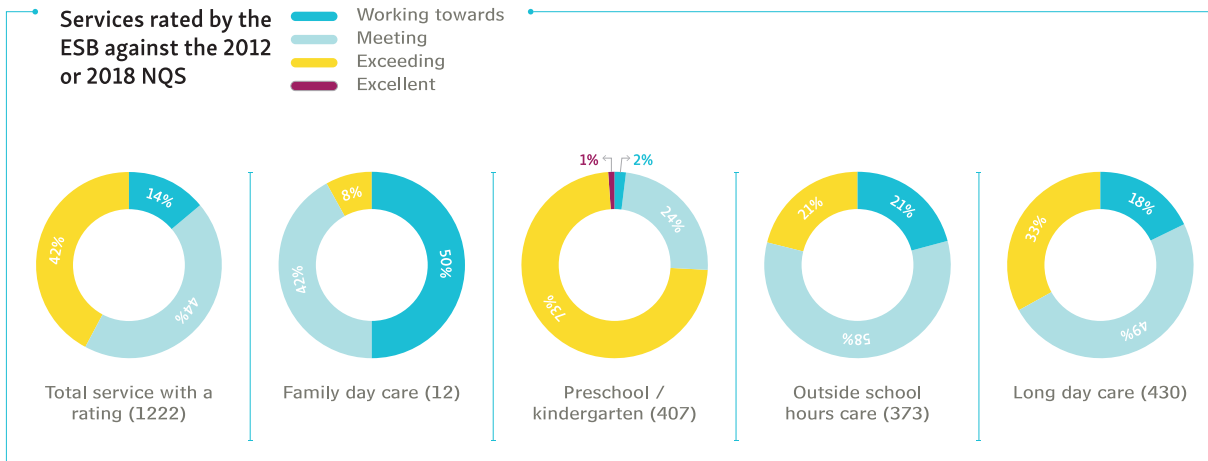


Figure 14: How South Australian services rate

The National Quality Standard (NQS) ratings of South Australian early childhood education and care services, by service type, including ratings against the 2012 or 2018 NQS

Source: Education Standards Board (2023)

Determining Quality

There is overwhelming evidence that preschool must be high quality to deliver good outcomes for children, and high quality gives better outcomes than low quality services.¹⁷¹

That is, quality matters for child outcomes, and policy makers need to ensure it is a priority in service design.

The term 'quality' is often broken into two distinct parts:¹⁷²

- Process quality – the pedagogy, learning programs and child-educator interactions.
- Structural quality – ratios, educator qualifications, learning frameworks, family supports and support for professional development.

Both are important ingredients to ensuring children are receiving high quality education and care, although some are harder to measure than others.

There is general agreement by stakeholders that high quality preschool will be teacher-led. It will also deliver a child-focused program that is safe, stimulating, trauma informed, and inclusive. Programs should be flexible and resourced in a way that give teachers the time to build healthy relationships with children and their families, time to plan for the individualised needs of children and provide the pay and conditions that reflect the importance of the work they are doing.¹⁷³

There is no perfect measure of quality, but the National Quality Standard (NQS) outlines seven quality areas that form the basis of assessment and rating by regulatory authorities. In South Australia, this is the Education Standards Board (ESB). Three quality areas are based on their link to child outcomes (educational program and practice, staffing arrangements, relationships with children), and the other four take a broader lens (children's health and safety, physical environment, collaborative partnerships with families and communities, leadership and management).¹⁷⁴

The NQS was revised in 2018, however over half of services in South Australia still hold a rating against the 2012 NQS.¹⁷⁵ The ESB advises that there are more long day care and OSHC services that have been assessed against 2018 NQS than preschools. The Commission notes that assessing 2012 rated services is a current priority of the ESB, aiming to have 50 per cent of all services rated against the 2018 standard by June 2024.

The ESB has told the Commission how South Australia's sector is tracking against the NQS. Figure 14, from the ESB shows that 14 per cent of services with a rating (against either 2012 or 2018) are 'working towards' the NQS, meaning, services provide a safe program but have one or more areas identified for improvement.¹⁷⁶

The Commission notes that of the services who have been assessed under the 2018 NQS, the percentage of services 'working towards' rises to 33 per cent.

From the data, we can surmise that generally there is high quality delivery of early childhood education and care in all kinds of early childhood settings in South Australia, but the data available does have key limitations. While quality varies across provider types, regions and services, and there is room to improve in all provider types, South Australian children are generally well supported with quality services.

In relation to settings that offer preschool (government preschool and long day care), the ESB data shows us that quality areas one and two (educational program and practice and children's health and safety) are the two main quality areas where improvement is needed. Currently, there are 18 per cent of long day care services, and two per cent of preschool/ kindergarten services, which are rated as 'working towards'. Of these, 69 per cent of long day cares and 40 per cent of preschools are listed as 'working towards' in Quality Area 1 (educational program and practice) and 60 per cent of long day cares and 70 per cent of preschools are listed as 'working towards' in Quality Area 2 (children's health and safety).

Noting the advice of the ESB about their own targets to update quality ratings, this means that there are four-year-old children across South Australia who are participating in preschool programs that are not meeting current quality standards and this should be a key consideration for government in designing additional preschool programs and funding.

The frequency of quality rating cycles is important to ensure individual services and the system as a whole is meeting the necessary quality standards. The Commission has heard from stakeholders that the current rating cycle in South

Australia makes it hard for families to be confident that their preschool is high quality.¹⁷⁷ The ESB advises that the rating cycle in South Australia is approximately 8-10 years, against a national average of three years, and the ratio of authorised officers to services is 1:99 in South Australia compared to the national average of 1:48.¹⁷⁸

Given this long rating cycle and what we know about workforce turnover in the sector, it is hard for families to get a sense of how a service is tracking against the NQS quality markers; a setting may have a rating that is several years old and, if their workforce has significantly changed, may no longer reflect that service.

It is the view of the Commission that in acknowledging the importance of quality preschool for children, ensuring those markers of quality are met through a timely assessment process is vital. The resource needs of the ESB should be reviewed through the lens of ensuring rating cycles in South Australia are in line with the national average at a minimum.

However, NQS ratings are not intended as a marker of quality in a preschool program, and the Commission has heard evidence from Professor Siraj that NQS is an imperfect proxy for learning outcomes for children.¹⁷⁹

As proposed in the Early Childhood Australia Issues Paper, referred to in Part 1 of this report, there are also setting-specific markers of quality. For example, the Preschool Directors Association of South Australia has made submissions in relation to the importance of early childhood education expertise in leaders and local education teams,¹⁸⁰ while other submissions noted the particular need for early childhood teachers operating in long day care to be connected to networks of other teachers for their own professional learning.¹⁸¹

Discussions at the three-year-old preschool stakeholder roundtable show that there is a need for further work to develop an agreed understanding about what these quality markers might look like, but the Commission is of the view that it is a worthwhile exercise in a context where preschool is delivered in a number of different settings.

Finally, the Commission notes that one of the design principles outlined in Recommendation 2 is "*That, while stewardship of the early childhood education and care system is shared with the Commonwealth (as the predominant funder), the State Government should be clear about the characteristics of the early childhood education and care system it wants to operate in South Australia and make decisions that support that.*"


One key lever the South Australian Government could exercise to shape the characteristics of the early childhood education and care system is to impose additional quality requirements (over and above those elements identified in the Report to date) for services to be able to deliver preschool.

For example, workforce quality, stability and opportunities for development are areas that are related to the quality of early childhood education and care overall.

The sector mapping undertaken on behalf of the Royal Commission shows meaningful differences in workforce conditions and composition between different provider types in long day care. 76 per cent of employees in the not-for-profit sector are paid above award wage, while in almost an exact inversion, 74 per cent of employees in the for-profit sector are paid only award wage. It is likely this feeds into the meaningful difference observed in the tenure of staff in not-for-profit compared with for-profit services.

These are uncomfortable findings that are not often profiled in the public discourse. In the Commission's Final Report, which will consider more directly the Term of Reference relating to "*opportunities to further leverage early childhood education and care to enable equitable and improved outcomes for South Australian children*", as well as more directly with the question of early childhood education and care workforce supply, the Commission will return to this question and to whether the State Government has an interest in promoting a particular configuration of workforce.

In the meantime, the Commission notes the valuable opportunity to gain a more direct understanding of the relationship between workforce quality, stability and opportunities for development with an improved assessment and rating cycle.



“Teacher and educator knowledge of child development from a critical and culturally responsive perspective would be essential, also enabling earlier than current identification of, and treatment for children with developmental issues.”

Roundtable participant



Findings

Ratings under the NQS are often used as a proxy for the quality of a preschool program, in particular program areas 1 (Educational program and practice), 5 (Relationships with children) and 7 (Governance and leadership). However, evidence heard by the Royal Commission suggests that this is an imperfect proxy.

In addition, the Royal Commission has heard evidence that the average assessment and rating cycle for early childhood education and care services in South Australia is now eight to ten years, compared to a national standard of three years.

17% of the 221 long day cares that are funded by the State Government to provide a preschool program are listed as 'working towards' in NQS ratings.

2% of Department for Education preschools are listed as 'working towards' in NQS ratings.¹⁸²

This equates to 8% of four-year-olds attending a State Government funded preschool program in a 'working towards' setting.

Expanding the offer of preschool to three-year-olds may increase inequity for those children not currently accessing four-year-old preschool.

Recommendation 13

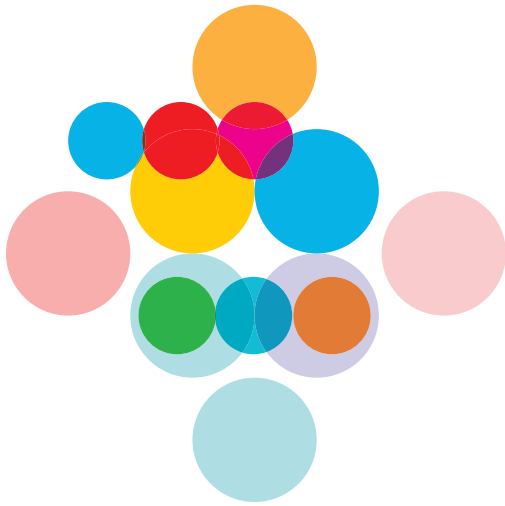
That the State Government ensure sufficient resources are available to the Education Standards Board to ensure every early childhood education and care provider is assessed and rated at least every three years.

Recommendation 14

That the State Government have a targeted focus on improving the NQS ratings of non-government services currently providing State Government funded preschool programs who are 'working towards', including working with the regulator (the Education Standards Board) to ensure that action is taken for consistent non-achievement.

Recommendation 15

That the State Government commission research to better understand the relationship between workforce consistency and quality over time, with a view to identifying further policy levers for inclusion in future quality improvement agendas.



Community-specific early learning models

One of the most challenging questions under consideration by the Commission is how flexible to be with the definition of preschool.

The Commission is mindful that if there is a strict requirement that preschool comprise a formal learning program led by a qualified teacher, a number of children might be excluded from accessing the program altogether.

This challenge is enhanced by the fact that the Commission is considering the expansion of an existing entitlement.

As discussed previously, the data about which children are not enrolled in preschool is poor, but the Expert Advisory Group and a number of stakeholders, including at the first 1000 days roundtable, have noted that increasing preschool provision by an extra year could have the unintended consequence of compounding inequality of outcomes for those children not accessing any preschool.

Further, the Commission is aware of evidence of successful models of engaging parents in their children's development outside of the traditional models of preschool.¹⁸³ Some models involve engaging peers (other members in the community) rather than educators to lead the program,¹⁸⁴ while others include financial incentives to support parent participation.¹⁸⁵ These might be appropriate for communities where very low levels of access to preschool relate to significant disconnection from mainstream service provision.

In other contexts, the barriers to preschool enrolment may be more transparent, and relate to the remoteness of families and their inability to travel to a traditional preschool. The Early Childhood Australia Issues Paper, for example, is expected to refer to a number of different mobile delivery models.

In Part 1, the Commission noted the opportunity to commence trials from 2024 in enrolling hard to reach families in early childhood education and care. In this Part, the Commission notes the need to invest as much (and maybe more) in children not enrolled in preschool.

Recommendation 16

That the State Government commit to co-designing and rigorously evaluating a small number of alternative early learning models for three-year-olds in specific communities where there are very low rates of enrolment in a traditional four-year-old preschool program.

These programs should be funded at a rate of approximately \$11,500 per child (indexed) (based on current per child cost of provision of government preschool).

Rigorous evaluation is required, and models and service providers may alter with evaluation. However, ongoing funding should be allocated to the overall program on the basis of an assumed rate of uptake in specified communities.

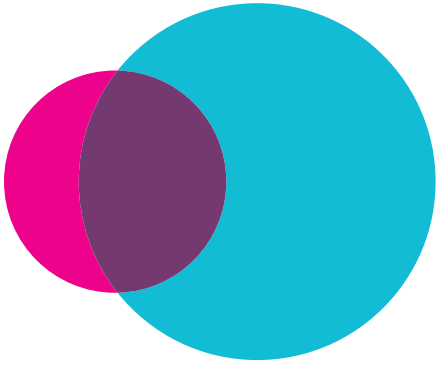
- These programs should be eligible for capital investment, per Recommendation 27.
- Among others, the following elements should be considered in the co-design process:
- That programs are delivered by organisations with existing connections to the community;

That programs include a workforce drawn from the local community, without requiring formal qualifications on entry to the workforce;

That programs include payments to families to support their engagement.

Communities should be selected on the basis of very low rates of access to traditional four-year-old preschool programs.

Children who are enrolled in these programs would be eligible to transition to a traditional four-year-old preschool program or continue in this program in the year before school.



Where to for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander three-year-old preschool?

Every South Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child has a right to attend a culturally inclusive preschool.¹⁸⁶

The importance of inclusion, cultural safety and belonging to support participation by Aboriginal children and their families in early childhood education and care cannot be overstated.

Some of the key elements to ensuring appropriate inclusion have been discussed earlier in Part 2 ('Culturally responsive pedagogy').

However, the Commission is mindful that the expansion of the entitlement to preschool may exacerbate unequal outcomes for Aboriginal children.

Aboriginal children in South Australia are currently entitled to 12 hours of preschool per week from the age of three. This commitment is currently worth around \$10.8 million per annum.

The Commission has heard about the value of three-year-old preschool for Aboriginal children, not just for children, but their siblings, parents and caregivers who, in this early entry process, find a welcoming community and support network that endures beyond those preschool years.¹⁸⁷

The Commission notes concern expressed by some Aboriginal families and service providers that expanding three-year-old preschool for all children will end this special focus on creating a connection with and for Aboriginal children through their longer engagement in preschool.¹⁸⁸

As the Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People, Commissioner April Lawrie, notes in her submission, "I urge this Royal Commission to seek to restore equity to the current delivery of ECEC and preschool to three-year-old Aboriginal children ... I urge the Royal Commission to ensure that the education and child development system provides the optimum delivery of education and wellbeing outcomes focussing on hardwiring the provision of cultural safety measures and cultural education for Aboriginal children."

Commissioner Lawrie goes on to identify a range of measures that would support this vision, including legislative change to embed self-determination in the *Education and Children's Services Act 2019*, funding for key elements of a culturally safe service, such as language, curriculum and workforce, as well as appropriate arrangements for partnership with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs).¹⁸⁹

The Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care – National Voice for our Children (SNAICC) submits to the Commission that self-determination is a critical component for Closing the Gap.

The SNAICC submission identifies a number of proposals that support self-determination for Aboriginal communities in the early childhood education and care space. These include providing guaranteed ongoing funding to ACCOs to deliver early childhood education and care (as well as supporting capability building for ACCOs delivering early childhood education and care);¹⁹⁰ transitioning all government led Aboriginal Child and Family Centres to ACCO leadership at a mutually agreed timeline;¹⁹¹ and embedding principles of Indigenous Data Sovereignty in the collection, dissemination and use of data in the context of early childhood education and care.¹⁹²



Findings

Currently, Aboriginal children are eligible for three-year-old preschool. Around 600 Aboriginal children currently access this entitlement, of and an estimated 940 Aboriginal three-year-olds in SA).

The State Government currently is committed to spending approximately \$10.8 million to provide Aboriginal three-year-olds early entry to preschool.

The Commission has heard evidence about the value placed on the early entry three-year-old program by Aboriginal communities.

Recommendation 17

That the State Government listen to the Aboriginal community, including through South Australia's First Nations Voice to Parliament and the South Australian Aboriginal Education and Training Consultative Council, about how to ensure that Aboriginal children retain (and increase) the benefits from three-year-old preschool.

A co-design process should then be undertaken on the basis of an ongoing guaranteed funding commitment equivalent to that which supports early entry for Aboriginal three-year-old children (currently around \$10.8 million per annum).

Note that this commitment would be over and above the usual State Government funding arrangements for three-year-old preschool, and any community specific early learning models established per Recommendation 16.

WHAT IS SPECIFIC TO THREE-YEAR-OLD PRESCHOOL?

This report has so far considered the importance of early childhood education in supporting learning and development for children, disrupting disadvantage and building opportunity.

It has also discussed the elements of quality preschool, community specific models, and preschool for Aboriginal children and families.

Which leads to the question: what is specific to three-year-old preschool?

Stakeholders have told the Commission that we must not lose focus on three-year-old children in this discussion.

They must be at the centre of any plan for three-year-old preschool.

We know that three-year-olds are not four-year-olds.

We agree that childhood is a short, precious time of growing and learning.

Preschool is not about 'schoolification' of young children.

It is the Commission's vision that high quality three-year-old preschool will be defined by:

- Qualified teachers and educators, who understand the developmental stages and needs of three-year-old children, who can work with families, identify support needs and access additional supports when needed. The Commission specifically notes the need for child development content in early childhood degrees; for degree qualified teachers to be programming and delivering preschool; and for intentional professional development of all educators.
- Environments that support teachers and educators to grow professionally and which provide time for programming and critical reflection. The Commission recommends that this be built into the quality expectations for the workforce regardless of the preschool setting.
- Sound pedagogical approaches that engage children in learning every day.
- An age-appropriate curriculum, with resources provided to teachers and educators regardless of where they are working. The Commission recommends this be shared sector wide.
- Physical infrastructure that supports the needs of children in their daily routines.

With an early years system that encourages learning and growth, and gives the support that is needed when it is needed, South Australian children will thrive now and into the future.



PART THREE:

DELIVERING THREE-YEAR-OLD PRESCHOOL

So far, the Commission has looked at the history of early childhood education and care in South Australia, the research behind why engagement with early childhood education and care is so important for children's life trajectories, the impact of poverty and disadvantage on child outcomes, and the composition of South Australia's early years sector; including the children it supports, its workforce and the way services connect to the community.

The previous two parts have laid out answers to big picture questions, such as 'what is the purpose of providing three-year-old preschool?' and 'what are the principles that we should use when making decisions about three-year old preschool?'. It also answers important practical questions, such as 'What does a three-year-old preschool program look like? Who should deliver it? How many hours a week should it be delivered?'

Early childhood education and care is a complex system, involving governments at all levels as policy makers, funders, regulators (and sometimes providers), private and not-for-profit providers operating in a mixed market, all intertwined with the needs and interests of families living busy lives.

In order to understand just what three-year-old preschool could and should look like in South Australia from 2026, the Commission has combined multiple datasets to provide a clear picture of the landscape, approaches, costs (for parents and government) and the change process that might be required.

These have been built into a detailed data model of where three-year-olds are currently engaging in early childhood education and care, where there is spare capacity in the system to offer additional places to three-year-olds, where families live and where they want to send their children to preschool, how many teachers and early childhood educators it would take to deliver the additional places required, how many rooms and new services we would need to build to make it happen; and so on.

This modelling, undertaken on behalf of the Royal Commission by Deloitte Access Economics, forms the basis for the discussion that follows.



DELOITTE ACCESS ECONOMICS: MODELLING OF DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO DELIVER THREE-YEAR-OLD PRESCHOOL IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

The specification of the modelling can be found on the Commission's [website](#), along with a summary of the key outputs of the model.

In the following section, we will discuss the figures associated with different stylised implementation scenarios envisioned by the Royal Commission. These figures are based on a range of assumptions and policy settings that are articulated in the specification document.

The model's purpose is to understand what it would take to deliver universal three-year-old preschool.

It has been built with significant functionality. Because it has been built from the 'ground up', using a detailed picture of the existing service offering of both non-government and government services, it allows detailed consideration of implications of different decisions at both a regional and state wide level.

For example, it can understand the cost and workforce implications if extra hours of non-instruction time for early childhood teachers working on preschool programs are mandated.

Or, it can be used to understand the implications for supply, if the ability to provide preschool is made subject to quality thresholds (such as National Quality Standard ratings, or workforce conditions).

While the modelling currently assumes progressive delivery from 2026, with full uptake achieved in 2032, the model provides an ability to understand the implications of longer and shorter implementation timeframes.

This will be important in light of the Commission's inquiries into workforce supply in May this year, which may lead to amended recommended timelines.

Following the release of this Interim Report, the Royal Commission will continue to explore different approaches in line with feedback received about this Interim Report, in addition to findings it makes about workforce supply in future hearings.

Therefore the figures provided in this Report are indicative only and may change depending on the final recommendations.

There are also some costs that still need to be specified. For example, the proposed implementation approach involves the establishment of locally based teams to work with the sector. This is a matter on which the Royal Commission wants to hear more from the sector.

The model will be handed to the State Government on completion of the Royal Commission to enable ongoing development and analysis of policy scenarios.

The Royal Commission expresses its thanks to the Deloitte team for their hard and thoughtful work.

Broadly, there are three different approaches for delivering universal three-year-old preschool in South Australia.

Firstly, it could be delivered entirely through government preschool, with no contribution made by the long day care and non-government preschool sector.

Secondly, it could be delivered entirely through the long day care and non-government preschool sector, with no contribution by government preschools.

Thirdly, it could be delivered via a mixed approach, using a mix of government preschool and long day care and non-government preschool services.

The Commission intends to base its decision on the final design of the new system guided by the following three themes and underlying principles which are drawn from Recommendation 2 above:

a. Embrace all children, which means the system will:

- *Be universal, but it will not be uniform;*
- *Take active steps to ensure full participation of all children in three-year-old preschool;*
- *Cater to the different needs of communities, families and children; and*
- Enable families to make choices about what preschool setting and service best meets their needs.

b. Fairness, which means the system will:

- Support equity for children and families, providing additional hours and supports as required to improve outcomes.

c. Quality, which means the system will:

- Be designed to reach or exceed current quality benchmarks and measurably improve learning outcomes.

d. Build the connections that matter for children's lives, which means the system will:

- Learn and be adaptive, building in mechanisms such as data collection, community input and support for professional development and research at every level of the system as part of always striving to do better.
- Be viewed by the State Government as a part of the backbone universal infrastructure which connects families to the services and supports needed for early child development.

In the next two sections, the Report will build out the picture of the different delivery approaches.

What would it look like to deliver three-year-old preschool only via government preschool? How many new preschools would we need? What would it cost to build those new preschools? How many new teachers, educators and other workers would be required? How do these answers change if preschool is only delivered as centre-based preschool and non-government preschool, or if preschool is delivered across all three settings?

The Report will also canvas some specific questions about the role of State Government in growing capacity of early childhood education and care, with particular reference to preschool. (Noting there will also be further discussion of this in the Final Report).

Once the landscape of different approaches has been painted, drawing on the principles identified above the Commission will nominate its preferred implementation approach.

This will then be followed by a discussion of key elements of that approach in relation to achieving universality, change management, investment in additional capacity, fees for parents, the funding model and the staging of delivery.

An overview of different delivery approaches for three-year-old preschool

The following section provides a high level overview of the three different delivery approaches for three-year old preschool, with a focus on physical capacity, workforce, capital and ongoing costs.

Physical capacity is critical to delivering three-year-old preschool, as is the workforce to support delivery.

We know that around 64 per cent of three-year-olds in South Australia already attend long day care for an average of 20.4 hours per week (noting families pay for 29.4 hours a week).¹⁹⁴

Capacity is not only about head counts or ratios, but the configuration of spaces needed to support children at age three. The Commission has heard from many stakeholders about the different developmental and support needs of three-year-olds, including spaces for rest and nappy changing facilities.¹⁹⁵

Capacity also speaks to questions of early childhood education and care availability and accessibility more broadly. The Commission has heard from a regional centre that was at capacity and struggling to offer a place to a child of two police officers who had newly arrived in the town.¹⁹⁶ We have also heard about so-called child care deserts, where no services exist. This lack of capacity gives rise to questions about the role of the market in responding and the role of government in areas of market failure.

For the Interim Report, the focus has been on understanding existing capacity for three-year-old preschool delivery across the government and non-government sectors and identifying the number of additional places and services required to support universal uptake.

In the Final Report, the Commission will also contemplate the role State Government should play in supporting the availability of early childhood education and care more generally.

Government preschool only

If the State Government delivered universal three-year-old preschool by guaranteeing every family a place in a government preschool, the modelling suggests there would be a need to build an additional 11,130 places across 126 new government preschools, with approximately 9,150 places supported from within existing spare capacity in government preschools.

These figures describe the capacity required to achieve a very high level of uptake of three-year-old preschool (97 per cent), whereas we know from the experience of four-year-old preschool that families are unlikely to take up places in government preschools at this rate.

Noting the decline in participation in government preschool over the last five years identified in Figure 7, it is somewhat difficult to make an assumption about the rate of demand from parents for a place in a government preschool.

Delivery via this model would require an additional 811 early childhood teachers, 1,217 educators and 152 other staff (directors). This is a significant task, given the overall preschool teacher workforce in South Australia is around 1,100.

The cost of capital to deliver the expanded and new capacity is estimated to be between \$127.4 and \$140.4 million. The State Government will need to provide recurrent funding of \$357.2 million in 2032 to government preschools to deliver this service. (All costs expressed in 2032 dollars).¹⁹⁷

Potential impacts on the availability of places in long day care

ACECQA requires educators at a ratio of 1:11 for children over three. The Commission notes that ratios and staffing requirements are a driver of cost in the long day care sector with greater costs incurred for younger children who require a higher child to educator ratio.

A service can effectively cross-subsidise younger enrolments with the lower costs of supporting older children, noting the Child Care Subsidy does not change according to the age of the child and it is very unusual for services to charge differentially based on age.

The reliance on older children in the typical long day care business model is borne out by the Child Care Subsidy data accessed as part of the sector mapping, with 26 per cent of all charged hours for long day care services being for three-year-olds, and 51 per cent of all charged hours being for three and four-year-olds.

There is a risk that these three and four-year-old enrolments reduce if children have access to a government preschool and therefore reduce their long day care enrolment.

Providers may then be less willing or able to enrol younger children if older children move to a different setting for preschool.

These concerns are part of a broader set of concerns expressed to the Commission about the impact on the viability of long day care providers of the movement of three-year-old children out into other settings for preschool.¹⁹⁸

Interestingly, there is limited evidence supporting this view in the sector mapping. In particular, it is notable that despite high rates of access to government preschool by children also attending long day care, the Child Care Subsidy data shows that hours purchased and attended are broadly the same between three-and-four-year-olds. In addition, services which report that many of their children are also attending a government preschool have similar rates of four-year-old attendance as those services where very few children attend a government preschool.

While the Commission has not encountered any research on parental choice explaining this, there are a number of plausible explanations and no doubt, for different families, there are very different reasons driving their choices. Some families may want more days of education and care than their current provider can offer them, so government preschool is helping them make up the hours they want. Other families may view preschool as

something ‘different’ from long day care, so they do not think of it as a replacement for what they get from the long day care. For still other families, lower cost government preschool may unlock additional hours of work that were not financially viable at the cost of a long day care place (e.g. once certain income or payment thresholds are met in the Child Care Subsidy Scheme).

Centre-based and non-government preschool only

The picture for delivering three-year-old preschool only via long day care and the non-government sector is somewhat different, because there are large numbers of three-year-olds already in long day care services.

From the sector mapping undertaken by the Royal Commission we know that while some services either offer an equivalent to a preschool program already, or are keen to expand, others are not. In addition, ‘spare’ capacity in the long day care sector is somewhat hard to predict in the context of likely increasing demand for places as a result of changes to the Child Care Subsidy.

Noting these challenges, the modelling suggests that if the State Government delivered three-year-old preschool by guaranteeing every family access to a funded preschool program delivered in a long day care centre or non-government preschool, the sector could support around 9,380 places within existing capacity.



An additional 1,030 places could be delivered by expanding existing services (through, for example, capital works or programming adjustments), while the remaining 9,950 places would be delivered across the equivalent of 60 new long day care centres and 11 new non-government preschools.

Again, this modelling describes the capacity required to achieve a very high rate of uptake of three-year-old preschool (97 per cent which may not be achieved, despite the measures discussed below in relation achieving universality.

(Note that under this approach, Aboriginal three-year-old children and children in care would remain eligible to receive a three-year-old program in government preschool.)

Delivery via this model would require an additional 631 early childhood teachers, 768 educators and 111 other staff (directors). Given the evidence previously canvassed from the Education Standards Board that on average there are 160 waivers at any time, primarily related to having an Early Childhood Teacher on site, this suggests a significant implementation risk for further consideration.

The cost of capital to deliver the expanded and new capacity is estimated to be between \$124.7 and \$137.4 million, although we expect that State Government would only bear a proportion of this cost.

The exact State Government contribution would depend on the business models and access to capital of the non-government sector, as well as State Government preferences for the capital arrangements of new services. There is further discussion of this below.

The recurrent funding that State Government would need to provide to long day care and non-government preschool services to deliver this is \$121.8 million in 2032.

Mixed approach to delivery

Finally, the Royal Commission has considered a mixed approach for delivery, which would optimise use of existing capacity across government and non-government settings, while reflecting likely patterns of parent demand.

In this approach, children attending long day care or non-government preschool when they are three will receive their State Government funded preschool program in that setting. Children not attending a service would receive their preschool in 'spare' capacity in either government preschools or long day care/non-government preschools, or, once that capacity is exhausted, in newly established services.

(Note that, again, under this approach, Aboriginal three-year-old children and children in care would remain eligible to receive a three-year-old program in government preschool.)

By 2032, the modelling suggests that children would access three-year-old preschool across different settings as follows:

- 14,550 children (71 per cent) receive their preschool in a funded program in long day care or non-government preschool
- 5,810 children (29 per cent) receive their preschool in a government preschool setting (in addition to the around 500 three-year-olds already accessing government preschools).

Again these figures describe the capacity required to deliver 97 per cent enrolment levels. The Commission's view is that demand for places under this scenario will be higher than under Scenario 1 or 2 (as this scenario better matches parent preferences for different kinds of preschool program) and so this 97 per cent assumption is closer to the likely level of enrolments.

To support this demand, once spare capacity is used throughout both settings, 880 places would be created by expanding existing services (through, for example, capital works and/or programming adjustments), while 4,860 new places would be created through the equivalent of 35 new services (30 long day care / non-government preschool and five government preschools).

Delivery via this model would require an additional 618 early childhood teachers, 813 educators and 112 other staff (directors).

The capital cost associated with increasing supply is estimated to be between \$63.1 and \$69.6 million, noting that as per the previous approach, there is a choice to be made about the proportion of this capital cost that is borne by the State Government.

The recurrent funding State Government will need to provide to service providers for this approach is \$190.3 million in 2032.

A mixed approach for delivery, with equity targeting. In addition to the mixed approach described above, the modelling also considers a version of mixed delivery where 1,000 new

places are commissioned in new, high-quality integrated services for children identified as at particular risk of developmental vulnerability, offering those children 30 hours preschool a week (per Recommendation 9).

The rationale for, and details of this approach, are discussed later in the report. For now, it is simply noted that under this approach, by 2032 the modelling suggests that children would access three-year-old preschool across different settings as follows:

- 14,360 children (70 per cent) receive their preschool in a funded program in long day care or non-government preschool
- 4,930 children (24 per cent) receive their preschool in a government preschool setting
- 1,080 children (5 per cent) receive 30 hours of preschool a week in a newly commissioned high-quality integrated service.

Delivery via this model would require an additional 660 early childhood teachers, 880 educators and 120 other staff (directors).

The capital cost associated with increasing supply is estimated to be between \$126.4 and \$138.9 million, noting not all will be borne by State Government.

The recurrent funding State Government will need to provide to service providers for this approach is \$212.2 million in 2032.

A note in relation to Recommendation 9 – access to more hours for three-year-olds who will most benefit

In Recommendation 9, the Commission has sought feedback on the targeting of an additional entitlement of up to 30 hours a week for both three-and-four-year-olds at risk of developmental delay.

Modelling has yet to be undertaken on the implications of this, beyond the increased entitlement for children receiving their preschool in a newly commissioned high quality integrated service.



Delivering increased supply—the role of State Government in setting up new services

The modelling identifies how many new preschool places are required over and above the spare capacity in the system to deliver universal access for three-year-olds.

The modelling also identifies the capital cost for building those new rooms and new services.

It does not, however, answer the question of how, exactly State Government should ensure new services are established.

In relation to long day care, for example, should State Government leave it to the market and assume that preschool funding is sufficient to drive a market-based supply response and encourage new providers to set up? (This may be a reasonable assumption in light of the likely increase in total demand for long day care as a result of planned and potential future expansions of the Child Care Subsidy).

Or if there is insufficient incentive for new long day care providers to enter the market, should State Government engage in some kind of a ‘reverse auction’? (A reverse auction is where the State seeks expressions of interest from providers interested in bringing on new supply and pays the lowest price to bring on new capacity.)

Such market-based approaches, however, assume that market principles are deeply embedded in the operations and ethos of early childhood education and care providers.

The Commission notes that this does not fit with how providers – for profit and not-for-profit – have represented their own thinking to the Commission, nor with the findings of the sector mapping that show single operator services in particular are disinclined to think about expansion, even if it might be in their economic interest.

The Commission notes the work in New South Wales and Victoria to reform preschool for three-and-four-year-olds and the significant investment by those State Governments to increase access to early childhood education and care.

This includes building and directly operating additional kindergartens and long day care centres, building facilities and then procuring a provider to operate them, as well as providing grants to providers to support them to increase capacity to accommodate three-year-old children.

The Victorian experience also suggests that there is an opportunity to create additional capacity with no or minimal capital investment, for example, through changes to operating hours (longer days to free up other days of the week) or converting spaces to support a different age cohort. This requires facilitation by the State Government that is embedded in deep, localised knowledge of the sector with support for change management. We return to this idea later.

The need to increase supply also prompts a different, and more fundamental, kind of question (either in government or non-government settings), relating to one of the principles in Recommendation 2—‘*That ... the State Government should be clear about the characteristics of the early childhood education and care system it wants to operate in South Australia and make decisions that support it.*’

The Commission has heard about the value of integrated services, for example, and notes that it has been urged to encourage investment in new integrated services to reshape the system towards a greater number of these sites being included.

It is widely agreed that bringing family supports to trusted places where children are engaging can be critical to combating barriers to access and engagement. Children’s Centres and early years hubs give children and families wider access to supports including playgroups, allied health and parenting programs.¹⁹⁹

Given the high value placed on integrated services by communities and practitioners, and the importance of the range of supports in a child’s first 1000 days, the role of integrated services in the early years will be examined in more detail in the Commission’s Final Report.

Findings

Currently, the State Government offers every four-year-old in South Australia a place in a government preschool for 12 hours a week, with the Commonwealth ‘topping up’ the hours offered to 15 hours per week.

The Royal Commission’s modelling suggests that there is a need to create between 5,740 and 11,130 new places to support universal preschool, depending on whether three-year-old preschool is delivered by government preschool only, long day care / non-government preschool only, or through a mixed approach.

The cost of capital for delivering these additional places ranges from \$63.1 million to \$138.9 million, depending on the delivery approach, noting that the proportion of the cost that is borne by the State Government will depend on additional choices in relation to stimulating supply.

There will be a need for between 618 and 811 additional early childhood teachers, noting there are around 1,100 early childhood teachers currently working in preschool programs. In addition there will be a need for between 768 and 1,217 additional educators (depending on the delivery approach), and between 111 and 152 additional staff in the form of directors.

The annual funding required from State Government to services in 2032 for delivery of three-year-old preschool ranges from \$121.8 million for non-government and centre-based preschool programs only through to \$357.2 million for government preschool only, with a mixed approach costing around \$190.3 to \$212.2 million.

The Royal Commission has received submissions and considered evidence relating to a number of different ways to increase supply of preschool places in the non-government sector, including those being canvassed by New South Wales and Victoria as part of their expansion of universal pre-prep.

These mechanisms include:

- the use of price signals to encourage supply (paying a price that supports either non-government preschool or long day care to bring on additional spaces)
- local brokerage of capacity by regionally based State Government employees, to support activity such as program changes and minor capital works
- State Government investments in either building and operating, or building and tendering out the provision of, new early childhood education and care services in areas of thin or failed markets.

The Commission has received submissions about the impact of three-year-old preschool on service business models, should offering three-year-old preschool lead to a decrease in enrolment in long day care. Currently, higher ratios are required for younger children under NQS, while child care subsidy arrangements do not change by child age. This makes provision of long day care to younger children relatively less attractive to providers.

Three-year-old preschool – a game changing investment in quality across the early childhood education and care sector

Some submissions have suggested that the long day care sector is best placed to support three-year-old preschool because of the facilities already in place, and the large number of three-year-olds already engaged in those settings.²⁰⁰

Others have suggested that government preschools are better placed to meet the needs of all children, including those from disadvantaged non-working families and children with disabilities.²⁰¹ The Commission has certainly heard evidence about the reluctance of some long day care services to cater to children with special needs.

Some have also contended that the highest quality delivery approach is in government preschools and that should therefore be the preferred approach.²⁰² The Commission has found that quality exists in all service types, and notes that over ten per cent of children already receive their State Government funded preschool entitlement in a long day care setting. However, the Commission accepts that quality

comparisons are difficult in current settings where there is a backlog in the assessment of long day care centres against applicable quality benchmarks.

The Commission has also heard evidence about the challenges of finding and retaining workforce in all parts of the sector. More will be examined in May and will be discussed in the Final Report.

However, based on what has been heard so far, we can conclude that the demand for early childhood education and care is growing and there are challenges ahead to ensure there is a suitably qualified and stable workforce in South Australia.

Commonwealth policy changes will increase affordability and therefore demand, and three-year-old preschool will only add pressure to the system.

Applying the themes and principles articulated earlier, the Commission recommends a **mixed approach to delivery for three-year-old preschool**.

First and foremost, this is because a mixed approach draws on the strengths of each sector and allows delivery of quality universal preschool to as many three-year-old children as possible in South Australia. Choosing between sectors and relying on one alone for delivery would undermine the commitment to embrace all children.

A system that relies solely on government preschool will struggle to achieve universal access without fundamental reform of the sessional nature of preschool, given the many demands on working parents and their interests in much more flexible patterns of access.

Similarly, a system that relies solely on centre-based and non-government preschool will ignore the particular experience and capabilities of the government preschool sector in providing high quality learning support for children experiencing disadvantage, noting that these are the families most commonly not accessing long day care.²⁰³ Government preschool is often the first interface for these families with the education and care system. There they can participate in high quality education, coupled with a very easy enrolment process, very low administrative overheads and a very low fee service, where non-payment is no barrier to ongoing participation.

Relying solely on centre-based preschool would also miss the opportunity to strengthen the valuable role of government preschools in regional and remote areas, where government preschools may be the only early childhood education and care provider and perform a crucial role in binding the community together.

Importantly, under the recommended approach, outcomes and expectations of services will be consistent and high across all settings, with support provided by State Government to match.



In recognition of the primary importance of quality, the Commission's recommended approach will raise quality across the entire sector and this fulfils the requirement for better quality articulated in the themes above.

On quality, it should be noted that in all of the approaches, the Deloitte model has not expanded the capacity of long day care services assessed as working towards the National Quality Standards but not at those standards. Given the Commission's focus on quality, one option could be to exclude offering a preschool program to children currently attending such services altogether. However, that would mean currently enrolled three year olds are still accessing a lower quality service. What may be more appropriate is to find a mechanism to ensure such services attain the National Quality Standards as quickly as possible. The Commission is seeking specific feedback on how best to remedy this quality deficit and will address this issue in its Final Report.

In line with the theme of South Australia learning and leading articulated above, it is only a mixed model which has the potential to change the current disconnected settings and services in preschool delivery into a joined up system which can best meet the needs of children and families.

Alongside School Readiness Funding in Victoria, South Australia will lead the nation by providing explicit, funded support to the holistic functions of early childhood education and care.

The Commission's recommended approach will ensure there are no winners or losers depending on where a child accesses their preschool.

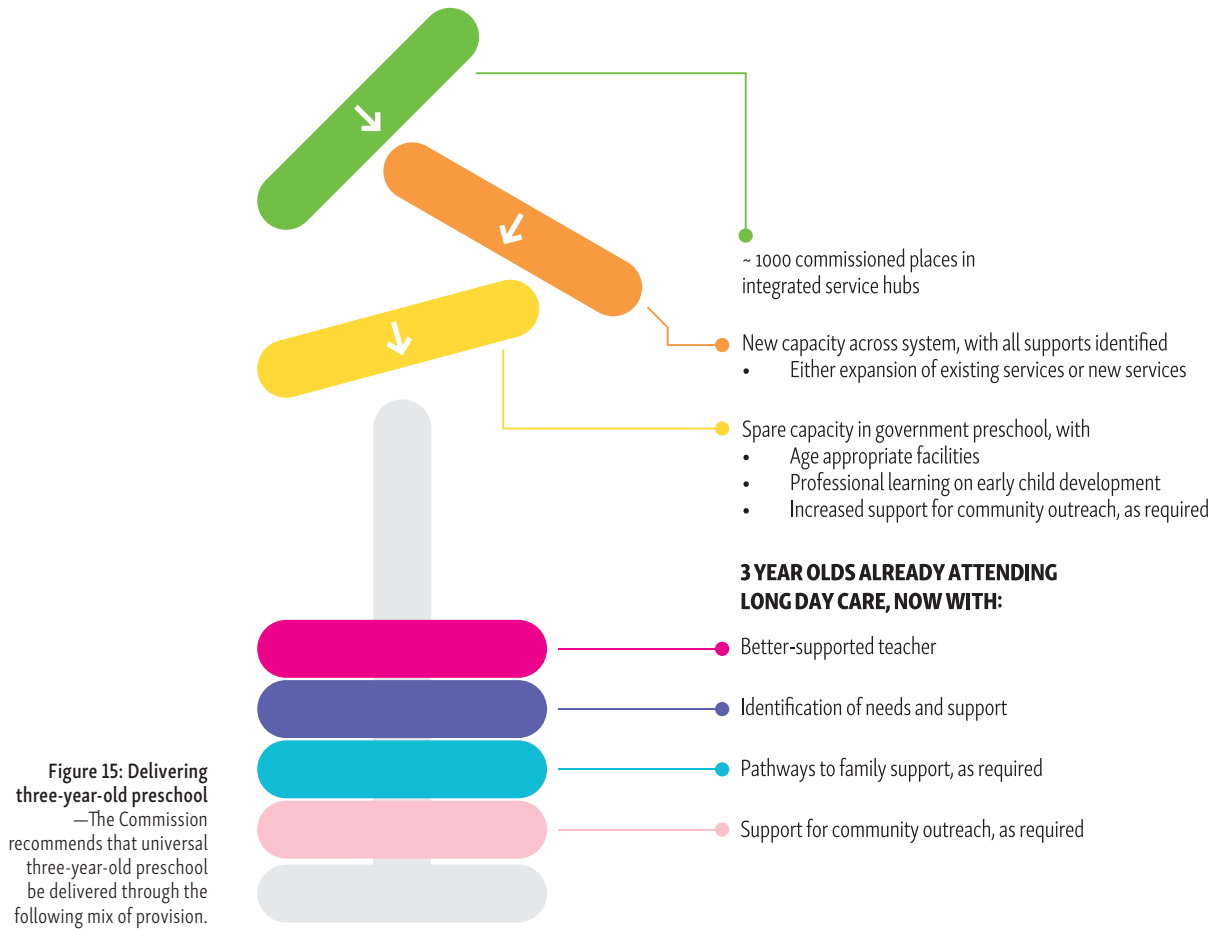
The Commission recognises that the recommended approach will also deliver some assurance to the long day care sector that it will not see a significant departure of three-year-old children, giving confidence for future planning. Equally, it may provide assurance to some government preschool directors that they will not necessarily have to significantly adapt their operating models to provide the full range of flexible services so clearly demanded by families, though the Commission will consider this further in its future work on OSHC equivalents for preschool.

However, neither of these is the driver or purpose behind this recommendation.

Rather the Commission has selected the mixed delivery option because it is best able to deliver the identified priorities articulated above, namely:

- a. **Embrace all children**
- b. **Fairness**
- c. **Quality**
- d. **Build the connections that matter for children's lives.**

The Commission wishes to clearly state that its recommendations come with genuine and challenging expectations for all services and their leadership, as well as teachers and educators. The extra investment contemplated in this Interim Report should flow only if it is met with reform zeal, a drive for continuous improvement and enduring commitments to high quality outcomes for all children.



The recommended approach in detail

The Commission recommends that universal three-year-old preschool be delivered through the following mix of provision.

Three-year-olds already in long day care or non-government preschool receive their preschool through that long day care or non-government preschool setting. Currently this is 64 per cent of all South Australian three-year-olds.

What will stay the same as the current approach to delivery of centre-based preschool

- As with the current four-year-old program, the program will be delivered by a degree-qualified early childhood teacher for a minimum duration of 15 hours per week, giving an entitlement to 600 hours per year (Recommendation 9).

What will change from the current approach to delivery of centre-based preschool

- This teacher will be given access to evidence-based tools to improve pedagogical approaches (Recommendation 6), specialised curriculum materials for three-and-four-year-olds (Recommendation 7), and have funded professional learning and planning time (see Recommendation 25 below).
- Teachers and educators will be supported through the provision of formative assessment tools as part of the preschool outcomes measure, so they can support a child's progress and engage in a process of reflection and adjustment (Recommendation 3).
- All educators and teachers will have access to professional learning on early child development, with a focus on broadening their understanding of the range of capabilities of three-and-four-year-olds (Recommendation 8).
- Per Recommendation 11 regarding layered supports, each individual child will be supported to receive their learning entitlement (including any adjustments required); with early identification of a child's developmental needs on site (e.g. by child development checks) and organised pathways to funded interventions. This would include providing those on site, with organised pathways to broader parental and community supports.

Additional capacity in government preschools²⁰⁴ will be offered on a priority basis to three-year-olds who are not already engaging in early childhood education and care. Modelling suggests this will accommodate 4,660 three-year-olds.

What will stay the same as the current

approach to delivery of government preschool

- As with the current government preschool program, the program will be delivered by a degree-qualified early childhood teacher, for a minimum duration of 15 hours per week, giving an entitlement to 600 hours per year (Recommendation 9), with access to funded layered supports (Recommendation 11) through existing department programs such as the Inclusive Education Support Program and Student Support Services, and the CAFHS preschool check.
- The early childhood teacher will continue to have access to evidence-based tools to improve pedagogical approaches (Recommendation 6), using curriculum material for three-and-four-year-olds (Recommendation 7), and with funded professional learning and planning time.

What will change from the current approach to delivery of government preschool

- Teachers and educators will be supported through the provision of formative assessment tools as part of the preschool outcomes measure, so they can support a child's progress and engage in a process of reflection and adjustment (Recommendation 3).
- All educators and teachers will have access to professional learning on early child development, with a focus on broadening their understanding of the range of capabilities of three-and-four-year-olds (Recommendation 8).

- Government preschools in

areas of high concentrations of developmental vulnerability will receive additional funding to reflect the increased requirement for case management, community outreach and the need to remove barriers to access for those communities (see Recommendation 25 below).

- Funding will be provided to those preschools welcoming three-year-old cohorts to ensure age-appropriate facilities are available (per Recommendation 26).

In areas of high developmental vulnerability, there will be place-based commissioning of integrated service hubs. In modelling this, the Royal Commission has relied upon a risk prediction model developed by BetterStart to identify nearly thirty communities where around 1,000 three-year-old preschool places would be commissioned (see breakout box p97).

These services would be co-designed with communities, delivering a place to support children and their families through preschool, other care (long day care, occasional care), and other family and allied health supports. This would deliver preschool places that bring families and children to a trusted space, with a focus on quality and integration. The level of funding provided would permit fee-free or very low fee access, per the current government preschool model.

Commissioning these new services

could be undertaken by the Office for the Early Years (Department for Education) in partnership with local government, non-government organisations and community representatives, as appropriate.

As part of the commissioning process, State Government would directly support the costs of change management/establishment, as well as minor or major capital works, and move health and family services on to the site.

Further discussion of the evidence to guide the commissioning, governance and composition of these integrated hubs will be discussed in the Final Report as part of the discussion regarding the first 1000 days.

In other areas, unmet demand will be met by a managed market response, matching parent demand with cost efficient increases in supply. The model suggests that 870 places would be created through physical expansions of eligible existing services, while 4,500 places would be created through the equivalent of 32 new services (3 government and 29 non-government).

A number of interlocutors familiar with the Victorian roll out of three-year-old kinder have noted that a well-resourced, locally based implementation team working on behalf of State Government can be very effective in prompting cost efficient increases in capacity through supporting services with programming changes, or very minor capital works.

The Department for Education has a regional architecture in place which could be leveraged in support of this work, as well as in support of driving quality improvement at the local level in both government and non-government settings.

Overall, it is anticipated that this approach will lead to children attending settings in the following proportions:

- 14,360 children (70 per cent) receive their preschool in a funded program in long day care or in a non-government preschool setting
- 4,930 children (24 per cent) receive their preschool in a government preschool setting
- 1,080 children (5 per cent) receive their preschool in a newly commissioned high-quality integrated service.

Quality requirements

As noted at the beginning of Part 2, the enablers of quality may look different in different settings. For example, early childhood teachers in standalone long day care services do not necessarily have regular teacher to teacher interactions to support their professional practice. An important enabler of quality in this context might be the ability to access a professional network of other early childhood teachers.

Noting the mixed delivery approach recommended in this Report, the Commission is of the view that the State Government must explicitly identify and support enablers of quality in different settings.

On a related note, the Early Learning and Care Council of Australia (ELACCA) has made submissions about the opportunity to bring programs such as the 'kinder tick' in Victoria and the 'kindy tick' in Queensland to South Australia.²⁰⁵ ELACCA argues that this will help parents and caregivers understand where they can find an approved preschool program in long day care and other services outside government preschools. Because the branding would only be available to those services operating within the framework established by the South Australian government, this would be another lever for promoting quality provision through family demand. The Commission notes that the Victorian and Queensland programs have been implemented in a context where long day care provision of preschool is much more widely employed (see the discussion in Part 1 'Comparing South Australia's early childhood education and care system to other states') and is mindful of the need to consider how such an accreditation might be received by the community in South Australia. The Commission is therefore specifically seeking submissions on this question.

The Commission will seek comment from the relevant agencies, and invites responses, prior to further discussion in the Final Report.

Recommendation 18

That universal three-year-old preschool be delivered through the following mix of provision. Three-year-olds already in long day care or non-government preschool receive their preschool through that long day care or non-government preschool setting;

- Additional capacity in government preschools be offered on a priority basis to three-year-olds that are not already engaging in early childhood education care;
- In areas of high developmental vulnerability, there be place-based commissioning of integrated service hubs;
- In other areas, unmet demand be met by managed market response, matching parent demand with cost efficient increases in supply. This should be facilitated by locally based implementation team working on behalf of State Government. Following the completion of the roll out, consideration could be given to making this function ongoing, to provide ongoing stewardship across the early childhood education and care sector.

Recommendation 19

That the State Government work with the sector to articulate agreed markers of preschool program quality in different settings.

These markers should be included in funding arrangements, in administrative arrangements and/or supported through programs, as appropriate, from the beginning of the rollout of three-year-old preschool.

Recommendation 20

The State Government provide access to the following supports and resources in all settings:

- Evidence-based tools for improving pedagogical approaches (per Recommendation 6)
- Curriculum material for use in three-and-four-year-old preschool (per Recommendation 7), noting that engagement with the resources should be a part of the State Government's funding agreement with non-government services
- Professional learning for early childhood educators and teachers on early child development (per Recommendation 8)
- Funding to support access to professional learning (including release time) and sufficient planning time for Early Childhood Teachers.

Recommendation 21

That the State Government note the Commission seeks further submissions on the proposal to operate a 'kindy tick' program to publicly communicate to families where a State Government accredited preschool program is operating.

Recommendation 22

That as the Commonwealth considers a broad early years reform agenda, it also consider introducing differential pricing in the Child Care Subsidy for younger children with higher ratios.

While the Commission's conclusion on the mixed model has not been driven by the potential impacts on three-year-old attendance at long day care, the Commission has received evidence about the cross subsidy older children provide for younger children. For State Governments contemplating reforms for three-year-old this is a pricing/cost issue, as it is for families. Removal of the implicit subsidy by changing the proportion of three and four-year-olds attending without reform to Child Care Subsidy would have negative consequences on the viability of the provision of places for younger children.

THE BETTERSTART RISK PREDICTION MODEL

The use of advanced data analytics in government service delivery is an emerging area of policy and practice. The Commission has heard examples of the power and use of ‘big data’ in policy making and will discuss this further in the Final Report.

The scenario modelling undertaken for the Interim Report provides an interesting lens on the issues with which governments need to grapple.

Some definitions

Data matching—comparing different data sets, and identifying where the data refers to the same individual or entity

Deidentification—a process which means that a person’s identity is not able to be ascertained from a data set

Deidentified data linkage—bringing together information from different sources in a way that allows different data held about the same person or entity to be connected by a process of data matching, without holding the identifying information about that person or entity (for example, name or address)

Identified data linkage—connecting different data sets to build a more complete picture of an individual, such that the user of the data set is able to see the personal details of the individual someone (for example, name or address)

Administrative data—data that government collects through what they do, for example a service interaction with government is held by that agency

The Royal Commission asked the BetterStart group to develop a risk prediction model for children who will go on to be developmentally vulnerable, using 23 routinely recorded administrative data points, most of which are known around the time of birth.

In understanding what the model tells us, it helps to understand a few key terms.

The **risk threshold** for the model defines what proportion of the population is categorised as being considered at high risk of developmental vulnerability on one or more domains. The risk threshold can be set at any level (for example, the top 5 per cent or the top 20 per cent) depending on various considerations such as population reach, resourcing, or the cost of false positives or false negatives. These costs could

include social costs such as stigma, or direct financial costs of services. The following measures such as sensitivity and positive predictive value will change, as the risk threshold changes. The risk threshold of the BetterStart risk prediction model identifies the top 20 per cent of children identified as at highest risk of developmental vulnerability.

The sensitivity of the model is how well it finds the children who go on to be developmentally vulnerable. When the risk threshold is set to the top 20 per cent, the sensitivity of the BetterStart model at a state wide level is 38.5 per cent. This means, if there are 100 children who go on to be developmentally vulnerable, the model correctly predicts 38 of them.

But the model identifies more children than those who go on to be developmentally vulnerable. This is the positive predictive value (PPV), which for the state wide BetterStart model is 43.5 per cent. This means, of 100 children predicted by the model to be at-risk, 43 of them will go on to be developmentally vulnerable.

In some geographic areas²⁰⁶ the model works better at predicting children who will go on to be developmentally vulnerable (and conversely, in other areas, it doesn’t work as well).

- In 28 areas, covering 26.4 per cent of the State’s developmentally vulnerable children, the model predicts more than 50 per cent of the children who will go on to be developmentally vulnerable (sensitivity > 50 per cent). And, of the children predicted by the model, on average more than half go on to be developmentally vulnerable (PPV > 50 per cent),²⁰⁷ so you are potentially offering developmental support to 2 children for every 1 child who would need it.
- Whereas for 42 areas, covering 18 per cent of the State’s developmentally vulnerable children, the model predicts fewer than 20 per cent of the children who will go on to be developmentally vulnerable (sensitivity <20 per cent). And, of those children identified by the model, on average less than 1 in 3 will go on to be developmentally vulnerable (PPV < 30.8 per cent).²⁰⁸ So in some geographical areas, you are potentially offering developmental support to 3 children for every 1 child who would need it.

One use of the data is for service commissioning.

Recommendation 18 states that: *“In areas of high developmental vulnerability, there will be place-based commissioning of integrated service hubs.”*

In modelling this recommendation, we have used the BetterStart risk prediction model in a forward looking way, commissioning new services in the 28 areas where the model works very well.

If these new services can enrol every child in the area identified by the model, this will reach approximately 16.6 per cent of the children state-wide who would go on to be developmentally vulnerable.

This makes sense from the perspective of seeking to maximise the efficiency of government investment—we are targeting new commissioned services where we know it will make a big difference.

But it also means the scenario does not commission new services in a number of areas where we know there are quite high levels of developmental vulnerability but where the BetterStart risk prediction model does not perform as well at predicting which children will go on to be developmentally vulnerable.

When it comes to implementation, the government would need to consider the balance between knowing you are efficiently targeting the population at risk and the broader needs of individual communities.

For example, Mt Gambier-West is included in the 28 areas where the model works very well (sensitivity 50 per cent, PPV 100 per cent). However, Mt Gambier-West has much lower levels of developmental vulnerability as a community (14.3 per cent) compared to Mt Gambier-East (22.3 per cent). Mt Gambier-East is not included in the 28 areas, however, because the risk prediction model works less well in Mt Gambier-East (sensitivity 40.7 per cent, PPV 50 per cent)—although it still works very well.

In making choices about areas for service commissioning, the government would clearly need to make judgments and not simply apply a rule.

Use of this kind of risk prediction model in a forward looking way also raises some practical and ethical matters to consider.


The BetterStart data is de-identified. If government wants to make sure that the children at risk attend the new commissioned services, then there are a number of approaches in how to implement this including:

1. Make the new services universal in areas with high levels of risk of developmental vulnerability. This is a non-stigmatising, universal base that is targeting areas of highest potential need, but is least likely to find the right children.
2. Use the modelling work to identify a set of eligibility criteria through which children and families can be identified by other professionals (e.g. postnatal health system interactions) and referred to the new services.
3. Use identified data to encourage the families of at risk children to connect to these services.

This last option opens out more questions: Who should have access to that identified data? Would families invited to use such services view the invitation as stigmatising? Would service providers (unconsciously or otherwise) lower expectations of the children identified by the model?

Using the BetterStart risk prediction model in this kind of forward looking way for service commissioning or targeting is only one potential use of that sort of data analytics and may not be the best one.

Another way of using the BetterStart risk prediction model might be to look backwards and see which services, in general, children identified to be at risk are attending. The data in the model could then remain de-identified, but services providing support to at risk children could be the recipients of extra support or priority access to services.



Monitoring our progress towards universal participation

In South Australia, the rate of enrolment in preschool in the year before school is around 90.1 per cent (although not all of these enrolments are in State Government funded preschool programs).²⁰⁹ This is above the national average of 87.2 per cent, but well below states like Western Australia and Tasmania where provision is much more tightly connected to the school system (recalling that just over a quarter of South Australia's government preschools are school-based preschools).

However, this kind of reporting on preschool enrolment is done annually, in arrears and at a high level of aggregation (the above figure shows 2021 enrolments, and was published in 2023, two years after the fact).

One of the challenges for policy makers is understanding which children are not attending preschool with sufficient time to do something about it.

As previously discussed, the Commission has heard from a wide range of experts and practitioners about the value of linked, system wide data to show progress, highlight areas of need and vulnerability, and support a system that can learn and evolve.²¹⁰

The Commission has had the privilege of accessing a range of data sources not usually available to State government policy makers. Of note, the Commonwealth Child Care Subsidy dataset has provided insight into patterns of participation in early childhood education and care which State government policy makers do not normally see.

However, because this Commonwealth data has not been linked to other data sets available to it (notably government preschool enrolments, but also, for example, the BetterStart risk prediction model), the

Commission has not been able to identify with certainty which children are currently missing out.

The recent declines in enrolment in government preschool, and in preschool more generally, should prompt more active efforts to enrol under-served families (see, for example, the discussion in Part 1 on opportunities to trial different methods for engaging those families).

Using timely de-identified linked data sets would allow state governments to identify with precision areas of need for services and supports, assist service design and community engagement. Child Care Subsidy data will be an important input into this dataset.

Recommendation 23

That the Commonwealth Government ensure the State Government has regularly updated access to Child Care Subsidy data to support system design and insight into system wide participation.

The State Government should conduct an annual reconciliation of enrolment data from all available sources (including Commonwealth Child Care Subsidy records) against State Government population projections to identify where children have not enrolled in four-year-old preschool to inform local activity to enrol children. The State Government should publish this data at a disaggregated level.



Reducing barriers to enrolment

The South Australian community's connection to government preschool is strong. This is apparent from the fact of historically and consistently high enrolment in the year before school (noting recent declines) and in the range of community supports that preschools offer to their children and families.

The Terms of Reference of this Commission reference the challenge for working families presented by government preschool hours. Through the community survey (Appendix 3) submissions, and forums with parents and caregivers, we know that there is a demand for preschool models that support working families, including approaches such as Out of (Pre)school Hours Care (OSHC).

This report has already noted a small number of government preschools that may have access to OSHC (for example, when co-located on a school site).

Centre-based preschool can support longer hours, although not all long day care services offer a preschool program, with significant challenges in attracting degree qualified staff being a major driver of this.

In parts of South Australia, particularly regional and remote areas, access to early childhood education and care is limited by a lack of any suitable services (government preschool plus OSHC or long day care). At its recent

hearing into early childhood education and care accessibility, the Commission heard about child care deserts, as well as challenges in facilitating universal access to OSHC (including for preschool aged children). These issues will be considered in the Final Report.

Policy settings of the Commonwealth also impact on access to early childhood education and care, including preschool. The Commission has received submissions and heard from many stakeholders about the role that the Child Care Subsidy Activity Test plays in limiting access to long day care for children who are from very disadvantaged or disengaged families.²¹¹

While changes will commence in July 2023 for Aboriginal children, increasing access to at least 36 hours per fortnight, other children from families where parents who are not engaged in recognised activities are unable to access more than 24 hours per fortnight of subsidised care.

The Commission and its Expert Advisory Group agree that this outcome does not support the best interests of those vulnerable children, who may in fact require more than 15 hours a week of early childhood education and care to improve their developmental outcomes and predispositions to learning.

A universal offering of preschool for three-and-four-year old South Australians is a significant investment in the state's future. However, in order to deliver universality, there are efforts to be made to promote enrolment and attendance by children who experience vulnerability or who are not currently engaging in early childhood education and care.

The Commission has heard from experts, practitioners and families about the barriers families face in accessing early childhood education and care. Professor Goldfeld and Associate Professor Jordan have told the Commission about the importance of outreach and engagement to make centres welcoming places for families. In Associate Professor Jordan's project with highly disadvantaged families in Melbourne, services actively reached out to families to build relationships and encourage participation.²¹²

For families with low levels of engagement, there is an additional effort needed to ensure children are able to participate. The Commission has heard views about the importance of cultural safety in early childhood education and care settings for Aboriginal children and children from other culturally diverse backgrounds, where educators value diversity, and engage with families.

Professor Goldfeld's research includes questions around barriers to and facilitators of participation and has found that barriers include costs (direct and indirect), transport, views about maternal roles and child readiness, and families not being aware of the benefits or knowing how to access early childhood education and care.²¹³

Professor Goldfeld's evidence suggested that the actions required to support under-served communities include:

- Skilled staff, cultural inclusivity, communication about benefits, well-trained educators, and good communication with families,
- Reducing both direct and indirect (e.g. transport) service costs for families,
- Increasing flexibility in program formatting so participation can be coordinated with the demands of work and other family responsibilities,
- More effectively promoting the benefits of play-based learning in formal early childhood education and care settings,
- Changing attitudes about maternal roles and child readiness to participate in early childhood education and care.

Recommendation 24

That the Commonwealth Government extend changes to the Child Care Subsidy Activity Test to include all families experiencing deep disadvantage and low rates of engagement in early childhood education and care.

Recommendation 25

That, to support universal enrolment in three-year-old preschool, the State Government invest in the following for both government and non-government services:

- Direct support to services for indirect cost reduction (for example, transport) where required to enable economically disadvantaged families to have their child attend
- Direct investment in services to support community outreach in areas with a lack of connection to early childhood education, as well as supporting communication
- Targeted fee relief where fees are a barrier to enrolment and/or attendance (to be available to families accessing preschool in any setting)



Supporting the change

Assumptions around willingness to offer three-year-old preschool have been made in the Commission's modelling, based largely around the non-government sector survey.

The sector survey conducted by Deloitte Access Economics on behalf of the Commission asked long day care providers to indicate their level of interest in providing three-year-old preschool.

- 81 per cent of those surveyed indicated they are interested in offering three-year-old preschool —63 per cent were 'very interested' and 18 per cent 'interested'
- Large providers (operating more than eight sites) were the most likely to indicate a strong interest in delivering a three-year-old preschool program.

Notably, almost half of survey respondents indicated that they already provide a program to their three-year-old children that meets the current definition of preschool (a program delivered by a degree-qualified teacher). Most of those were small-medium providers.

Of all providers who responded, only a small number (six per cent) indicated they could not convert their existing three-year-old program into preschool.

Expanding a service offering must ensure appropriate supports to services of all sizes.

Services indicated that influencing factors on their willingness and ability to offer three-year-old preschool would include funding, available places, space and demand, and workforce.

Similarly, the Department for Education has indicated the critical considerations for government preschool are capacity, infrastructure, workforce and funding.²¹⁴ Preschool Directors have suggested that infrastructure, workforce (including teachers as well as allied health and behaviour support), amended fee models and piloting will all support rollout.²¹⁵

The Commission has already recommended that the preferred implementation approach involve well-resourced, locally based implementation teams working on behalf of State Government.

The local implementation teams should be mindful that larger organisations will find it easier to make the changes required to deliver the three-year-old program and ensure that smaller community providers, which play an important and valued role in the sector, are not crowded out.

Following the completion of the roll out, consideration could be given to making this function ongoing, and thereby providing ongoing stewardship across the early childhood education and care sector.

This is an opportunity to build 'system-ness' into the early child education and care system by having local mechanisms for coordinating activity across current silos and boundaries, with a particular focus on improving access and quality (e.g. government / non-government, preschool / long day care etc).

Investment in additional capacity

The Commission has modelled where additional capital works, minor and major might be needed across government and non-government providers.

Government preschools

The State Government has advised the Commission that, concurrent with this Royal Commission process, and to ensure it is well placed to respond to the Commission's recommendations, it is auditing preschool infrastructure. This will build a more comprehensive picture of additional capacity in government preschools than is currently available to the Commission.

(Note the Commission's position is that additional capacity should be defined by reference to the physical capacity of the site, and not by reference to internal enrolment caps. It should also include consideration of the opportunity to release additional capacity through low cost minor capital works and/or programming.)

In addition to capital works, there are also programming changes that might create capacity. While the Commission has received submissions about the need to change the sessional format of government preschool to better reflect the needs of working families, at this stage, the Commission has not interrogated the opportunity this might unlock by creating capacity.

The Commission notes, however, that moving to a configuration of two longer days per week as part of broader programming reform would unlock additional capacity in the government preschool system.

It is the view of the Commission that any additional capacity, or capacity that can be easily realised, should be made available and used for additional days for three and four-year-olds identified as likely to benefit from that increased dosage (per Recommendation 9) — (Note the cost of this has not been included in the modelling at this stage.)

The State Government's audit is also likely to find that in order to accept three-year-old children, capital investment is needed to ensure facilities are appropriate (such as for nappy changing).

The Commission notes that government preschools and Children's Centres often go the extra mile to connect with under-served families, and work in the multi-disciplinary way the Commission recognises as a hallmark of best practice in preschool delivery.

As part of the capital refurbishment that will be required, there is an opportunity for government to look at how it invests in social capital. For example, capital upgrades in government preschools should prioritise the professional space required to support multi-disciplinary approaches, including confidential meeting spaces and sufficient space for teacher and educator programming and reflection.



The non-government sector

As part of the intent to lift quality for all children regardless of setting, the Commission recommends that any funding for infrastructure in the non-government sector is allocated under a quality regime that prioritises services who meet quality expectations.

This might include services that meet or exceed NQS ratings, demonstrate investment in their workforce, or who are engaging with vulnerable or hard to reach children.

The Commission is also mindful that access to capital is variable across the sector. Not all non-government providers will have the access to funding to expand in response to the reforms. Consistent with the principle articulated in Recommendation 2 (f), government will need to be mindful of the impact on the overall characteristics of the sector to the South Australian community when considering how it might invest.

In particular, the Commission has heard that not-for-profit standalone community run services, which comprise about a quarter of the long day care system, will not have the ability to access capital funding for expansion. Many of these operate in older facilities

on a peppercorn lease arrangement (having benefited in earlier generations from State and Commonwealth government investment in this kind of social infrastructure). They have volunteer management committees that may find the prospect of capital raising or debt financing daunting.

The sector mapping undertaken by the Commission noted the high performance of these not-for-profit standalone community run services in terms of workforce continuity and conditions in these services. This suggests an interest in supporting those standalone or other small providers to access capital for growth.

The Commission is aware that Government would need to establish a clear set of guidelines to support any allocations of capital or concessional capital financing.

Some of these issues will be further discussed in the Final Report, as part of an overall discussion of the State Government's role in promoting accessibility of early childhood education and care.

Recommendation 26

That the State Government audit and assess existing government preschool infrastructure with a view to ensuring investment is prioritised in areas including:

- a. Appropriate spaces and facilities for three-year-old enrolments
- b. Multi-disciplinary team approaches (space for meetings, confidential discussions, and outreach services)
- c. Room to support directors, teachers and educators to appropriately reflect on and review practices and programs for three and four-year-old children.

Recommendation 27

That State Government support for additional capacity through investment in capital works (minor or major) be predicated on the nature and quality of the early childhood education and care system it envisions. Investment in additional capacity should prioritise services including those that:

- a. Meet or exceed National Quality Standard ratings;
- b. Can demonstrate investment in workforce (through staff retention / low turnover, supported quality professional learning)
- c. Have demonstrated an ability to enrol children from hard to reach or vulnerable communities
- d. Are operated by a community management committee, making it less likely to be able to access capital.

Fees for parents

Government preschool fees are generally set by the governing bodies (centre directors or school principals and parent representatives) and charged per term. They can range from \$15 per term up to \$320 per term, with an average of \$122 per term for standalone preschools.²¹⁶

Fees are not compulsory, and debts are not recovered from families who do not pay. The department allows centre directors to reduce or waive fees for families who are unable to pay to ensure children continue to attend.²¹⁷

This approach means that currently the school card scheme²¹⁸ does not apply to preschools, although the Commission notes that the Preschool Directors Association advocates for the school card in preschools to support participation.²¹⁹ Fees and fund raising are a supplement for government preschool funding. Funds are required for staffing, operating costs and other elements that might include additional complexities in children attending the site.

In long day care settings, fees will be set by a service, subsidised by Child Care Subsidy with the gap met by parents. This varies across sites.



The non-government sector mapping found that mean hourly fees range from \$10.76 in standalone providers up to \$11.67 in small-medium providers, with some variation also seen across for profit (\$11.48), not for profit (\$10.80) and non-government school settings (\$11.65). For those settings offering preschool with universal access funding from the State Government, some fees may be subsidised further.²²⁰

New South Wales and Victoria have recently committed to offering universally 'fee free' kindergarten or kinder via payments designed to reduce the out of pocket expenses for families.

The Commission's modelling for South Australia indicates that should the State commit to low cost / free preschool regardless of setting, the responsibility for costs will shift from parents. Here, it is important to note that under the Commission's recommended implementation approach, over half of children who are not already enrolled in long day care at age three will receive their three-year-old preschool in a government preschool or newly commissioned high-quality integrated service.

Putting in place arrangements like those in New South Wales and Victoria would cost the State Government between \$29.4 and \$62.0 million per annum, with the majority of this benefit going to families who are able to meet their child care fees.²²¹ For this reason, the Commission prefers instead an approach of targeted fee-free relief (per Recommendation 25), which has been built into the modelling of costs presented in this report.

This is not to say that the Commission views cost as unimportant in driving access to early childhood education and care more broadly, and this may be discussed further in the Final Report in relation to the role early childhood education and care can play in the first 1000 days. However, the Commission is mindful that the Commonwealth is the primary funder of the long day care sector, and that in the current distribution of policy responsibilities and functions, affordability remains squarely in the Commonwealth's remit, and will be a significant area of investigation in the Productivity Commission inquiry underway.

Recommendation 28

That the current approach to parent fees in the government preschool and long day care and non-government preschool sectors be adopted for three-year-old preschool delivery, noting the targeted fee relief recommended at Recommendation 25.

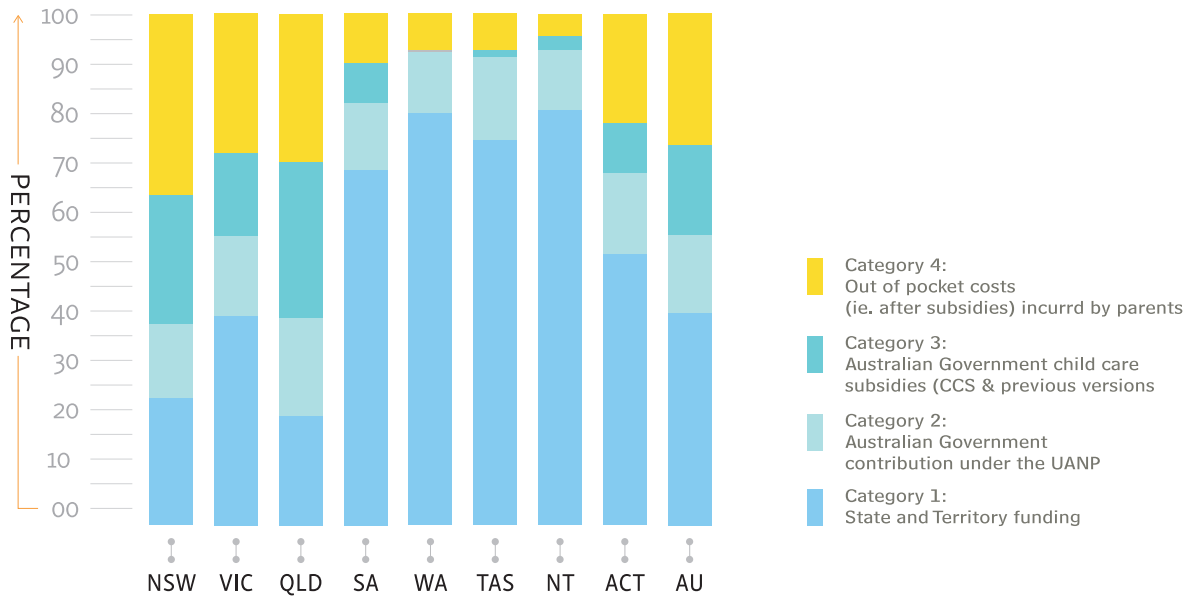
Newly commissioned high-quality integrated services will provide fee-free or very low fee access.



Figure 16: Estimated contribution of funding to preschool across jurisdictions

Estimated contribution of funding to preschool programs for 600 hours for children in state-specific Year Before Full time Schooling (YBFS) across jurisdictions

Source: Reproduced from Nous Group (2020) *Universal Access National Partnership Review: Final Review Report*, pp. 30-31



A national approach to funding for preschool?

Current funding of 600 hours of preschool per year in the year before school in South Australia is predominantly provided by the State Government, with a smaller contribution through the Preschool Reform Agreement, Child Care Subsidy and parents.

Figure 16 shows the estimated sources of funding for preschool in different states and territories for four-year-old preschool.

These reflect the very different delivery approaches in various states, with Western Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territory, in particular, having very little preschool delivered in long day care settings (which are eligible for Child Care Subsidy), while New South Wales and Queensland have a lot.

South Australia sits closer to Western Australia and Tasmania with around 80 per cent of delivery being in government preschools, while Victoria sits closer to New South Wales and Queensland, although a significant proportion of their preschool is still delivered in sessional kinder that is not eligible for Child Care Subsidy.

Under the Commission's recommended approach, three-year-old preschool delivery will look more like that of New South Wales and Queensland, reducing this funding disparity somewhat.

However, noting that there is no equivalent national agreement providing Commonwealth funding for preschool two years before school, the per child cost of government three-year-old preschool to the State Government will grow.

The Commission has undertaken internal analysis that suggests the different distribution of preschool service types leads to a funding inequity between the states of an estimated \$226m.

That is, if all states and territories had the same proportion of preschool enrolments receiving Child Care Subsidy as Queensland and New South Wales, families in these states would receive \$226m more from the Commonwealth, displacing \$226m in expenditure by state governments. For South Australia, this would equate to approximately \$35.5m per annum.

While this analysis is stylised, it speaks to the opportunity for states and territories to open a dialogue with the Commonwealth about rationalising the confusing and overlapping funding arrangements for the preschool sector that vary state by state.

	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA	SA	TAS	ACT	NT	Total/Ave.
Estimated proportion of YBFS preschool enrolments covered by Child Care Subsidy ²²²	64%	41%	63%	3%	21%	5%	28%	15%	46%
Estimated proportion of YBFS preschool enrolments covered by Child Care Subsidy									64%
Number of children required to receive Child Care Subsidy to match NSW & Qld proportion	0	17,724	0	20,519	8,182	3,406	2,034	1,640	53,505
Average Cth subsidy paid to services for 600hrs of long day care in that state (Sep 2021) (\$/child)	4,151	4,332	4,122	4,249	4,333	4,049	4,002	3,289	4,193
Additional Cth funding required to match NSW & Qld CCS coverage (\$m)	0.0	76.8	0.0	87.2	35.5	13.8	8.1	5.4	226.8

Figure 17. Estimated Commonwealth funding required to equalise Child Care Subsidy access for children in preschool, 2021

Source: Internal Royal Commission analysis, using Australian Bureau of Statistics (2023) Preschool Education; 2021 Census TableBuilder; Commonwealth Department for Education (2023) - Royal Commission data request; Productivity Commission (2023) Report on Government Services.

One option would be to frame the role of the states as one of supporting quality, and the ability for early childhood education and care services to form the backbone of an early child development system (for example, by funding connection to health and social supports which are often state government funded).

The Commonwealth's role would then be to support accessibility, with a significant focus on cost reduction for families.

This Interim Report makes a range of recommendations that would commit the South Australian Government to this path, such as increasing funding to the regulator to drive quality (Recommendations 13 and 14); sector neutral investments in tools, professional learning and resources (Recommendations 20); and nation-leading funding for additional supports, including funding and recognising in a sector neutral way the role of early childhood education and care in providing holistic support to families and children beyond learning and care (Recommendations 11 and 29).

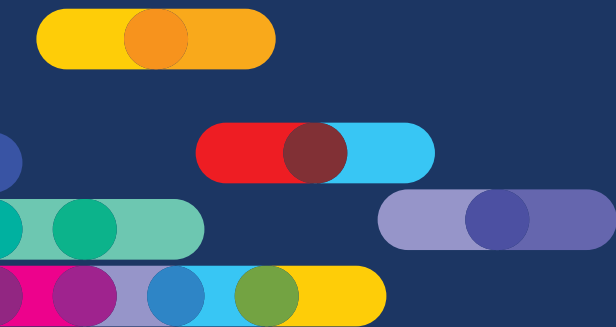
The Commission will watch with interest progress of the Productivity Commission inquiry.

Findings

Royal Commission modelling suggests that if the Commonwealth provided Child Care Subsidy to the same proportion of four-year-olds in South Australia as it does in received Child Care Subsidy funding from the Commonwealth for the same proportion of four-year-olds as New South Wales and Queensland, then the South Australian government could reduce expenditure on preschool by \$35.5m per annum.

The complexity of different funding arrangements between jurisdictions and across service types is a barrier to the early childhood education and care sector operating as a 'backbone' universal infrastructure for early child development.

There is an opportunity for States, Territories and the Commonwealth to revisit their roles and responsibilities, including funding, in relation to early childhood education and care, in light of the Productivity Commission inquiry, as well as significant new state government investments in three-year-old preschool.



Getting the funding to services right

Government preschools operate under a well-established formula with the Resource Entitlement Statement (RES), along with access to supports for children with additional needs (the largest of these are described in Part 1). There are also loadings for remoteness or cohort complexity based on enrolment numbers.

State Government funding for long day care and non-government preschool programs is provided as a contribution towards the cost of employing a degree qualified Early Childhood Teacher to deliver the four-year-old program. The current price paid to non-government services under the Preschool Reform Agreement includes weightings according to the SEIFA index in which the long day care is located, and ranges from \$1,250 per child in a service in the highest socio-economic area, to \$2,530 per child in a service in the lowest socio-economic area.

In addition, the current model includes specific pricing to encourage provision to priority cohorts, notably: a remote area subsidy of \$610 per child; a targeted child subsidy of \$1,890 per annum (for Aboriginal children, health care card children, and children on various visas); and a recognised disability subsidy of \$3,140. Overall, the average per capita price paid is around \$2,000.

The Commission has developed a cost model to reflect the broader definition of preschool in Recommendation 11, which includes a child's learning entitlement (including any adjustments required), identification of and funded interventions to support a child's developmental needs, and organised pathways to broader parental and community supports.

Other recommendations that have been made throughout the Report which impact cost of service delivery include Recommendation 20 (access to professional learning including release time and sufficient planning time for Early Childhood Teachers) and Recommendation 25 (support to services for indirect cost reduction, community outreach and targeted fee relief).

The modelling undertaken by the Commission has included the cost of supporting services to meet those recommendations, taking the average per capita price paid to long day care providers closer to \$3600.

Further efforts, however, should be made to understand those unfunded costs that are hard to count; outreach, community engagement, liaison with family support networks, as well as those that are easier to quantify such as ad hoc fee relief and transport.

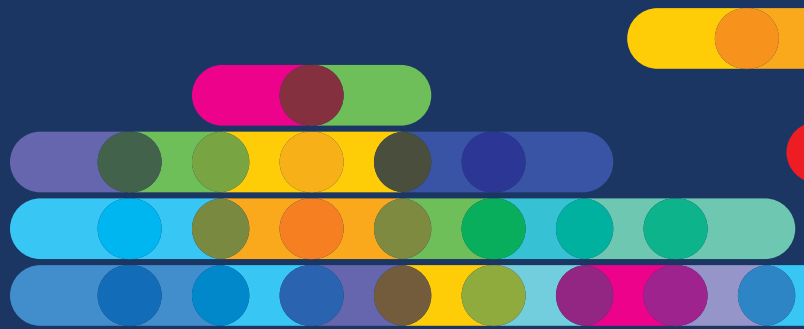
Funding models need to be simple and predictable, and it is not the intent of the Commission to add an administrative burden to the already high workloads of leaders in either setting. The funding formula should be as simple as possible and not require onerous reporting and acquittal.

The South Australian Government should carefully consider how to use data linkage, regulatory visits and other mechanisms to support accountability prior to requiring additional reporting. This data should be used to ensure the system learns while phasing in and adjusts where necessary, including to provide greater support in disadvantaged communities.

The Commission notes that a per capita funding amount is not always the right mechanism. In particular, the Commission is interested in the idea of base funding provision for providers in areas of high concentrations of developmental vulnerability, to reflect the increased case management, community outreach and removal of barriers to access required for those communities.

It should also be noted that at this stage, the Commission has not modelled the increase in costs associated with its recommendations to the four-year-old cohort, although it intends that these recommendations are applied to both three and four-year-old preschool. The Commission has also not modelled at this stage the second round effect that increased publicity and focus on the creation of three-year-old preschool and ongoing outreach to maximise enrolment will likely increase four-year-old enrolment too.

None of these findings or recommendations are made in isolation from our national conversation. Any review of funding models by South Australia should be done in the context of work already underway by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, the NSW Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal and the Productivity Commission to better understand cost drivers and effective funding models in the early childhood education and care sector.



Recommendation 29

That the current four-year-old per child funding for long day care and non-government provision of preschool be reviewed in light of the increased expectations of, and support for, preschool outlined in this Report.

The new per child funding level for both three and four-year-olds should include:

- a. Funding sufficient to meet professional learning and release time requirements for early childhood teachers (per Recommendation 20)
- b. Loadings (or equivalent service provision) for the provision of layered supports to children in the service who are likely to be developmentally vulnerable and/or need additional support (per Recommendation 11).

In addition, providers in areas of high concentrations of developmental vulnerability, should receive funding to reflect the increased case management, community outreach and removal of barriers to access (such as provision of transport, some fee subsidies) (per Recommendation 25).

Recommendation 30

That the State Government consider how to use data linkage, regulatory visits and other mechanisms to support accountability prior to requiring additional reporting.

Looking beyond South Australia

This Royal Commission is inquiring into a range of early childhood reforms to give children who grow up in South Australia the best opportunity to develop and learn, so they can thrive now and in their futures.

We do of course live in a federation, with a range of policy and funding levers operating at both State and Commonwealth levels.

And it would be remiss of the Commission not to look beyond our borders where there are reforms underway.

A number of recommendations made in this Interim Report will require further discussion with other states and with the Commonwealth.

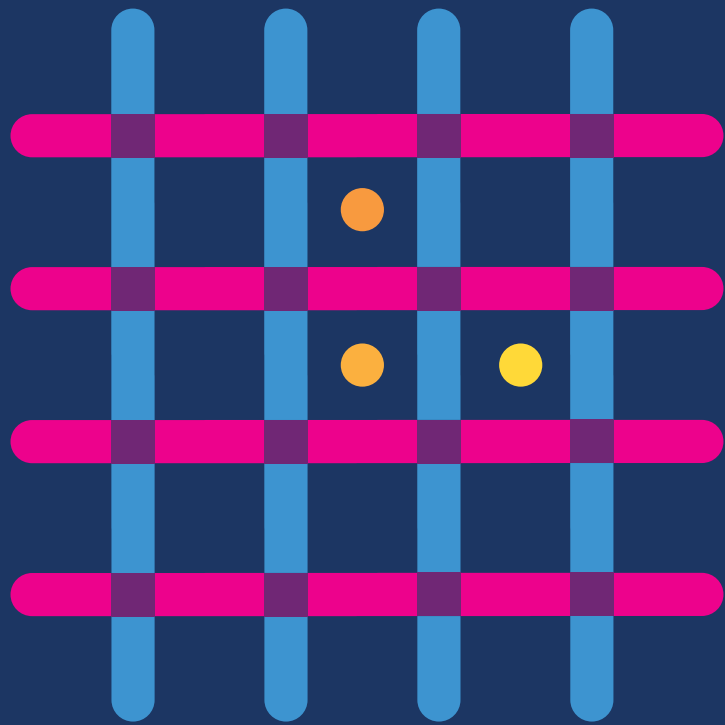
Notably, the Commission will hold further hearings and seek further submissions on the matter of the registration of teachers with a Birth to Five degree as early childhood teachers. It is possible this will result in a recommendation for the Teachers Registration Board to accredit Birth to Five teaching degrees.

The Commission notes that as far as possible, a nationally consistent approach to initial teacher education accreditation will give flexibility and opportunity for the sector and those who are working within it.

There are also recommendations made to the Commonwealth government that the State should advocate for.

While beyond the ability of the State Government to deliver, these recommendations are made acknowledging the significant impact that Commonwealth policies have on families and the sector and are supported by evidence heard by this Commission. They are:

- That the Commonwealth Government consider introducing differential pricing in the Child Care Subsidy for younger children with higher ratios.
- That the Commonwealth Government extend changes to the Child Care Subsidy Activity Test to include all families experiencing deep disadvantage and low rates of engagement in early childhood.
- That the Commonwealth Government ensure the State Government has regularly updated access to Child Care Subsidy data to support system design and insight into system wide participation.
- That the Commonwealth Government be prepared to open a dialogue with the states and territories about rationalising the confusing and overlapping funding arrangements for the preschool sector that vary state by state.



Timeframes

The reforms proposed in this Interim Report will take time to consider, plan for, and fund.

The Terms of Reference provide for delivery of three-year-old preschool from 2026, without requiring full delivery in that year.

Based on the proposed approaches of this Interim Report, there is time to engage with the sector, researchers and South Australian communities to plan in a measured way how different elements of this reform will be designed and implemented across the State.

There is also the very real challenge that the pace of reform must not sacrifice quality and equity. 2026 is not far into the future; conversations and work need to start now to be ready, which is one of the key reasons why this Interim Report has been released at this stage.

A progressive rollout of three-year-old preschool from 2026 to 2032 is recommended, with 2029 a marker at which point all commissioned services and government preschool places should be available.

This will allow for necessary physical modifications, and for providers to offer three-year-old preschool as they are able to demonstrate the quality requirements that must be met.

It will also allow time to meet the significant workforce demand identified. The Commission notes the need for continuous review of workforce availability, to ensure the rollout does not get ahead of quality workforce supply. Given future inquiries into workforce supply, the Final Report may revisit this question of timing.

The State Government should be forecasting recurrent budgets from 2026 and a rolling capital budget to ensure supply, on top of those investments described above. From the outset, this reform should be understood in terms of investment, and the budget process should reflect this.

Opportunities exist to use investment models of budgeting, such as those employed in New Zealand, particularly in light of the key elements of a learning system design that have been built into the recommendations of this Interim Report.

Investigations into data collection, governance, storage and linkage should start now.

While a program like this will inevitably have many moving parts, the Commission has sketched out some elements below, to give a sense of the way in which the program might unfold.

2024

Establish governance mechanisms to ensure cross-sector planning and engagement in the rollout.

Begin local service commissioning process for 1000 places in areas of high developmental vulnerability, with a view to programs in these locations commencing from 2026.

Ensure work on preschool outcomes measurement (Recommendation 3), curriculum resources for children aged three to five (Recommendation 7), early child development professional learning (Recommendation 8) are in train, ready for implementation from 2026.

Design and commence trials to inform roll out design, including:

- Trialling different configurations of early learning programs delivered by Diploma qualified educators (for example, with practice supervision, additional professional learning, with different ratios, with coaching and so on), review the quality of practice and rigorously assess the different outcomes (Recommendation 4)
- Trialling different models of allied health provision (Recommendation 12)
- Designing ways to support enrolment of under-served families in long day care, as discussed at the end of Part 1.

2026

The first commissioned services in areas of high developmental vulnerability open.

Long day care and non-government preschool services can opt in to deliver three-year-old preschool when they are able to meet the quality requirements.

Government preschools begin to offer three-year-old programs on a progressive basis.

2026–2028

Complete service commissioning in areas of high developmental vulnerability, with final services to open in 2029.

Complete opening of three-year-old programs in government preschools, with final intakes to commence in 2029.

Encourage increased access to three-year-old programs in other areas through market led, lowest cost interventions.

2029

Review gaps in supply and make major capital investments to meet shortfalls, if required, to ensure full delivery by 2032.



Recommendation 31

That the rollout of three-year-old preschool occur progressively from 2026, with the first phase of roll out completed by 2029. The final date for universal offering should be 2032.

Detailed sequencing should consider the opportunity to trial things in advance of full roll out, and to learn from the gradual roll out in ways identified in this report.

Recommendation 32

That the State Government closely monitor the availability of workforce and adjust staging as required. Further advice on this will be given in the Commission's Final Report

Recommendation 33

That, from the outset, this reform be understood in terms of investment, and the budget process should reflect this. Opportunities exist to use investment models of budgeting, such as those employed in New Zealand

Where to from this Interim Report?

This Interim Report is an opportunity to share with State Government and the South Australia community the rich evidence the Commission has heard so far. It enables us to contemplate and describe what more we need to understand over the life of this Royal Commission.

It is also an opportunity to test the ideas we are putting forward, and for the sector and the community to tell us how this report aligns with their own vision for South Australia's future.

Stakeholders have told us to keep children at the centre; that learning through play is fundamental, and that early childhood education and care needs to be inclusive, accessible and high quality.

Families have told us how important preschool is to their children's learning, social interactions and development.

Teachers and educators have told us how highly they value their work, but how undervalued they feel.

Researchers have told us how much early childhood education and care can change a child's life.

Every step of the way we have felt keenly how much is at stake here. South Australia is a place with a caring culture and a rich history of focussing on early childhood education. We want our children to learn, grow and thrive.

In coming months, the Commission will continue to hear evidence from all over Australia about the importance of overcoming disadvantage, about child development in the first 1000 days of life, the challenges of workforce supply in the early childhood sector and the opportunity to support working families by improving access to out-of-school-hours care.

This Interim Report is accompanied by one final opportunity for submissions.

In addition to some of the specific questions raised in this report, the Commission is particularly interested to hear views about what structures, institutions and governance need to be put in place to successfully deliver this reform.

How can State Government create the space for co-ownership of key elements of this reform, so that it can truly support the creation of early childhood education and care as the backbone of an early child development system that learns and grows?

Submissions close on 19 May 2023 and can be made via the Royal Commission's [website](#).



recommendations

RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations are made in principle and may be tested and refined in the Commission's Final Report:

The Royal Commission recommends:

1. That the purpose of providing universal three-year old preschool is to support every South Australian child's healthy early development and learning, so that they can thrive, now and in the future.

An effective system of universal three-year-old preschool will also redress the disadvantage experienced by too many South Australian children.

How the system is designed and delivered will also influence the choices made by families about whether to access the system for their child and their own workforce participation.

While important, support for workforce participation should be a focus of the broader early childhood education and care system (not simply preschool), as well as the provision of Out of School Hours Care. This will be discussed further in the Final Report.

2. That the following principles underpin the design and rollout of universal three-year-old preschool.
 - a. The offering should be universal, but not necessarily uniform, and that the offering reflects the different needs of different communities and families
 - b. Active steps should be taken to ensure full participation of all children in three-year-old preschool
 - c. Three-year-old preschool should support equity for children and families, providing additional supports as required to reduce disparity in outcomes
 - d. The system should support families to be able to access a diversity of offerings dependent on their needs and interests
 - e. The system should allow for continuous learning and adaptation, building in mechanisms such as data collection, community input and support for growth and learning at every level of the system
 - f. While stewardship of the early childhood education and care system is shared with the Commonwealth (as the predominant funder), the State Government should be clear about the characteristics of the early childhood education and care system it wants to operate in South Australia and make decisions that support it
 - g. The State Government should embrace the role that early childhood education and care can play as a 'backbone' universal infrastructure for early child development.

3. That the State Government seek to actively shape the emerging national approach on preschool outcomes measurement, including, in accordance with the vision of South Australia being a leader in early childhood education research, volunteering to be involved in any trials or pilots.

In doing so, the State Government should advocate that the measurement approach should support two objectives: understanding and informing its early childhood investments at a population level; and supporting teachers and services to ensure they can support a child's progress and monitor quality improvement of their practice.

In addition, the State Government should require that the results of outcomes measurement should not be published at a service level, and should not be used in funding or regulatory decision-making processes relating to individual services. Rather, objective quality measures (such as the NQS) should be published and used for the purpose of informing community choice and for government decision making.

On timing, the State Government should press for nationally agreed outcomes measurement being available in time to be embedded in the roll out of three-year-old preschool from 2026.

If the intergovernmental processes do not acquit the above outcomes, South Australia should design and adopt its own preschool outcome measures.

4. That in the period prior to universal achievement of three-year-old preschool, while teacher workforce supply is being developed, the State Government trial different configurations of early learning programs delivered by Diploma qualified educators (for example, with practice supervision, with additional professional learning, with different ratios, with coaching and so on), review the quality of practice and rigorously assess the different outcomes.

5. That the State Government note the Commission will hold further hearings and seek further submissions on the matter of the registration of teachers with a Birth to Five degree as early childhood teachers. It is possible this will result in a recommendation for the Teachers Registration Board to accredit Birth to Five teaching degrees.

6. That the State Government identify, evaluate and provide evidence-based tools for improving pedagogical approaches in preschool.

7. That the State Government continue to develop curriculum material for use in three and four-year-old preschool which builds on the Early Years Learning Framework.

8. That the State Government reflect the range of developmental needs of three-year-olds in implementing three-year-old preschool, including by developing professional learning for early childhood educators and teachers on early child development, with emphasis on the capabilities of three-year-olds and four-year-olds.

9. That the minimum duration of a three-year-old preschool program be 600 hours per year, or 15 hours per week in for 40 weeks a year. This universal three-year-old preschool entitlement mirrors the universal four-year-old preschool entitlement.

Children at risk of developmental delay should be able to access additional hours and days of three and four-year-old preschool up to 30 hours per week for the most at risk.

The Commission specifically invites feedback about the targeting of this extra entitlement, what would be needed to maximise take up and how roll out should acquit the principle of progressive universalism.

10. That, as part of implementation, consistent with outcomes measurement, the State Government continue to build the evidence base of the following, with a view to informing future program design:
- a. The impact on attendance and outcomes of 15 hours versus two days with shorter hours, with a view to considering whether 15 hours is the appropriate use of government preschool hours at age four if clear evidence emerges;
 - b. The best method of targeting additional hours/days for children who require additional support at age three or four
 - c. The impact of consecutive days on attendance and outcomes
 - d. The impact of consistent groupings on outcomes;
 - e. The impact of transitioning between different settings in a child's daily life
 - f. The benefit of two years of preschool with a stable cohort.
11. That implementation of the three-year-old preschool program reflect and prioritise the role of early childhood education and care in layering supports for children and families as they need it.
- The State Government should adopt a definition of three and four-year old preschool that includes the following elements:
- a. Each individual child to receive their learning entitlement (including any adjustments required) from an early childhood teacher operating with support from allied health professionals as appropriate
 - b. Early identification of a child's developmental needs on site (e.g. by child development checks) and organised pathways to funded interventions, including providing those on site as appropriate
 - c. Organised pathways to broader parental and community supports including those provided on site as appropriate.
12. That, as part of layered support, the State Government commit to rigorously trialling and evaluating different models of allied health and other support (e.g. small group v educator capability building) with a view to continuously improving the offerings.

Student Support Services in the Department for Education would provide a useful testing ground for new models of service.

13. That the State Government ensure sufficient resources are available to the Education Standards Board to ensure every early childhood education and care provider is assessed and rated at least every three years.
14. That the State Government have a targeted focus on improving the NQS ratings of non-government services currently providing State Government funded preschool programs who are 'working towards', including working with the regulator (the Education Standards Board) to ensure that action is taken for consistent non-achievement.
15. That the State Government commission research to better understand the relationship between workforce consistency and quality over time, with a view to identifying further policy levers for inclusion in future quality improvement agendas.
16. That the State Government commit to co-designing and rigorously evaluating a small number of alternative early learning models for three-year-olds in specific communities where there are very low rates of enrolment in a traditional four-year-old preschool program.

These programs should be funded at a rate of approximately \$11,500 per child (indexed) (based on current per child cost of provision of government preschool).

Rigorous evaluation is required, and models and service providers may alter with evaluation. However, ongoing funding should be allocated to the overall program on the basis of an assumed rate of uptake in specified communities.

These programs should be eligible for capital investment, per Recommendation 27.

Among others, the following elements should be considered in the co-design process:

- a. That programs are delivered by organisations with existing connections to the community
- b. That programs include a workforce drawn from the local community, without requiring formal qualifications on entry to the workforce
- c. That programs include payments to families to support their engagement.

Communities should be selected on the basis of very low rates of access to traditional four-year-old preschool programs.

Children who are enrolled in these programs would be eligible to transition to a traditional four-year-old preschool program or continue in this program in the year before school.

17. That the State Government listen to the Aboriginal community, including through South Australia's First Nations Voice to Parliament and the South Australian Aboriginal Education and Training Consultative Council, about how to ensure that Aboriginal children retain (and increase) the benefits from three-year-old preschool.

A co-design process should then be undertaken on the basis of an ongoing guaranteed funding commitment equivalent to that which supports early entry for Aboriginal three-year-old children (currently around \$10.8 million per annum).

Note that this commitment would be over and above the usual State Government funding arrangements for three-year-old preschool, and any community specific early learning models established per Recommendation 16.

18. That universal three-year-old preschool be delivered through the following mix of provision:
- Three-year-olds already in long day care or non-government preschool receive their preschool through that long day care or non-government preschool setting
 - Additional capacity in government preschools be offered on a priority basis to three-year-olds that are not already engaging in early childhood education care
 - In areas of high developmental vulnerability, there be place-based commissioning of integrated service hubs
 - In other areas, unmet demand be met by a managed market response, matching parent demand with cost efficient increases in supply. This should be facilitated by locally based implementation teams working on behalf of State Government. Following the completion of the roll out, consideration could be given to making this function ongoing, to provide ongoing stewardship across the early childhood education and care sector.

19. That the State Government work with the sector to articulate agreed markers of preschool program quality in different settings.

These markers should be included in funding arrangements, in administrative arrangements and/or supported through programs, as appropriate, from the beginning of the rollout of three-year-old preschool.

20. That State Government provide access to the following supports and resources in all settings:
- Evidence-based tools for improving pedagogical approaches (per Recommendation 6)
 - Curriculum material for use in three and four-year-old preschool (per Recommendation 7), noting that engagement with the resources should be a part of the State Government's funding agreement with non-government services
 - Professional learning for early childhood educators and teachers on early child development (per Recommendation 8)
 - Funding to support access to professional learning (including release time) and sufficient planning time for Early Childhood Teachers.
21. That the State Government note the Commission seeks further submissions on the proposal to operate a 'kindy tick' program to publicly communicate to families where a State Government accredited preschool program is operating.

22. That as the Commonwealth considers a broad early years reform agenda, it also consider introducing differential pricing in the Child Care Subsidy for younger children with higher ratios.

While the Commission's conclusion on the mixed model has not been driven by the potential impacts on three-year-old attendance at long day care, the Commission has received evidence about the cross subsidy older children provide for younger children. For State Governments contemplating reforms for three-year-olds this is a pricing/cost issue, as it is for families. Removal of the implicit subsidy by changing the proportion of three and four-year-olds attending without reform to Child Care Subsidy would have negative consequences on the viability of the provision of places for younger children.

23. That the Commonwealth Government ensure the State Government has regularly updated access to Child Care Subsidy data to support system design and insight into system wide participation.

The State Government should conduct an annual reconciliation of enrolment data from all available sources (including Commonwealth Child Care Subsidy records) against State Government population projections to identify where children have not enrolled in four-year-old preschool to inform local activity to enrol children. The State Government should publish this data at a disaggregated level.

24. That the Commonwealth Government extend changes to the Child Care Subsidy Activity Test to include all families experiencing deep disadvantage and low rates of engagement in early childhood education and care.

25. That, to support universal enrolment in preschool, the State Government should invest in the following for both government and non-government services:

- a. Direct support to services for indirect cost reduction (for example transport) where required to enable economically disadvantaged families to have their child attend
- b. Direct investment in services to support community outreach in areas with a lack of connection to early childhood education, as well as supporting communication
- c. Targeted fee relief where fees are a barrier to enrolment and/or attendance (to be available to families accessing preschool in any setting).

26. That the State Government audit and assess existing government preschool infrastructure with a view to ensuring investment is prioritised in areas including:

- a. Appropriate spaces and facilities for three-year-old enrolments
- b. Multi-disciplinary team approaches (space for meetings, confidential discussions, and outreach services)
- c. Room to support Directors, teachers and educators to appropriately reflect on and review practices and programs for three and four-year-old children.

27. That State Government support for additional capacity through investment in capital works (minor or major) be predicated on the nature and quality of the early childhood education and care system it envisions. Investment in additional capacity should prioritise services including those that:
- Meet or exceed National Quality Standard ratings
 - Can demonstrate investment in workforce (through staff retention / low turnover, supported quality professional learning)
 - Have a demonstrated an ability to enrol children from hard to reach or vulnerable communities
 - Are operated by a community management committee, making it less likely to be able to access capital.

28. That the current approach to parent fees in the government preschool and long day care and non-government preschool sectors be adopted for three-year-old preschool delivery, noting the targeted fee relief recommended at Recommendation 25.

Newly commissioned high-quality integrated services will provide fee-free or very low fee access.

29. That the current four-year-old per child funding for long day care and non-government provision of preschool be reviewed in light of the increased expectations of, and support for, preschool outlined in this Report.

The new per child funding level for both three and four-year-olds should include:

- Funding sufficient to meet professional learning and release time requirements for early childhood teachers (per Recommendation 20)
- Loadings (or equivalent service provision) for the provision of layered supports to children in the service who are likely to be developmentally vulnerable and/or need additional support (per Recommendation 11).

In addition, providers in areas of high concentrations of developmental vulnerability, should receive funding to reflect the increased case management, community outreach and removal of barriers to access (such as provision of transport, some fee subsidies) (per Recommendation 25).

30. That the State Government carefully consider how to use data linkage, regulatory visits and other mechanisms to support accountability prior to requiring additional reporting.
31. That the rollout of three-year-old preschool occur progressively from 2026, with the first phase of roll out completed by 2029. The final date for universal offering should be 2032.

Detailed sequencing should consider the opportunity to trial things in advance of full roll out, and to learn from the gradual roll out in ways identified in this report.

32. That the State Government closely monitor the availability of workforce and adjust staging as required. Further advice on this will be provided in the Commission's Final Report.
33. That, from the outset, this reform should be understood in terms of investment, and the budget process should reflect this. Opportunities exist to use investment models of budgeting, such as those employed in New Zealand.

opinion

PERSPECTIVE: OUR KIDS

We know the make-up of healthy children - physical, mental, cognitive, social.

We don't yet know what works to achieve this - so that every child can be healthy.

1. Vision

We need new strategies to help young children flourish, to prevent illness and to manage the complex, connected problems of the 21st century. 'One question at a time' research approaches are not delivering answers at the pace and breadth that are needed.

We can speed up solutions to complex problems by creating powerful interventional early life research cohorts that, when combined with Australia's national data assets, can rapidly generate discovery, prevention, and interventions at scale. Neither can achieve this alone.

Such Open Science resources—collecting data once, using many times - will transform and amplify preventive opportunities for all Australians, young and old.ⁱ

2. The early years offer the greatest opportunities for long and healthy lives

As shown conceptually in Fig 1, the early years make extraordinary contributions to lifetime health and wellbeing. Early life is when maximising growth in all domains - physical, cognitive, mental, social - has greatest benefit to children, our future adults, and Australia. If bones are not strong, nephrons and alveoli are not laid down, brain connections not made or healthy social and emotional functioning not established in early life, they can never be recovered. This is when building resilience and minimising toxic stress have lifelong impacts, leading to whole-of-life inequity, disease, disability and early mortality. Nobel Laureate James Heckman showed that investing in this age group above all others is the most efficient, effective path to national economic growth.

We now know enormous amounts about 'risk' and 'resilience' factors. However, this is not enough. We need to be able to weigh up what change is actually possible. Which interventions improve which risk/resilience factors, by how much and for whom? Does this translate into better outcomes in real-life conditions, and by how much? Are they feasible, acceptable, affordable and fair? Only then can we mount effective early life strategies for healthier children.

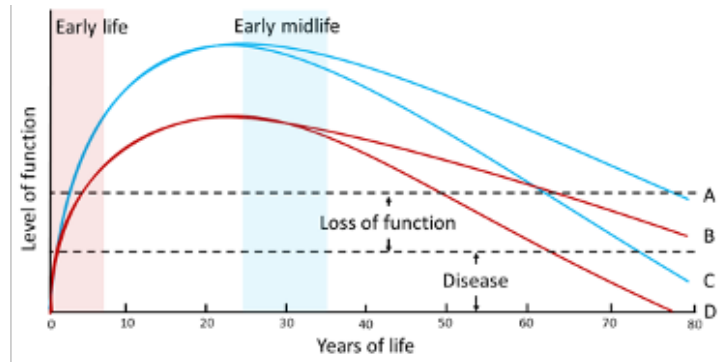


Figure 1. Lifecourse function trajectories; (A) Best growth and decline, (B) Poor growth and normal decline, (C) Best growth, poor decline, (D) Poor growth and decline

3. Evidence for early childhood preventive care is limited & not aligned with need

It is estimated that 85% of all research resources are wasted.ⁱⁱ There are many reasons for this. It is costly and slow to laboriously mount each new research study de novo. Much research fails logistically, with reasons including failure to recruit target numbers,ⁱⁱⁱ the need to extend with additional costs, delays in translation into clinical or preventive practice, or simply never being completed. Most trials do not show efficacy of the tested intervention, and most test one main hypothesis in restricted groups over a short time frame, limiting their return on investment. Further, most research takes place in the health sector, but this accounts for only 10-25% of health variation in high income countries. The rest reflects social and environmental determinants (eg income, built environment, racism, pollution)^{iv}. This is where the evidence base is weakest—but these determinants too are open to interventional research, including trials that can improve health outcomes.^v

On top of this, babies and children specifically are under-represented in research^{vi}, in trials^{vii}, and especially in large trials that can zero in on impact size or confirm outcomes that are rare or important for subgroups. Existing large trials map poorly to actual paediatric need as measured by burden of disease. For example, a 2021 review mapping all registered children's trials identified only three very large trials internationally tackling childhood overweight/obesity—one of the major threats to lifelong health of our time.^{viii}

Without a translational evidence base, children may not benefit from exciting discovery research. Policies and treatments may be ineffective or misplaced, while new approaches

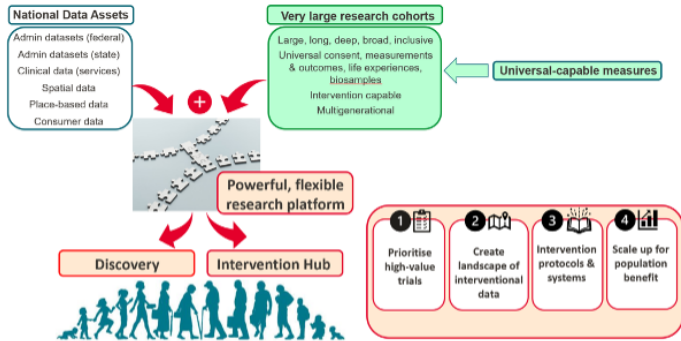
may never be tested or implemented. We believe that the evidence base for many issues – mental health, obesity & diabetes, brain function, allergy & immunity, infection & antibiotics, equity, impacts climate & environment – can all be efficiently targeted within the framework of very large, intervention-capable childhood research cohorts.

4. Multi-use platforms could help solve complex problems facing children today

Australia holds vast national data assets regarding services and environments, but these lack information about the actual people who contribute these data. Research cohorts hold consent, measured characteristics (‘phenotypes’), surveys and biosamples, but cannot readily combine with other data assets.

Individually, none suffice to create the conditions for knowledge advances in health, learning and wellbeing. Together, they can create powerful platforms for discovery and interventional research (Fig 2). If sufficiently large, long, deep, broad and inclusive, they could speed up solutions at scale to complex early life problems.

Fig. 2. Powerful research platforms that could speed up



solutions at scale to complex early life challenges

Australia has invested heavily in large routinely-collected National Data Assets over the last decade. However, this is not the case for the other half of the equation – very large research cohorts holding critical consented biopsychosocial data. We present a case study of Generation Victoria (GenV), designed specifically to address many early life needs.

5. Case Study: Generation Victoria (GenV), a ‘solutions system’ for children

A national asset led from the state of Victoria, GenV aims to create parallel, whole-of-state birth and parent cohorts for discovery and interventional research, and thence translatable evidence to improve future wellbeing and reduce disease burden for children and adults. The cohort design comprises a number of data building blocks: (i) Consented cohort, (ii) Linked data, (iii) Biosamples, (iv) Directly-collected participant data, (v) Collaborator-led

studies including trials and (vi) an Open Science platform to maximise its value. GenV targets all 150,000 Victorian newborns born over two full years from Oct 2021-Oct 2023 and their parents.^{ix} Already Australia’s largest-ever life course initiative, at point of this submission it includes over 85,000 participants (>35,000 infants) that are representative of Victoria (and thus in most respects Australia) on ethnicity, disadvantage metrics, and urban/regional domicile.

GenV is specifically designed to create the ‘solutions system’ that is conceptualised in Figure 2. Despite only starting cohort recruitment in 2021, GenV is already working as it should: it has generated >\$27m for research mostly from highly-competitive national schemes. Table 1 shows some early examples of how GenV research already in train could change young children’s life chances for the better.

GenV stands alone in being able to show how today’s tumult and existential challenges are shaping this generation of young children. Its value is amplified as the only mega-birth cohort launched worldwide during the COVID-19 pandemic, and by the 15-year void left by the failed attempts at comparable cohorts in the US and the UK in the 2010s. No others are expected in North America, Europe or the UK until the late 2020s.

GenV is the work of many. Its establishment was made possible by large grants from the Paul Ramsay Foundation, the Victorian Government and the Royal Children’s Hospital Foundation. It is supported by families, all birthing hospitals and 10 pathology providers across Victoria, and by numerous peak bodies and institutions. At last count, it is already supporting research with 140 collaborators and partners from 59 institutions across Australia and internationally (see Table 1 for examples). Many more examples are in the pipeline. Alone among mega-cohorts internationally, GenV is now planning its Intervention Hub (Table 2), which aims to support multiple trials to show which discoveries can really change outcomes at scale.^{x,xi}

A novel newborn methylation screen to improve the lives of children born with one of 9 genetic syndromes
A newborn CRISPR screen to reduce deafness and neurodisability from cCMV, a treatable newborn infection
A newborn CRISPR screen to reduce deafness and neurodisability from cCMV, a treatable newborn infection
The long-term safety for mothers and children of COVID-19 and flu vaccinations in pregnancy
A new Hearing Health Evidence-Based data system to improve outcomes for children with hearing loss
A new statewide registry to improve prediction, treatments and outcomes for children with hip dysplasia
A new statewide registry to better understand, support and treat children who regress developmentally

Table 1. Early examples of collaborative early-life research at scale leveraged from GenV in its first year (as of 2023-03): \$27.6 million funded (MRFF \$20.5m; NHMRC \$5.3m; other \$1.7m)

PERSPECTIVE: OUR KIDS

Prof. Melissa Wake

One cohort can support many trials - reducing time, participant, financial and regulatory burdens

Stacked trials can mimic real life - participants can experience more than one intervention over time

Trial effect sizes may generate more realistic intervention population benefits than cohort estimates

Trials can access prior data (for effect modification) and long-term outcomes (for whole-of-life impacts)

Trials could shift their focus from mostly one-dimensional health interventions to the myriad environmental, social and economic determinants that underpin the bulk of health and prosperity

Table 2. Why test interventions in a very large cohort like GenV? [Reproduced from: Pediatrics 2022^{xii}]

6. Achieving break-through, real-world impacts of GenV and other major cohorts

Australia is known for visionary developments at the international cutting edge of science and research. However, it can sometimes then allows them to 'wither on the vine'; an example in the news at time of writing is the loss of Australia's international computer technology leadership in the 1950s^{xiii}. GenV has generated (i) the major funding for its establishment and has already shown that it can generate (ii) funds for major research drawing in GenV as it was envisioned. However, GenV - like all major researcher-driven cohorts in Australia - has no clear pathway to (iii) the ongoing infrastructural funding needed for its long term survival.

To achieve real-world impacts and return on investment, GenV and other cohorts need:

- **mechanisms to fund core infrastructures to maintain very large interventional cohorts once established and 'keep the lights on'.** Neither the National Health and Medical Research Council nor the Medical Research Future Fund allow for such support, and governments usually provide one-off funding only. If this problem can be solved, then a platform such as GenV can be used over and over to develop preventive opportunities for young Australians, at a speed, scale, inclusion and cost-efficiency not otherwise possible. This requires cross-sectoral partnerships with a long view and to span academic funders, governments and philanthropy. For GenV alone, this is likely to be in excess of \$50-\$100 million over 10 years.
- **inexpensive, non-invasive, fast, portable technologies that can provide universal outcomes at population scale.** For the first time, these are within reach - an incredibly exciting development. For example, the Wellcome LEAP initiative is investing in new measures of children's brain structure and function. If these and other tools are available by the time GenV children turn 6 years, GenV could then examine what factors and interventions led to the best outcomes for children's brains, bodies, and mental and social health.

- **funds to transform 'raw' data and biosamples into 'refined' assets that can address important research questions.** Examples include genomic and microbiome bioassays, and image extraction and sleep and activity data using artificial intelligence. This again requires a shift to high-throughput, large-scale, inexpensive analytics, and extensive partnerships including with commercial partners, within the bounds of the participant consent for use of their data.

7. Conclusion

This Perspective has not touched on the many inputs to young children's growth and development. Rather, it focuses on systems needed to create real-world approaches with impacts that are known, costed and can be compared and valued. There will no silver bullet - we need to explore many avenues and be open to many possibilities, only some of which will be fruitful once tested. If we can seize the moment, GenV can provide a unique 'solutions system' for young children that brings the best of science, technology, policy, services and communities together to help solve complex challenges faced by young children today.

Professor Melissa Wake

Paediatrician FAHMS MBChB FRACP MD GradDip Obst & Gynae
Scientific Director, GenV & Group Leader, Prevention Innovation
Professorial Fellow, Department of Paediatrics,
The University of Melbourne

Honorary Professor, Liggins Institute, The University of Auckland

Murdoch Children's Research Institute

The Royal Children's Hospital,
50 Flemington Road
Parkville, Victoria 3052 Australia

T +61 3 9345 5937

T +61 3 9345 5761

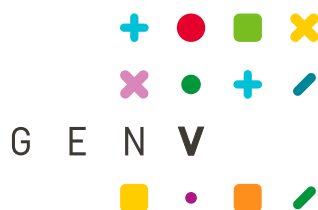
(EA Jackie Whyte: Mo-Th)

M +61 417 506 400

Tw @melissa_wake

E melissa.wake@mcri.edu.au

W mcri.edu.au



8. References

- i. Heckman JJ. Invest in the very young. In: Tremblay RE, Barr RG, Peters RDeV, eds. *Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development* [online]. Montreal, Quebec: Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development; 2004:1-2. Accessed 22 March 2023. <http://www.child-encyclopedia.com/documents/HeckmanANGxp.pdf>
- ii. Macleod MR, Michie S, Roberts I, ..., Glasziou P. Biomedical research: increasing value, reducing waste. *The Lancet*. 2014;383(9912):101-104. doi:10.1016/S0140-6736(13)62329-6
- iii. McDonald AM, Knight RC, Campbell MK, ..., Snowdon C. What influences recruitment to randomised controlled trials? A review of trials funded by two UK funding agencies. *Trials*. 2006;7(1):9. doi:10.1186/1745-6215-7-9
- iv. Zimmerman FJ. Population health science: fulfilling the mission of public health. *Milbank Q*. 2021;99(1):9-23. doi:10.1111/1468-0009.12493
- v. Taylor LA, Tan AX, Coyle CE, ..., Bradley EH. Leveraging the social determinants of health: what works? *PLoS ONE*. 2016;11(8):e0160217. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0160217
- vi. Bow S, Klassen J, Chisholm A, ..., Hartling L. A descriptive analysis of child-relevant systematic reviews in the Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews. *BMC Pediatr*. 2010;10(1):34. doi:10.1186/1471-2431-10-34
- vii. Klassen TP, Hartling L, Craig JC, Offringa M. Children are not just small adults: the urgent need for high-quality trial evidence in children. *PLoS Med*. 2008;5(8):e172. doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.0050172
- viii. Cho SM, Serghiu S, Ioannidis JP, ..., Contopoulos-Ioannidis DG. Large pediatric randomized clinical trials in ClinicalTrials.gov. *Pediatrics*. 2021;148(3):e2020049771. doi:10.1542/peds.2020-049771
- ix. Generation Victoria. Generation Victoria Figshare project. Figshare. 2018. Accessed 22 March 2023. https://mcri.figshare.com/projects/Generation_Victoria/35822
- x. Wake M, Hu YJ, Warren H, ..., Davidson A. Integrating trials into a whole-population cohort of children and parents: Statement of intent (trials) for the Generation Victoria (GenV) cohort. *BMC Med Res Methodol*. 2020;20(1):238. doi:10.1186/s12874-020-01111-x
- xi. Sung V, Williams K, Perlow E, ..., Wake M. Enhancing value and uptake for whole-population cohorts of children and parents: methods to integrate registries into the Generation Victoria cohort. *Children*. 2021;8(4):285. doi:10.3390/children8040285
- xii. Wake M, Goldfeld S, Davidson A. Embedding Life Course Interventions in Longitudinal Cohort Studies: Australia's GenV Opportunity. *Pediatrics*. 2022 May 1;149(Suppl 5):e2021053509R.
- xiii. A government of grown-ups. <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/a-government-of-grown-ups-how-albanese-s-making-it-look-easy-20230330-p5cwpf.html>. Accessed 2023-04-04

CHILDREN'S COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT—A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

In Australia and around the world, babies and toddlers are routinely measured and weighed to assess how well they are developing physically. Whilst there is no single right height or weight to be at a given age, we can chart typical growth trajectories and detect when a child is too underweight or too small for their age. This can trigger further assessments as well as advice and support to parents on diet and nutrition. Even if no health issues are identified, parents usually welcome these checks because it can be reassuring to know more about how your child is developing.

Now, I invite you to imagine a world where we can check children's brain development as regularly and as easily as we check height and weight. Once again, there would be a spectrum of outcomes, but we would be able to chart brain development trajectories and identify if a child is going off course. I also invite you to imagine a world in which parents are then offered advice and a range of options to shape their child's environment and experiences and push them in the direction of healthy brain development.

Is this science fiction or will it soon be fact?

What we know now

The first 1000 days can make all the difference to a child's start in life. During this time the brain reaches 80% of its adulthood size and a child develops critical cognitive skills that enable them to plan, focus attention, and manage multiple tasks at once (known as executive function (EF) and self-regulation skills)ⁱ. By the end of the first 1000 days, a child's individual EF performance changes their odds of dealing successfully with opportunities or difficulties they face in life. Well-developed EF improves a child's chances for lifelong physical and mental health by up to 30%; reduces early signs of ageing by up to 40%ⁱⁱ; and underpins greater productivity and wellbeingⁱⁱⁱ. Indeed, if EF is underdeveloped, there can be significant consequences. We know that children with underdeveloped EF at age 3 represent about 20 percent of the population but make up nearly 80 percent of adults who are likely to require some form of societal or economic assistance^{iv}. Ensuring

healthy cognitive development is critical to a child's future, but we are currently blind to the critical stages, measures, and inputs necessary to promote healthy development.

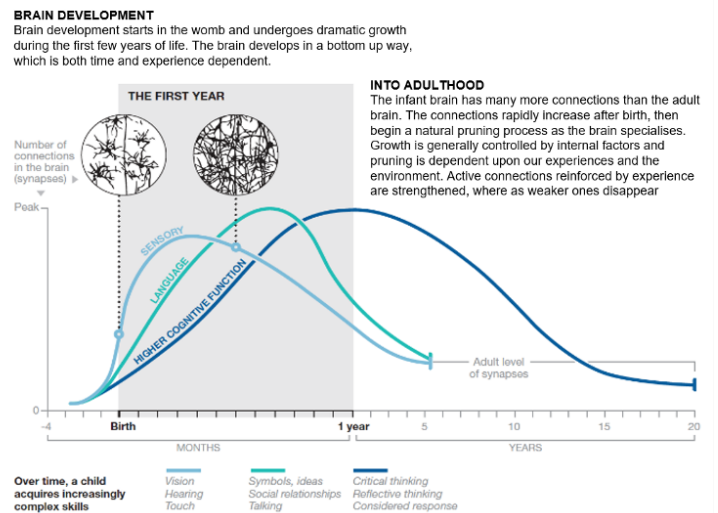


Fig. 2. . Source: adapted from Charles Nelson, Harvard Medical School; Pat Levitt, Children's Hospital Los Angeles

Over 30 years of scientific research has told us that our brains develop over time and from the bottom up – from lower sensory areas of the brain to higher cognitive functions (Figure 1). And whilst a child is born with billions of brain cells, it is the connections that form between these brain cells that gives rise to function and cognitive skills. During the first 1000 days, a child's brain forms more than 1 million new connections per second^v. This period of rapid growth is followed by critical periods of pruning, where these connections are strengthened and retained or eliminated depending upon our experiences in the world (Figure 1). The periods of growth are predominantly controlled by internal factors, such as genetics, nutrition and perhaps the bacteria residing in our guts, whereas the period of pruning is guided by the environment, sensory experiences, and interactions with caregivers. This means the brain is highly susceptible to the environment but also has a remarkable ability to adapt in response to intervention. Indeed, children exposed to positive environments tend to be pushed in the direction of healthy brain development, whereas those exposed to negative experiences can be pushed in the direction of unhealthy development. Yet despite this knowledge, we

still don't have the tools we need to chart brain development nor understand how these different environmental factors predict differences in brain development and EF outcomes. Without them, we cannot optimise the key ingredients necessary for promoting healthy development.

Further, the timing of these experiences is critical because windows of growth and pruning are narrow, and if the right experiences aren't available at the right time, development can go awry. For example, institutionalised children admitted into foster care before 24 months old versus those admitted after, showed significant differences in brain connectivity at 42 months old and only those children taken into foster care before 24 months could recover later cognitive skills and mental health from age 8 onwards^{vi,vii,viii}.

What if we could predict differences in brain development from before the first birthday and identify which factors have an impact, and when? Could we optimise interventions to improve EF by 20% in 80% of children?

If we could, the results could be dramatic. Historical data suggests we could reduce the risk of childhood obesity by nearly 20%, the pace of ageing by about 12%, and the risk of criminal encounters by 20%.

What we are trying to develop

Achieving such a bold goal requires a different approach. One that unites experts from different scientific fields, bridges geographical borders to have global impact and brings together fundamental science with technology development and clinical work in infants, to create new solutions.

In 2021, Wellcome Leap, a new philanthropic foundation designed to tackle huge challenges in global health, launched The First 1000 Days program (1kD), a \$50M program to tackle this big 'what if'. We built a network of teams working across nine different countries, in fields ranging from child psychology and neuroscience to microbiology, robotics, engineering and machine learning to work together and create new solutions that could improve EF by 20% for 80% of children before age 3. We are halfway through the three-year program, and already emerging results are showing promise. A few illustrative examples:

New machine learning approaches can predict brain age from tools that measure brain connectivity, presenting a novel way of charting the brain development underlying EF¹.

Work in animal models is demonstrating that, within a critical developmental window, different infant gut bacteria can drive differences in EF-related behaviours by up to 30%, showing promise for better dietary guides or supplements².

And a third project is showing promise that toys, with sensors that measure when and how an infant interacts with the toy, could screen and potentially promote a child's cognitive flexibility during social interactions in the home³.

Paving the way for a new future

Identifying environmental factors that contribute to and predict differences in brain and cognitive development is essential if we want to reduce early life disparities. In the next five to ten years significant advances in science and technology, like those mentioned above, could provide us with the solutions we need to predict risk and tailor interventions. By 2024 the 1kD network hopes to show the world this is possible. To accelerate impact and scale these solutions to the real world we need:

- Independent philanthropies to do what others cannot; take a long-term view and support research at scale – research that bridges geographical borders to get the best ideas and build strong capabilities. Extending studies that chart infant brain development over time and through to early adolescence is needed to demonstrate how differences in early brain development predict later academic success and mental health outcomes. A coordinated approach to measuring brain development, environmental factors, cognitive and mental health outcomes across global populations, like in 1kD, is vital for global impact. An estimated funding of \$10M/year for 10 years would be needed.
- Commercial partners that will act on promising scientific advances and turn them into products that could promote and measure the health of a child's social interactions in the home and/ or bring dietary support and/or probiotic nutritional supplements to market.
- Governments and healthcare practitioners to develop flexible policies and programs that can accommodate and promote a range of interventions, whether it be: parental courses that promote knowledge on how to provide a structured, predictable, and responsive caregiving environment in the first year of life; updating advice on post-natal nutrition to promote healthy gut bacteria; or implementing early learning and education programs from 12 months old onwards.

CHILDREN'S COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT—A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Dr Holly Baines

Science and technology development are closer than ever before in providing the range of solutions we need. By 2030, we could be living in a world where children undergo routine brain scanning in the clinic to chart growth trajectories and new toys and nutritional guidance or supplements can be provided by caregivers/governments to promote healthy brain development. But these solutions cannot be delivered by scientists alone. We need partners that can turn these advances into products and bring them to market and we need systems ready to accept them.



Dr Holly Baines

wellcome leap

www.wellcomeleap.org

LinkedIn: wellcome-leap

Tw: @wellcomeleap

-
1. Scheinost, D., Yale School of Medicine and Gabard-Durnam, L., Northeastern University, College of Science
 2. Britton, R., Danhof, H., Tolias, K., Baylor College of Medicine and Murray, D., and Kiely, M., University College Cork.
 3. Leong, V., Campolo, D. and Ortega, J.P.; NTU Singapore
-

References

- I. Center on the Developing Child. Harvard University. <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/executive-function/>
- II. Richmond-Rakerd, L.S., Caspi, A., Ambler, A., et al. Childhood self-control forecasts the pace of midlife aging and preparedness for old age. *PNAS*. 118 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2010211118>
- III. Moffitt, T.E., Arseneault, L., Belsky, D., et al. A gradient of childhood self-control predicts health, wealth and public safety. *PNAS*. 108: 2693-2698 (2011).
- IV. Caspi, A., Houts, R.M., Belsky, D.W., et al. Childhood forecasting of a small segment of the population with large economic burden. *Nat Hum Behav*. 1: (2016). doi:10.1038/s41562-016-0005
- V. Center on the Developing Child. Harvard University. <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/brain-architecture/#neuron-footnote>
- VI. Marshall, P.J., Reeb, B.C., Fox, N.A, et al. Effects of early intervention on EEG power and coherence in previously institutionalized children in Romania. *Development and Psychopathology*. 20: 861–880 (2008).
- VII. Vanderwert, R.E., Marshall, P.J., Nelson, C.A., et al. Timing of Intervention Affects Brain Electrical Activity in Children Exposed to Severe Psychosocial Neglect. *PLoS ONE*. 5 (7): e11415 (2010). doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0011415
- VIII. Wade, M., Fox, N.A., Zeanah, C.H. and Nelson, C.A. Effect of Foster Care Intervention on Trajectories of General and Specific Psychopathology Among Children With Histories of Institutional Rearing. *JAMA Psychiatry*. (2018). doi:10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2018.2556
- IX. Wellcome Leap- <https://issues.org/network-innovation-wellcome-leap-dugan-gabriel/>

terms of reference

TERMS *of* REFERENCE

HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE FRANCES JENNIFER ADAMSON, Companion in the Order of Australia,
Governor in and over the State of South Australia:

TO

THE HONOURABLE JULIA EILEEN GILLARD AC

Greeting,

RECOGNISING that research on early childhood education makes it clear how crucial the years before school are to the rest of a child's life.

AND that around 90 per cent of adult brain development and growth occurs in the first five years of life.

AND that nearly a quarter of South Australian children are behind on at least one domain, and 13 per cent are behind on at least two domains on the Australian Early Development Census.

AND that there is a strong link between the socio-economic status of a family and the developmental vulnerability of children when they start school.

AND that 15 per cent of Australian three-year-olds attend preschool, in comparison to an OECD average of nearly 70 per cent.

AND that the school day length is out of step with modern working families.

AND that Out of School Hours services are not universally available, accessible or convenient.

I, the Governor, with the advice and consent of the Executive Council and under the *Royal Commissions Act 1917*, DO HEREBY APPOINT YOU to be a Commissioner and require and authorise you to inquire into:

- a. The extent to which South Australian families are supported in the first 1000 days of a child's life, focussed on opportunities to further leverage early childhood education and care to enable equitable and improved outcomes for South Australian children;
- b. How universal quality preschool programs for three and four year olds can be delivered in South Australia, including addressing considerations of accessibility, affordability, quality and how to achieve universality for both age cohorts. Consideration of universal three-year old preschool should be undertaken with a view to achieving this commencing in 2026;
- c. How all families can have access to out of school hours care at both preschool and primary school ages, including considerations of accessibility in all parts of the state, affordability and quality in public and private settings. AND I direct you to make any recommendations arising out of your inquiry that you consider appropriate, including recommendations about any policy, legislative, administrative or structural reforms.

AND, without limiting the scope of your inquiry or the scope of any recommendations arising out of your inquiry that you may consider appropriate, I direct you, for the purposes of your inquiry and recommendations, to have regard to the following matters:

- a. The benefits of increasing workforce participation by parents through improved access to childcare, early childhood education, out of school hours care and more flexible school day lengths;
- b. The importance of workforce capacity and sustaining the ongoing viability and affordability of non-government early education and care services;
- c. The variable provision of services across rural, regional, and remote South Australia;
- d. The views and experiences of:
 - i. Parents and caregivers from diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds with lived experience of the early years system, including both universal services and services targeted at families with complex needs;
 - ii. Experts in early childhood development;
 - iii. Service providers in the first 1000 days;
 - iv. Leaders in preschool and long day care services in the public, private, and community sectors;
 - v. Unions representing working in early childhood education and care;
- f. Consideration of the costs and benefits of implementing the recommendations of the Royal Commission, including not just economic benefits but benefits to children, their families and communities, and the social fabric of South Australia.

AND I:

1. Require you to begin your inquiry as soon as practicable.
2. Require you to make your inquiry as expeditiously as possible.
3. Require you to submit your final report by 31 August 2023. The provision of interim reports is at the discretion of the Commissioner.

GIVEN under my hand and the Public Seal of South Australia,
at Adelaide this 16th day of October 2022.

appendices

Appendix 1: Glossary of Terms

Preschool (also known as kindergarten, kinder, kindy)—play based learning program delivered by a four-year degree qualified early childhood teacher. May be delivered in a sessional / standalone preschool, a school-based facility, a non-government preschool or in a long day care centre.

Long day care (also known as child care, or centre based care)—a centre-based facility for children up to school age, staffed by qualified early childhood educators (and may have early childhood teachers on staff). Fees are set by facilities, paid by parents and subsidised by the Australian Government Child Care Subsidy. Hours tend to be longer than a typical working day (for example 6am – 6pm, Monday to Friday).

Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)—a broad phrase that generally includes services delivered to families and young children. It includes long day care, early learning centres, preschool, OSHC, children’s centres, and family day care.

Family Day Care—long day care that is based in a home-setting, often limited to small numbers. Provision may be more flexible than centre based care, and may include weekends or overnight if needed. Family day care can also offer respite care to families of children with disability.

Out of School Hours Care (OSHC)—before and after school care for predominantly primary school aged children and care in school holidays (also known as vacation care). Fees are paid by parents and subsidised by the Australian Government Child Care Subsidy. Providers may be for profit, not for profit or school governing councils.

Child Care Subsidy (CCS)—Australian government subsidy, that offers financial assistance toward the out-of-pocket cost of child care (including OSHC).

National Quality Framework (NQF)—Australia’s system for regulating early learning and school age care including legislation and national quality standards, sector profiles and data and learning frameworks.

National Quality Standard (NQS)—the benchmark for early childhood education and care and outside school hours care services. It includes seven quality areas that are important outcomes for children. Services are assessed and rated by regulatory authorities against the NQS and given a rating for each area and an overall rating based on their results.

Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA)—the independent national authority that assists governments in administering the National Quality Framework for children’s education and care. It is guided by a governing Board that is accountable to national Education Ministers.

Education Standards Board (ESB)—South Australia’s independent statutory authority responsible for the registration and regulation of early childhood services and registrations of schools for domestic and overseas students.

Appendix 2: How the Royal Commission has engaged

Community

The priority of the Royal Commission was to firstly, ask parents and caregivers to tell us what is important to them about early childhood education and care.

The Commission wanted to hear about the choices that families make for their children's early learning and what influences those choices. This was done via an online survey using the South Australian government's YourSAy platform and was promoted on the Commission's [website](#) and newsletter. At the time of this report, almost 450 responses have been received from across our community, including parents, grandparents, carers, and educators across South Australia.

Most respondents lived in metropolitan Adelaide and the Adelaide Hills, however there were also responses from residents of regional and remote locations, including the Riverland, the Far North, Yorke Peninsula, and the Limestone Coast. The vast majority (84 per cent) have been female and just over 70 per cent are aged 30-49.

Of those who responded, most had an interest due to children or grandchildren attending (or previously attended or who would be attending) long day care (also known as child care or early learning centres) or a Department for Education run preschool. Government preschool and/or long day care were the two most common early learning services that survey respondents had experience with.

A summary of responses is provided at Appendix 3.

The Royal Commissioner held online forums for parents and caregivers at the end of January 2023. Co-hosted with Georgie Dent, Chief Executive, the Parenthood, Auntie Suzanne Russell, senior Kurna woman and Lynne Rutherford, Chief Executive, Gowrie SA, the forums brought together parents of young children, families and services that support children with disability and Aboriginal families and services. The Commissioner heard about the specific challenges for families seeking services that are inclusion aware, the need for timely access to supports, the importance of culture and Aboriginal ways of learning and the ways that families experience preschool and child care. The insights of those who participated have been invaluable to support the policy thinking of the Commission.

Experts

The Commission established an Expert Advisory Group, bringing together experts in early childhood development, education, health and public policy to help shape the focus of the Commission's inquiries, ensuring findings are shaped by contemporary and rigorous evidence and thinking in early childhood education and care policy, operations and outcomes.

The Expert Advisory Group will meet over the life of the Royal Commission. The Expert Advisory Group is chaired by the Royal Commissioner, and members are:

Dr Anne Glover AO
Professor Sally Brinkman
Professor Leslie Loble
Dr Danielle Wood
Commissioner April Lawrie
Ms Lisa Paul AO PSM
Professor Brett McDermott

Public Hearings

Public hearings provide the opportunity for the Royal Commissioner to hear directly from experts and stakeholders in early childhood education and care.

Public hearings are being held throughout the Commission to bring expert advice on the lines of inquiry. Public hearings are live streamed on the Royal Commission [website](#) and are recorded and available to view at any time.

In January 2023, hearings were called to bring forward a range of local, national and international experts and to tell the story of South Australia's children, our early childhood education and care sector and to understand the evidence that supports preschool for three-year-olds.

In March, the Commission held a hearing focusing on data, research, and innovation heard from academics and senior public servants to further understanding as to how data can be better linked to best leverage service delivery and how cutting edge research can be implemented into practice and service delivery in a timely fashion.

Public hearings later in 2023 will look at accessibility, considering matters such as child care deserts, out-of-school-hours-care and sector workforce challenges.

Stakeholder Roundtables

The Royal Commission established stakeholder roundtables to provide forums for a wide range of experts to bring insight and expertise to the Commission's specific areas of inquiry.

Three roundtables have been formed: three-year-old preschool, the first 1000 days and out-of-school-hours-care (OSHC).

Roundtable members have been engaged in practical conversations tackling questions including what the commitment to three-year-old preschool means for South Australian children and how it might look for three-year-olds as compared to four-year-olds; provider reflections on what three-year-old preschool means on a practical level; challenges in the first 1000 days; barriers and opportunities for OSHC; and lessons from other Australian states.

Roundtables and their members are listed Appendix 4.

Formal Submissions

Formal submissions opened on 16 October 2022, however formal calls came later with guiding questions issued for three-year-old preschool in November 2022 and on the broader terms of reference in March 2023. The closing date for all formal submissions is 19 May 2023.

Witnesses at public hearings were asked to provide formal submissions, as were key sector and academic stakeholders. However, anyone is welcome to provide a formal submission via the Royal Commission's [website](#).

At the time of this report over 60 formal submissions have been received covering subjects across the Commission's Terms of Reference.

Submissions are published on the Royal Commission's [website](#) unless authors have specifically requested to keep content confidential.

Other Stakeholders

Alongside formal engagement with experts at hearings, roundtables and via formal submissions, the Commissioner and the Royal Commission team have met with a range of people and organisations with an interest or expertise in early childhood education, child development, public policy, and data in relevant fields.

These discussions have informed how the Commission has shaped hearings, focussed its inquiries and has ensured the Commission has been engaged at both a national and local level in current thinking about early childhood education and care policy directions and operational challenges.

The Commission thanks all of those who have been and continue to be engaged with this work.

A View from the North

In the early stages of the Commission, Adelaide's northern suburbs became a focus area given its very young resident population and significant evidence of community and intergenerational disadvantage. Noting the evidence that quality early childhood education and care can have a positive effect on a child's life course, and that quality benefits all children, but benefits children from disadvantaged families even more, the Commission has elected to hold a focussed hearing in Adelaide's northern suburbs in May 2023.

This focus on northern Adelaide will allow insight into the unique services and needs of the region, and will give the Commissioner opportunity to hear how innovative models, family support and community development can provide preschool; providing quality universal early learning in a way that brings learning and support to children and their families.

Appendix 3: Summary of YourSAy consultation October 22 – February 23

The Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care commenced on 16 October 2022. The terms of reference require the Commission to inquire into:

the extent to which South Australian families are supported in the first 1000 days of a child's life,

how universal quality preschool programs for three and four year old children can be delivered in South Australia, and

how all families can have access to out of school hours care at both preschool and primary school ages

The Terms of Reference also direct the Royal Commission to have regard to the views of parents and caregivers from diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds with lived experience of the early years system.

One part of hearing from the wider South Australian community on the issues important to them for early childhood education and care is a community survey, which opened on 16 October 2022.

The survey asks 23 questions about preschool, early learning and out of school hours care (OSHC).

While the survey remains open, this paper provides a summary of community views received between October 2022 and February 2023. The survey will remain open until May 2023 and the Royal Commission will continue to seek views via the survey as part of the wider engagement on the terms of reference.

The Royal Commission is grateful to the South Australians who have taken the time to respond to the community survey. The insights, lived experience and perspectives of families, parents, carers, grandparents and the wider community are so important, bringing richness and 'real life' to the inquiries of the Royal Commission.

Explanation of Terms

The community survey defines early childhood education and care as including : long day care, family day care, early learning centres and preschool (often known as kindy or kindergarten). Preschool may be delivered by the State Government Department for Education or by the private / non-government sector.

The Royal Commission acknowledges that some of these terms are used interchangeably, and some are used differently in other parts of Australia.

The survey also acknowledges that children may access multiple types of early childhood education and care, even in the same week. Children may be accessing combinations of services, including long day care (child care) and government or non-government preschool (kindy).

Demographics of respondents

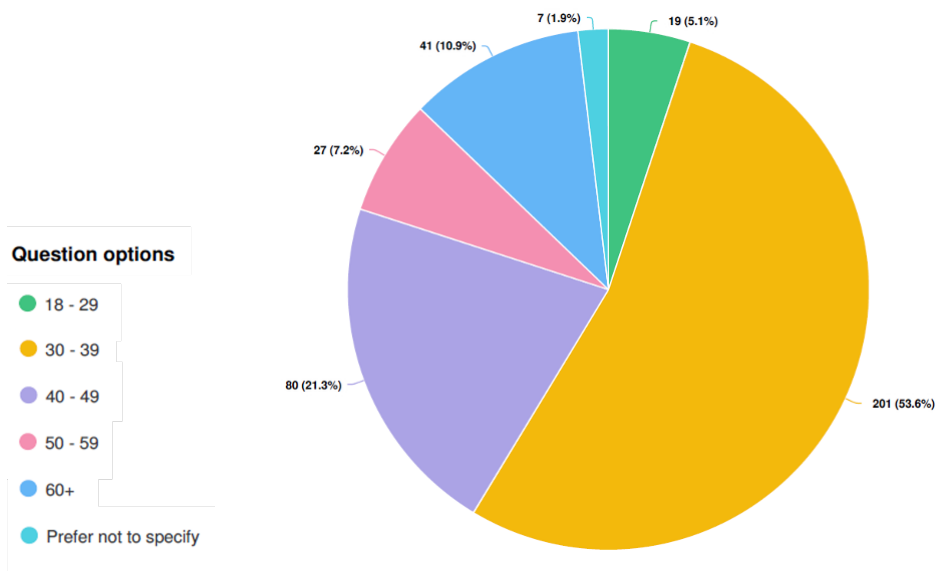
As at February 2023, just under 400 South Australians have responded to the community survey.

Of those, the majority are located in metropolitan Adelaide and the Adelaide Hills, however responses have been received from across the state, from locations including Kangaroo Island, the south-east region, far west, Yorke Peninsula, Riverland, Eyre Peninsula and far north.

Over 80% of respondents have identified as female, and over 70% are aged between 30 and 49.

In terms of roles in children's lives, just over 60% have responded as parents or caregivers either with children currently in ECEC or with children who have recently finished preschool. Grandparents have also responded to the survey, some with responsibility for children currently in or about to start ECEC, and some with adult children who also participated in ECEC.

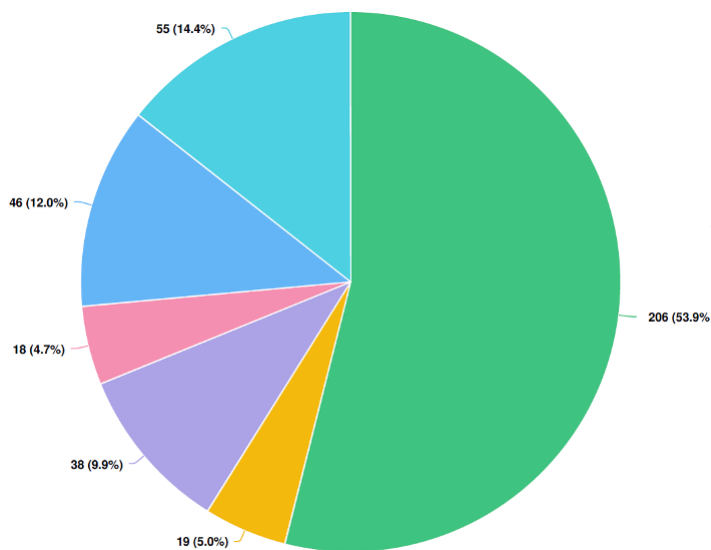
Figure 1: age of respondents



Interest in the Royal Commission

South Australians have responded to the Royal Commission for a variety of reasons. It is important to the Commission to hear from across the community and to understand how families are engaging (or not) in ECEC for their children.

People have responded to the survey for reasons including:



"I have children who were in care and a daughter who works in the industry"

"I want to ensure that we are not pushing children into school earlier than necessary"

"My kids attended both childcare and kindergarten and I am keen to see positive changes in both sectors to support parents and children"

"I have children who are banned from early learning due to being unvaccinated"

"I am an educator"

"My children went to preschool and it resulted in a diagnosis that led to early intervention from NDIS"

Participation in early childhood education and care

The Royal Commission notes that in South Australia the service models of early childhood education and care

(including preschool) vary. Many survey respondents had significant experience with long day care/early learning centres as well as Department for Education preschool and this reflects government data about where three and four-year-old children are attending ECEC.¹ Only a small number of survey respondents (23) were not accessing any ECEC.

Question options

- A parent or carer with children currently in early childhood education and care
- A grandparent with children currently in early childhood education and care
- A parent or carer with a child about to start early childhood education and care
- A grandparent with a child about to start early childhood education and care
- A parent or grandparent whose child has recently finished preschool
- None of these

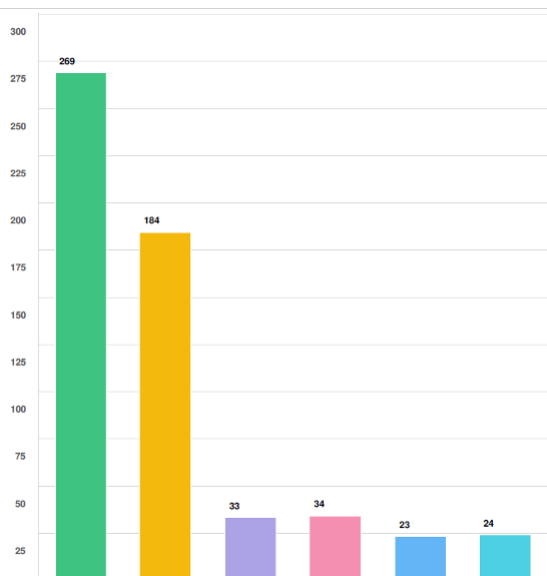
Figure 2: what capacity are you responding to this survey?

Interestingly, it was not uncommon for survey responses to indicate a preference for children to be accessing a combination of long day care and government preschool. However, it is not clear if this is because for example, of the need to balance working hours with children in ECEC (and the shorter operating hours of government preschool compared to long day care), or if in fact it is connected to South Australia's long history of, and community relationship with government kindergarten for our children in the year before school.²

1 SA Department for Education (2022) Background Paper to the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care (unpublished)

2 University of South Australia website, [A History of Early Childhood Education in South Australia](#)

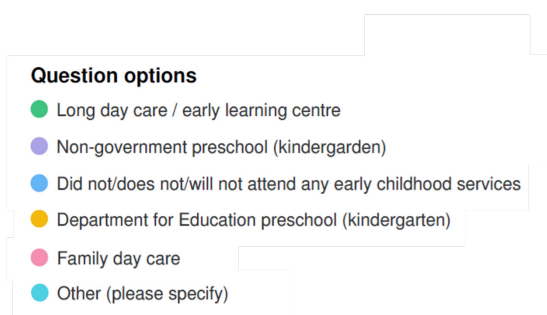
Conversely reasons for not accessing a government preschool included ‘wraparound care not available (e.g. OSHC, vacation care), session times offered didn’t / wouldn’t suit, and ‘happy with current ECEC service’. In the context of the terms of reference for this Commission and the question of OSHC for preschool aged children, these responses, along with those indicating they use a mix of ECEC types for their children give some insight into the demand for OSHC before and after preschool, as well as the balance that working families live with and how that influences their choice of ECEC for their children.



Respondents who were undecided were so mainly because they felt more information was needed. This included a desire for information about the education approach that three-year-old preschool would take (and for it to be suitable to their child), but hours of delivery, cost to families and service location were also factors for those undecided respondents.

The majority of respondents who indicated they would not send their three-year-old to preschool felt that three is too young for preschool. Others indicated concern about class sizes and satisfaction with current ECEC service.

Figure 3: What ECEC services did/do/ will your children/grandchildren attend?



This questioning in the survey led to asking about the key factors that influence choice of preschool. Again, session days and times and availability of long day care were important influences on service choices. However, also important to survey respondents was the location of the service, the ability of a service to support transition to school, service reputation and educational approach (such as Montessori, nature play etc.).

This speaks to the complexities that families need to grapple with in making choices that suit the needs of a child, connection to community, future education choices as well as the hours that suit working families. The Royal Commission notes that these decisions are not straightforward for any family, and multiple factors come into consideration when making decisions about accessing ECEC. Also of note, while cost was a factor in family decision making, it was not the main factor for survey respondents.

Three-year-old preschool

The survey asked for community responses to three-year-old preschool, as a key element of the Commission’s terms of reference.

While 60% of respondents indicated they would send their three-year-old to preschool (mostly because of the opportunity it presents for learning), 18% were undecided and 21% would not send their three-year-old to preschool.

Other general comments and views about preschool were invited.

Commentary included views on educational approach (such as Montessori and child-led learning), the opportunity for preschool to be a foundation for school, friendship and learning, cost of ECEC being challenging for working families (and prohibitive in some cases), lack of access in regional parts of South Australia, hours of preschool and lack of OSHC, the importance of parents and learning in the home, and ECEC sector workforce challenges.

Questions around how a preschool that caters for four-year-olds would support three-year-olds were also raised in the context of demand on educators, developmental stages, toileting and sleep /settling. These are all important questions for the Royal Commission.

Many survey responses also spoke of how much families value the opportunity for their children to access early childhood education and care. This included acknowledging the positive role that educators have played in their children’s lives, expressing a strong desire for more access in regional areas and a desire for all children to be able to participate.

Views on educators in early childhood education and care settings

The survey asked a series of questions on how early childhood educators are viewed.

Overwhelmingly, while respondents were very supportive of educators and the positive roles they play in children’s lives, and the quality and breadth of education and learning experiences they provide, there were strong views that there are not enough educators in the system in South Australia. Pay and conditions (including incentives for teachers to work in early childhood education and care) were considered to be significant barrier to having a sufficient and high-quality workforce.

While the survey was asking only about perceptions and views, it is noted that some respondents to the survey work in the sector or have family in the sector.

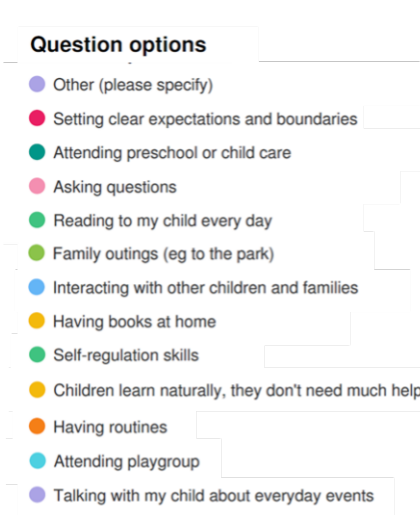
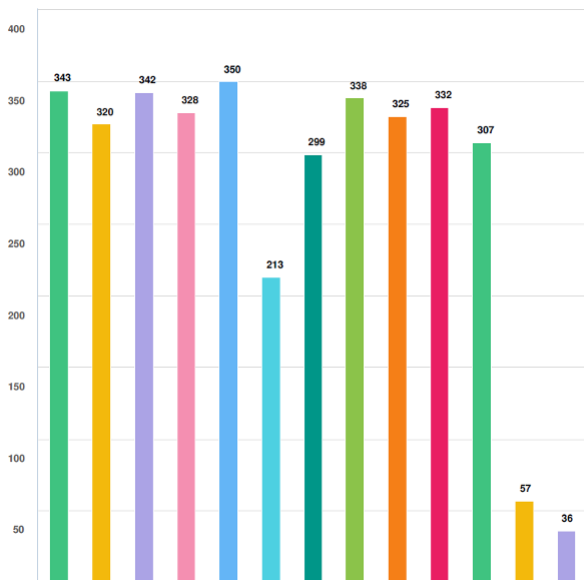
The Royal Commission is committed to examining workforce issues during its inquiries. As part of that, public hearings will be held later in 2023 on this subject. The Royal Commission is also aware of wider work happening both at a national level and in other parts of Australia and any findings of the Commission will be within that wider context.

Generally, respondents to the survey expressed a view that while the cost they pay is a reasonable contribution to the cost of delivering ECEC, it is expensive for families, particularly when they have multiple children below school age. Not all families agreed they were making a reasonable contribution to costs, and some were non-committal on this question.

The Commission acknowledges families may feel that they are making a reasonable contribution in fees to the cost of services but may still believe that educator pay and conditions are a barrier to workforce growth. The survey was not intended to delve deeply into the structural elements of service delivery, subsidy and costs to families, however it was important to gauge perceptions of cost of ECEC and how it impacts on South Australians.

The Royal Commission notes recent reforms to Child Care Subsidy that passed the federal Parliament and the impact this will have on affordability of long day care and other eligible services for many families.

Figure 4: What do you think is important for children’s development and learning?



Cost of early childhood education and care

The cost to families of early childhood education and care was raised by respondents in a number of ways across the survey. Affordability of ECEC is a barrier to access.

Views on what is important for children’s development and learning

The Royal Commission wanted to hear from families their views on what is important for children’s development and learning and what helps to keep families engaged in children’s learning.

Survey respondents felt strongly about providing children with an opportunity to interact with others, reading every day, attending preschool or child care, asking questions and talking with their children. Setting boundaries and expectations, having routines, and accepting the ability of children to learn naturally were also important to respondents.

Respondents indicated they receive support to engage their children in learning by reading books/articles, interacting with early childhood educators, advice from family and friends, and parent workshops. While books, internet and social media are important ways of communicating and learning, these responses suggest that community and ‘the village’ still remain so vital to families with young children.

Of those who have responded so far, only 45% have used OSHC, however that is mainly because they don’t have children who are of an age where they are able to access it. This is suspected to be a signal of the age of children of survey respondents more so than a sign that OSHC is not in demand.

Of those who have used OSHC, it is because it is accessible, and allows parents to work longer hours (although some respondents suggested it is not ‘longer hours’ but just the hours they need to work). Survey respondents also noted the ability of OSHC to give children social interactions before and after school and in the holidays.

Those who have children at primary school accessing OSHC have emphasised its importance to allow families to work. This was in both metropolitan and regional areas.

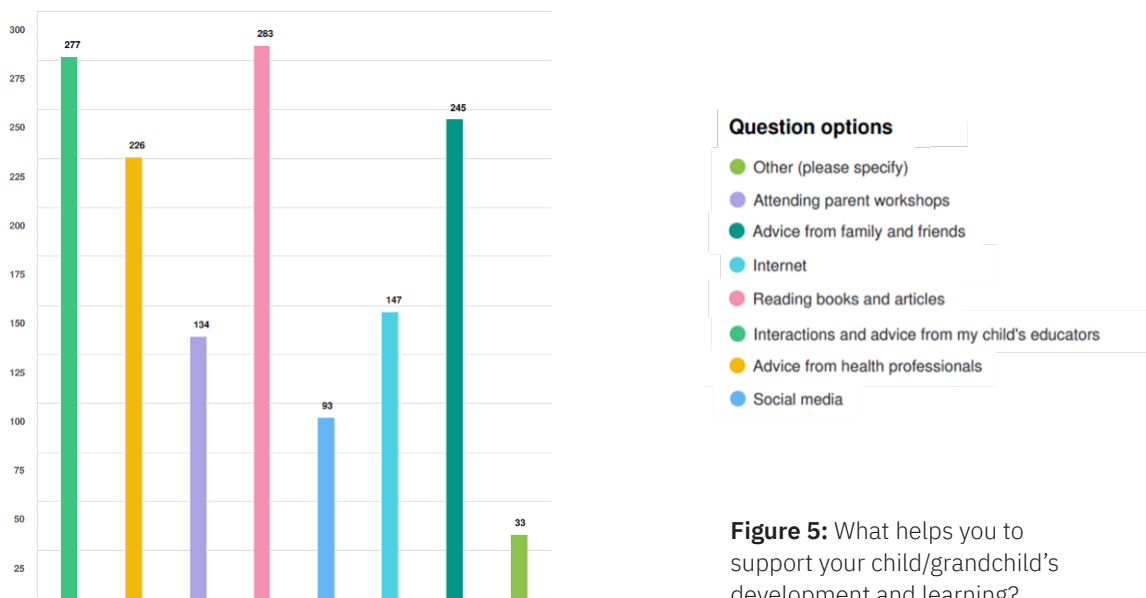


Figure 5: What helps you to support your child/grandchild’s development and learning?

Grandchild’s development and learning?

Child development checks, engaging with services like CaFHS and other health services (like dental) and the ability to detect developmental delays were raised by numerous respondents, who also considered ECEC to be critical in helping families to identify delays, and navigate and understand where to find support.

Out of School Hours Care (OSHC)

The final set of questions in the community survey were about out of school hours care (OSHC). The Royal Commission is inquiring into the availability of OSHC for both primary school and preschool aged children. The survey responses have brought a range of important views to the Commission.

There were however, challenges highlighted by respondents. The age mix of children was raised, as was the fact that older primary school children ‘outgrow’ OSHC. The cost in some cases was considered high, the operation of OSHC by external providers and the role of government and schools in overseeing services was also raised as a challenge. Similarly, comments about the roles of governing councils and the status of OSHC in school structures were also made.

Lack of OSHC for preschool aged children was raised by multiple respondents. This connects with earlier views in the survey about the choices of preschool that families are faced with, and the need for some children to move between long day care and preschool in that year before school.

The question of OSHC accessibility, delivery and opportunities in this area will be part of the Royal Commission’s inquiries and part of the April 2023, accessibility hearings.

Appendix 4: Roundtable Members

3-year-old preschool roundtable members

Lynne Rutherford, Gowrie SA
Kerry Leaver, Education Standards Board
Kerry Mahoney, Australian Childcare Alliance
Jackie Bray, SA Department for Education
Carrie Johnson, Community Children's Centres SA
Jo Vlassco, Local Government Association
Paula Pittam, Goodstart
Neil McGoran, Catholic Education SA
Associate Professor Victoria Whitington,
University of South Australia
Libby Worrell, Association of Independent Schools SA
Professor Angela Scarino, Ministerial Advisory Committee,
Multicultural Education & Languages Committee
Jan Murphy, Australian Education Union
Helen Gibbons, United Workers Union
Tim Oosterbaan, Independent Education Union
Kate Ryan, Preschool Directors Association
Judy Atkinson, Australian Childcare Alliance SA
Susan Jackson, Early Childhood Australia (SA)
Elizabeth Death, Early Learning and Care Council of Australia
Sarah Graham, Early Childhood Organisation (ECHO)

First 1000 days roundtable members

Professor Katina D'Onise, Wellbeing SA
Jackie Bray, SA Department for Education
Merrilyn Hannaford, Family Day Care
Educators Association (SA)
Fiona Margrie, Women's and Children's Health Network
Carrie Johnson, Community Children's Centres SA
Sandy Pitcher, Department of Human Services
Lynne Rutherford, Gowrie SA
Tessa Kong, Australian Association for Infant Mental Health
Mandy Dempsey, Port Augusta Children's Centre

Greg Ward, Novita SA
Kerry Mahoney, Australian Childcare Alliance
Helen Graham, Autism SA
Dr Rhiannon Pilkington, University of Adelaide, BetterStart
Shona Reid, Guardian for Children and Young People
Craig Bradbrook, Playgroups SA
Professor Jon Jureidini, University of Adelaide, School of Medicine
Ross Womersley, SA Council of Social Services
Helen Gibbons, United Workers Union
Adriana Christopoulos, SA Multicultural Commission
David Coltman, TAFE SA
Jo Vlassco, Local Government Association
Judy Atkinson, Australian Childcare Alliance SA
Myra Geddes, Goodstart

Out-of-School-Hours-Care roundtable members

Alicia Flowers, Out of School Hours Care Association SA
Merrilyn Hannaford, Family Day Care Educators Association (SA)
Helen Gibbons, United Workers Union
Angela Falkenberg, SA Primary Principals Association
Libby Worrell, Association of Independent Schools SA
Kate Ryan, Preschool Directors Association
Kathryn Bruggeman, SA Department for Education
Ian Lamb, SA Department for Education
Chris Roberts, SA Area School Leaders Association
Kerry Leaver, Education Standards Board
Judith Bundy, SA Association of School Parent Communities
Komala Champion, YMCA
Chelsea Daly, Camp Australia
Nicholas Smith, Happy Haven
Tracey Aberle, SA School Business Association
Brian Schumacher, Catholic Education SA

Appendix 5: Key data received by the Commission

Key to the Royal Commission providing a plan for implementing three-year-old preschool to the South Australian government, is a comprehensive map of children and ECEC services. It is impossible to plan if you do not know your starting point.

ECEC data is held by a number of State and Commonwealth government entities, along with regulators and of course, providers both small and large.

Because providers include both government and non-government services, some operating as long day care (including family day care), some as preschools, some for profit and others not-for-profit, the range of services delivered to children and their families before primary school is broad.

Government holds significant data on its own part of the sector, but much less information on non-government provision.

To understand the entire sector across South Australia, the Royal Commission engaged Deloitte Access Economics to survey non-government ECEC providers of all types to gather information about service offerings, capacity (demand and availability), workforce, potential to expand physical service footprints and interest in delivering three-year-old preschool. The survey was open for four weeks in early 2023 and there was a 69 per cent response rate across providers. The survey was developed and tested with small, medium and large providers before distribution. The testing allowed the survey to be modified to ensure it was easy for providers of all size to understand and complete.

Survey data was then combined with State government, Commonwealth education data and independent regulator data to develop a sector map and a modelling tool that can model varying options for delivering preschool to three-year-old children in South Australia (Part 3 of this report).

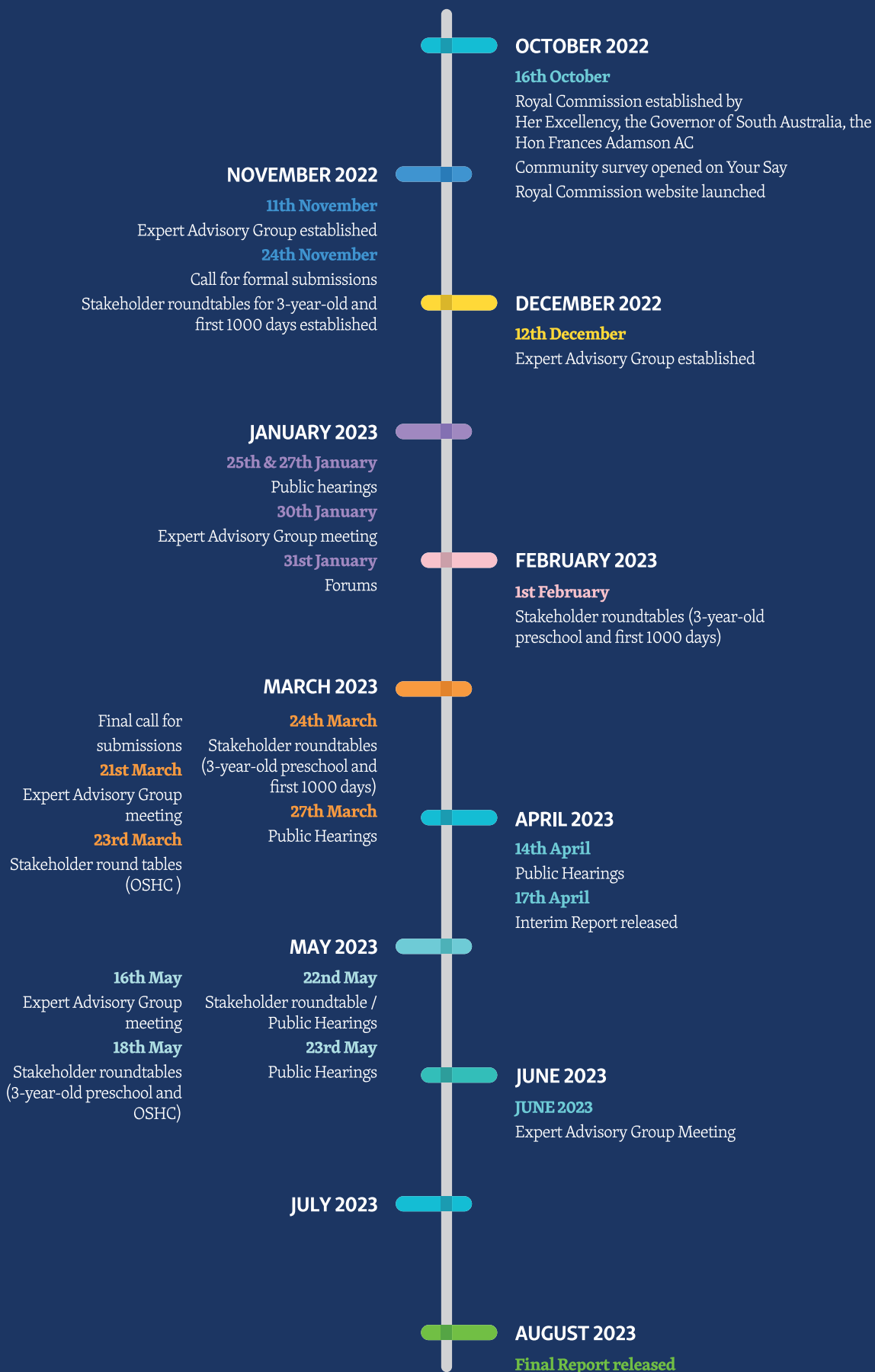
This is the first time we are aware that government, non-government, and provider data has been collated into a single sector map of early childhood education and care in South Australia.

However, there are limitations to the data and the modelling tool. Data has been collected at different points in time, there is a reliance on survey data for non-government providers, and because of the varied data sources, the data was collected, held and provided in different ways.

Deloitte Access Economics, working with the Royal Commission and providers of data have worked to reconcile and quality-check data as much as possible but we cannot guarantee all data is of the same quality.

Despite the limitations highlighted, the model does provide a rigorous mechanism to test and assess preschool delivery options and impacts and has been an important tool to inform this Interim Report.

Appendix 6: Dates



references

References

1. Australian Bureau of Statistics (2022) Births, Australia Births, Australia, 2021 | Australian Bureau of Statistics (abs.gov.au).
2. D Brennan & S Pascoe (2017) Lifting our Game, Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian schools through Early Childhood Interventions.
3. Oral evidence: V Whittington (25/1/23).
4. C Molloy, T Moore, M O'Connor, K Villanueva, S West, S Goldfeld (2021) A novel 3-part approach to tackle the problem of health inequities in early childhood. *Academic Paediatrics*, 2021; XXX:1-8.; S Howells, B Lam, R Marrone, S Brinkman (2022) Rapid Review of the literature and results of an academic pulse survey to determine the evidence behind pre-school for three-year-old children. Commissioned report for the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care, South Australia.
5. D Brennan & S Pascoe (2017) Lifting our Game, Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian schools through Early Childhood Interventions.
6. Oral evidence: B Jordan (25/1/23).
7. M Grant, K Meissel & D Exeter (2023). Promoting Temporal Investigations of Development in Context: a Systematic Review of Longitudinal Research Linking Childhood Circumstances and Learning-related Outcomes. *Educational Psychology Review*, 35(1).
8. There are a number of population cohort studies with a focus on early child development. In addition to those referenced in this report, for example, see: X Wang et al. (2021). Cohort Profile: The Shanghai Children's Health, Education and Lifestyle Evaluation, Preschool (SCHEDULE-P) study. *Int J Epidemiol*, 50(2), 391-399; M Quante et al. (2012) The LIFE child study: a life course approach to disease and health. *BMC Public Health*, 12, 1021.
9. Oral evidence: K Hawkins and K Beck (27/3/23).
10. University of South Australia, A History of Early Childhood Education in South Australia
11. Oral evidence: S Wong (25/1/23).
12. Submission: SA Department for Education (2023).
13. Deloitte Access Economics (2023) Mapping long day care and non-government preschool in South Australia. Commissioned report for the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care, South Australia.
14. Nous Group (2020) UANP Review: Final Review Report, prepared for the COAG Education Council.
15. Submission: V Whittington (2023), Oral evidence: R Pilkington (25/1/23).
16. Australian Government (2022) Australian Early Development Census National Report 2021
17. Submission: V Whittington (2023).
18. H Keleher and C MacDougall (eds) (2009) *Understanding Health: A Determinants Approach* (2nd Edition). Oxford University Press: South Melbourne.
19. Oral evidence: V Whittington (25/1/23).
20. Child Development Council (SA) (2022) How are they faring? South Australia's 2020 Report Card for children and young people.
21. Ibid.
22. SA Child and Family Health Service.
23. SA Department for Education (2022) Background paper to the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care (unpublished).
24. SA Department for Education (2021) All young children thriving and learning, South Australia's Early Learning Strategy.
25. Oral evidence: K D'Onise (27/3/23).
26. Oral evidence: R Pilkington (25/1/23)
27. Submission: K D'Onise (2023).
28. Note that this report uses the term parent for simplicity, but the Commission intends it to mean anyone who is fulfilling the role of primary caregiver, and recognises this may often be another family member (e.g. grandparent) or someone else as a result of family circumstances.
29. OECD (2017) *Starting Strong 2017: Key OECD Indicators on Early Childhood Education and Care*, OECD Publishing, Paris. D Wood. K Griffiths and O Emslie (2020) *Cheaper childcare: A practical plan to boost female workforce participation*. Grattan Institute.
30. Ibid.
31. S Howells, B Lam, R Marrone, S Brinkman (2022) Rapid Review of the literature and results of an academic pulse survey to determine the evidence behind pre-school for three-year-old children. Commissioned report for the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care, South Australia.
32. Ibid., OECD (2017) *Starting Strong 2017: Key OECD Indicators on Early Childhood Education and Care*, OECD Publishing, Paris; Submission: I Siraj (2023); R Beatson et al (2022) Early Childhood Education Participation: A Mixed-Methods Study of Parent and Provider Perceived Barriers and Facilitators, *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 31:2929-2946 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-022-02274-5>, D Brennan & S Pascoe (2017) Lifting our Game, Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian schools through Early Childhood Interventions., Nous Group (2020) UANP Review: Final Review Report, prepared for the COAG Education Council
33. Ibid.
34. Submission: I Siraj (2023); D Brennan & S Pascoe (2017) Lifting our Game, Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian schools through Early Childhood Interventions
35. S Howells, B Lam, R Marrone, S Brinkman (2022) Rapid Review of the literature and results of an academic pulse survey to determine the evidence behind pre-school for three-year-old children. Commissioned report for the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care, South Australia.
36. Submission: I Siraj (2023); S Fox & M Geddes (2016) *Preschool – Two years are Better than One: Developing a Preschool Program for Australian 2-Year-Olds – Evidence, Policy and Implementation*, Mitchell Institute Policy Paper No.03/2016. Mitchell Institute Melbourne.
37. S Howells, B Lam, R Marrone, S Brinkman (2022) Rapid Review of the literature and results of an academic pulse survey to determine the evidence behind pre-school for three-year-old children. Commissioned report for the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care, South Australia.
38. Oral evidence: B Jordan (25/1/23).
39. Submission: I Siraj (2023).
40. Submission: Goodstart Early Learning (2023).
41. C Molloy, S Goldfeld, C Harrop, N Perini (2022) Early Childhood Education: A study of the barriers, facilitators, & strategies to improve participation.
42. Oral evidence: S Goldfeld (25/1/23).
43. Submission: Thrive by Five (2023).
44. University of South Australia, A History of Early Childhood Education in South Australia
45. Submission: SA Department for Education (2023).
46. Table 3A.17 'Children enrolled in a preschool program in the state-specific year before full time schooling, by sector' (2023). Report on Government Services. rogs-2023-partb-section3-eccec-data-tables.xlsx (live.com).

References—continued...

47. Submission: SA Department for Education (2023).
48. Australian Government Preschool Reform Agreement.
49. Submissions: SA Department for Education (2023); Goodstart Early Learning (2023); Gowrie SA (2023); Oral evidence: C Cavouras (27/1/23).
50. Submission: SA Department for Education (2023).
51. Note that this figure is only indicative of the rates of enrolment in government preschool in the year before school, as the Year Before School methodology does not perfectly match the age of children included in Department enrolment figures for four and five year olds. However, the time series gives a reliable indication of decline in the proportion of children enrolled in government preschool over time.
52. Submission: SA Department for Education (2023).
53. Submission: Goodstart Early Learning (2023).
54. Deloitte Access Economics (2023) Mapping long day care and non-government preschool in South Australia. Commissioned report for the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care, South Australia.
55. Ibid.
56. SA Department for Education (2023) Apply for non-government preschool service provider funding (education.sa.gov.au).
57. For completeness, the national reporting under the ABS uses the Child Care Subsidy data, as well as data about the State Government preschool enrolments to provide a state-wide figure of ECEC enrolment of three, four and five-year-olds. However, this does not capture what the South Australian government would consider to be an 'accredited' preschool program, nor does it use linked data to allow identification of the characteristics of those children not attending.
58. Australian Government Preschool Reform Agreement.
59. Deloitte Access Economics (2023) Mapping long day care and non-government preschool in South Australia. Commissioned report for the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care, South Australia.
60. SA Department for Education (2023) data request for the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care (unpublished).
61. Deloitte Access Economics (2023) Mapping long day care and non-government preschool in South Australia. Commissioned report for the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care, South Australia.
62. Ibid.
63. C Rinaldi (2013) Re-imagining childhood, the inspiration of Reggio Emilia education principles in South Australia.
64. Submission: Early Childhood Organisation (EChO) (2023).
65. Australian Government, Preschool Reform Agreement.
66. SA Government (2021) South Australia's Implementation Plan for the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.
67. Productivity Commission Inquiry into Early Childhood Education and Care Terms of Reference
68. Australian Competition and Consumer Commission Childcare Inquiry Childcare inquiry | ACCC
69. Submission: S Wong (2023).
70. P Hurley, H Matthews, & S Pennicuik (2022) Deserts and oases: how accessible is childcare? Mitchell Institute, Victoria University.
71. Submission: Australian Department of Education (2023).
72. Deloitte Access Economics (2023) Mapping long day care and non-government preschool in South Australia. Commissioned report for the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care, South Australia.
73. Nous Group (2020) UANP Review: Final Review Report, prepared for the COAG Education Council.
74. Deloitte Access Economics (2023) Mapping long day care and non-government preschool in South Australia. Commissioned report for the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care, South Australia.
75. Nous Group (2020) UANP Review: Final Review Report, prepared for the COAG Education Council.
76. Deloitte Access Economics (2023) Mapping long day care and non-government preschool in South Australia. Commissioned report for the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care, South Australia.
77. Joint media release (16 June 2022) the Hon Dominic Perrottet and the Hon Daniel Andrews.
78. Dandolo Partners (2022) Working through the NSW and Victorian early education reforms, paper 1 – Balancing ambitious growth with equity and quality.
79. Submission: I Siraj (2023); Oral evidence: B Jordan (25/1/23).
80. Parent and Caregiver forums with the Royal Commissioner (31/1/23).
81. Submission: SA Department for Education (2023).
82. Ibid.
83. F Mustard (2008) Investing in the early years: closing the gap between what we know and what we do, Adelaide Thinker in Residence.
84. Submission: SA Department for Education (2023).
85. Oral evidence: C Cavouras (27/1/23).
86. Oral evidence: G Combes (27/1/23).
87. Australian Government, Department of Education (2022) Inclusion Support Program Guidelines - Department of Education, Australian Government version 2.4, September 2022.
88. Gowrie SA website.
89. Parent and Caregiver forums with Royal Commissioner (31/1/23).
90. Ibid.
91. Deloitte Access Economics (2021) Mapping of Early Childhood Programs, prepared for Department for Education (SA).
92. Ibid.
93. Deloitte Access Economics (2023) Mapping long day care and non-government preschool in South Australia. Commissioned report for the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care, South Australia.
94. Submission: R Pilkington (2023); Panel evidence to the Commission: C Cavouras, J Lemon, G Combes (27/1/23).
95. Child Development Council (2022) How are they faring? South Australia's 2020 Report Card for children and young people.
96. Stakeholder roundtable with the Royal Commission (24/3/23).
97. Ibid., For example: submissions of Preschool Directors Association and Australian Community Children's Services (SA) (2023).
98. Deloitte Access Economics (2023) Mapping long day care and non-government preschool in South Australia. Commissioned report for the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care, South Australia.
99. For example, UnitingCare program offers early childhood education and play for rural and remote children - ABC News.

References—continued...

100. Stakeholder roundtable with the Royal Commission (24/3/23).
101. SA Department for Education (2023) Non-government preschool funding agreement template.
102. C. Rinaldi (2013) Re-imagining childhood, the inspiration of Reggio Emilia education principles in South Australia.
103. SA Department for Education Purpose statement for public education.
104. Australian Department of Education (2019) The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration - Department of Education, Australian Government.
105. Submission: Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (2023).
106. L Barblett, et al (2021). National quality framework approved learning frameworks update: Literature review. ACECQA. <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-09/2021NQF-ALF-UpdateLiteratureReview.PDF>.
107. Submissions: Australian Department of Education (2023), Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (2023), Early Learning and Care Council of Australia (2023).
108. Submissions: Flinders University of South Australia (2023); Early Childhood Australia (2023); Educators SA (2023); University of South Australia Education Futures (2023).
109. D Cairney, et al (2021). The predictive value of universal preschool developmental assessment in identifying children with later educational difficulties: A systematic review. *PLOS ONE*, 16(3), e0247299.
110. S Cibralic, et al (2022). Developmental Screening Tools Used with First Nations Populations: A Systematic Review. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*, 19(23).
111. L Harrison, et al (2019). NSW preschool assessment study: review of formative assessment practices in early childhood settings. NSW Department of Education.
112. Submissions: Education Standards Board (2023); Catholic Education SA (2023); Educators SA (2023).
113. Submission: Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (2023).
114. E Melhuish, et al (2015). A review of research on the effects of early childhood Education and Care (ECEC) upon child development. CARE project; Curriculum Quality Analysis and Impact Review of European Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). <http://ecec-care.org/resources/publications>.
115. Oral evidence: I Siraj (27/1/23); Submissions: Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (2023); Early Learning and Care Council of Australia (2023).
116. Submissions: Flinders University of South Australia (2023); Australian Community Children's Services (2023).
117. Submission: Flinders University of South Australia (2023).
118. Submissions: University of South Australia Education Futures (2023); Goodstart Early Learning (2023); Nazareth Early Childhood Centre (2023).
119. Stakeholder roundtable with the Royal Commission (1/2/23).
120. Oral evidence: I Siraj (27/1/23); Submissions: Montessori (2023); University of Melbourne, REEaCh Centre (2023).
121. Submissions: Early Learning and Care Council of Australia (2023); Education Standards Board (2023).
122. Submissions: United Workers Union (2023); Australian Community Children's Services (2023); Goodstart Early Learning (2023); Gowrie SA (2023).
123. Submission: Education Standards Board (2023).
124. Oral evidence: C Nielson-Hewitt (2023).
125. S Howells, B Lam, R Marrone, S Brinkman (2022) Rapid Review of the literature and results of an academic pulse survey to determine the evidence behind pre-school for three-year-old children. Commissioned report for the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care, South Australia; E Melhuish, et al (2015). A review of research on the effects of early childhood Education and Care (ECEC) upon child development. CARE project; Curriculum Quality Analysis and Impact Review of European Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). <http://ecec-care.org/resources/publications>; Submissions: Community Children's Centres (SA) (2023), Early Childhood Australia (2023).
126. Australian Government Department of Education (2022) *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (v2.0)*. Australian Government Department of Education for the Ministerial Council.
127. Oral evidence: I Siraj (27/1/23).
128. S Howells, B Lam, R Marrone, S Brinkman (2022) Rapid Review of the literature and results of an academic pulse survey to determine the evidence behind pre-school for three-year-old children. Commissioned report for the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care, South Australia.
129. Submission: Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care - National Voice for our Children (SNAICC) (2023), p10.
130. Submission: SA Department for Education (2023).
131. SA Department for Education (2019) *Aboriginal Education Strategy, 2019-2029*.
132. Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) website.
133. Submission: SA Department for Education (2023).
134. Ibid.
135. E Melhuish, et al (2015). A review of research on the effects of early childhood Education and Care (ECEC) upon child development. CARE project; Curriculum Quality Analysis and Impact Review of European Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). Available at <http://ecec-care.org/resources/publications/>.
136. S Howard and E Melhuish (2017) An early years toolbox for assessing early executive function, language and self-regulation, and social development: Validity, reliability, and preliminary norms. *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment*, 35 (3), 255-275.
137. L Harrison, et al (2019). NSW preschool assessment study: review of formative assessment practices in early childhood settings. NSW Department of Education. pp 69-70.
138. For example, submission by Australian Community Children's Services (2023).
139. Oral evidence: C Nielson-Hewitt (27/3/23).
140. Submission: Goodstart Early Learning (2023).
141. Submission: Early Learning and Care Council of Australia (2023).
142. Submission: Community Children's Centres SA (2023).
143. Submissions: Early Learning and Care Council of Australia (2023); SA Montessori (2023); Gowrie SA (2023).
144. Submission: Early Childhood Australia (2023).
145. Submission: Preschool Directors Association (SA) (2023).
146. Submission: Flinders University of South Australia (2023).
147. Submission: Australian Department of Education (2023).

References—continued...

148. S Howells, B Lam, R Marrone, S Brinkman (2022) Rapid Review of the literature and results of an academic pulse survey to determine the evidence behind pre-school for three-year-old children. Commissioned report for the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care, South Australia.
149. For example Submission: Early Childhood Organisation (EChO) (2023).
150. Deloitte Access Economics (2023) Mapping long day care and non-government preschool in South Australia. Commissioned report for the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care, South Australia.
151. Submission: Community Children’s Centres SA (2023).
152. Submissions: Early Childhood Organisation (EChO) (2023); I Siraj (2023).
153. The Commission notes the term ‘dosage’ is often used in research to identify the optimal number of hours per week of education and care. However, the Commission has elected to use language like duration and format to reflect what those delivery models look like for children and families.
154. Oral evidence: J Lemon (27/1/23).
155. E Melhuish, et al (2015). A review of research on the effects of early childhood Education and Care (ECEC) upon child development. CARE project; Curriculum Quality Analysis and Impact Review of European Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). Available at <http://ecec-care.org/resources/publications/>. Submissions: The Front Project (2023), Preschool Directors Association (SA) (2023).
156. Oral evidence: B Jordan (25/1/23).
157. Submission: Goodstart Early Learning (2023).
158. Submission: Gowrie SA (2023).
159. Submission: I Siraj (2023).
160. Centre For Policy Development (2021) Starting Better, A guarantee for young children and families
161. Submission: Early Learning and Care Council of Australia (2023).
162. Oral evidence: C Cavouras (27/1/23).
163. Submission: SA Department for Education (2023).
164. For example: Submissions by: Association of Independent Schools SA (2023), Save the Children/54 Reasons (2023), Early Learning and Care Council of Australia (2023), Educators SA (2023).
165. Submission: Speech Pathology Australia (2023).
166. C Blewitt, et al (2021). Social and emotional learning in early childhood education and care: A public health perspective. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, 45(1), 17-19. doi: 10.1111/1753-6405.13058. See also, S Wong & F Press (2017). Interprofessional work in early childhood education and care services to support children with additional needs: two approaches, *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties*, 22:1, 49-56, DOI: 10.1080/19404158.2017.1322994
167. For an example of this kind of work, see: A Lindorff, K Sylva, K Ereky-Stevens and A Joseph (2022). Coaching Early Conversation, Interaction and Language (CECIL) Impact evaluation. Sutton Trust. <https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/CECIL-Evaluation-Oxford-14.02.2022.pdf>
168. Submission: Early Learning and Care Council of Australia (2023).
169. Victorian Government, funding and policies supporting three-year-old kindergarten.
170. For example: Preschool Directors Association (2023); Commissioner for Children and Young People (SA) (2023); Telethon Kids Institute (2023); Educators SA (2023).
171. S Howells, B Lam, R Marrone, S Brinkman (2022) Rapid Review of the literature and results of an academic pulse survey to determine the evidence behind pre-school for three-year-old children. Commissioned report for the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care, South Australia; Oral evidence: I Siraj (27/1/23); C Molloy et al (2018) Restacking the Odds, Technical Report; Early childhood education and care: an evidence based review of indicators to assess quality, quantity and participation.
172. Submission: University of Melbourne, REEaCh Centre (2023).
173. Submission: Australian Association of Infant Mental Health (2023).
174. C Molloy et al (2018) Restacking the Odds, Technical Report; Early childhood education and care: an evidence based review of indicators to assess quality, quantity and participation.
175. Submission: Education Standards Board (2023).
176. ACECQA Assessment and Rating Process.
177. Submission: Early Learning and Care Council of Australia (2023).
178. Submission: Education Standards Board (2023).
179. Oral evidence: I Siraj (27/1/23).
180. Submission: Preschools Directors Association (SA) (2023).
181. Submission: Community Children’s Centres SA (2023).
182. ACECQA (2022), National Quality Standards Data, as at January 2023.
183. J Jeong, J et al (2021). Parenting interventions to promote early child development in the first three years of life: A global systematic review and meta-analysis. *PLoS Med*, 18(5), e1003602.
184. C Day, J Harwood , N Kendall, J Nicoll (2022) Impact of a peer-led, community-based parenting programme delivered at a national scale: an uncontrolled cohort design with benchmarking. *BMC Public Health*. 22(1):1377.
185. D Gross and A Bettencourt, (2019). Financial Incentives for Promoting Participation in a School-Based Parenting Program in Low-Income Communities. *Prevention Science* 20, pp 585–597.
186. From here, this report will use the term ‘Aboriginal’ to refer to people who identify as Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, or both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.
187. Oral evidence: C Cavouras (27/1/23).
188. Parents and caregivers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children forum with Royal Commission (31/1/23).
189. Submission: Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People (2023), p. 2.
190. Submission: SNAICC (2023), p12.
191. Ibid p14.
192. Ibid p19.
193. In the interests of clarity, the usual State Government funding arrangements for three-year-old preschool are taken to include:
 - The funding provided to government preschools for all children attending their service (including Aboriginal children)
 - The funding State Government provides to non-government ECEC services for delivery of preschool to all children attending their service (including Aboriginal children, including ACCOs delivering ECEC)
 - Loadings included in any funding model to reflect areas of additional need (including the number of Aboriginal children)

References—continued...

194. Deloitte Access Economics (2023) Mapping long day care and non-government preschool in South Australia. Commissioned report for the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care, South Australia.
195. Submission: Australian Childcare Alliance SA (2023).
196. Stakeholder roundtable with the Royal Commission (1/2/23).
197. The operational costs have been derived in accordance with Recommendation 18.
198. Submissions: Australian Childcare Alliance SA (2023); United Workers Union (2023).
199. Submissions: Thrive by Five (2023); The Front Project (2023).
200. Submission: Australian Childcare Alliance SA (2023).
201. For example: Submission by Australian Education Union (2023).
202. Submission: Preschool Directors Association (SA) (2023).
203. See Figure 4, in Part 1.
204. Additional capacity will be defined by reference to the gap between the physical capacity of the site, per the ACECQA approved places model, and current enrolments. It will also include consideration of the opportunity to release additional capacity through minor capital works and/or programming. Specifically, rather than with reference to 'soft caps' imposed by the Department for the purpose of ensuring efficient use of staffing resources. For more on this, see Deloitte Model Specification.
205. Submission: Early Learning and Care Council of Australia (2023).
206. These areas are Statistical Areas Level 2 (SA2). The Australian Bureau of Statistics advises that: "Statistical Areas Level 2 (SA2) are medium-sized general purpose areas built up from whole Statistical Areas Level 1. Their purpose is to represent a community that interacts together socially and economically. ... SA2s generally have a population range of 3,000 to 25,000 persons. SA2s have an average population of about 10,000 persons and include towns with a population in excess of this. SA2s in remote and regional areas generally have smaller populations than those in urban areas." 1270.0.55.001 - Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS): Volume 1 - Main Structure and Greater Capital City Statistical Areas, July 2016 (abs.gov.au).
207. Average of PPV across the 28 SA2s (range 37.5% - 100%).
208. Average of PPV across the 42 SAs (range 0% - 66.7%).
209. Report on Government Services (ROGS) (2023) Early childhood education and care services. Table 3A.17 'Children enrolled in a preschool program in the state-specific year before full time schooling, by sector'.
210. Oral evidence: V Whittington (25/1/23); R Pilkington (25/1/23); K D'Onise (27/3/23).
211. Submission: Goodstart Early Learning (2023).
212. Oral evidence: B Jordan (25/1/23).
213. C Molloy, S Goldfeld, C Harrop, N Perini (2022) Early Childhood Education: A study of the barriers, facilitators and strategies to improve participation.
214. Submission: SA Department for Education (2023).
215. Submission: Preschool Directors Association (SA) (2023).
216. Submission: SA Department for Education (2023).
217. SA Department for Education Governing council fees for stand-alone preschools (education.sa.gov.au).
218. School card is a scheme that supports low-income families with fees and other expenses for school students. There are specific circumstances and income limits to eligibility.
219. Submission: Preschool Directors Association (SA) (2023).
220. Deloitte Access Economics (2023) Mapping long day care and non-government preschool in South Australia. Commissioned report for the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care, South Australia.
221. This figure is derived from the number of children in Child Care Subsidy (CCS) supported places in Scenario 3B of the Deloitte Access Economics modelling, times the rate being paid by the Victorian Government to ensure free kinder (\$2,000 per child for 15 hours a week in a CCS service) or the rate being paid by the New South Wales Government to ensure fee relief (\$4,220 per child for 15 hours a week in a CCS service).
222. Estimated CCS coverage does not take into account the fact that some children enrolled in centre-based day care also access their preschool in a separate, state government funded setting (and therefore do not receive the CCS for this portion of their ECEC). This means the 64% average CCS coverage for NSW & Qld may be an overestimate, however, data on government preschool enrolments in these states suggests this is unlikely to be a significant overestimate.
 - NSW Government data shows there were around 3,000 four-year-olds enrolled in government preschool in 2021 (noting not all government preschool enrolments are likely to also be enrolled in CBDC).
 - Qld Government data shows there were around 2,000 three and-four-year-olds enrolled in government early childhood services in 2021.

