

Office for  
Early Childhood  
Development



Government of  
South Australia

# South Australia's Preschool Infrastructure Strategy



# Acknowledgement of Country

From the heart:

We acknowledge the Aboriginal peoples as the First peoples of South Australia and as custodians of the lands, waters, skies and Communities where we live, learn and raise children.

We recognise Aboriginal peoples as having the longest living culture, raising children safe and strong in their identity, Community, Culture, and Connection to Country.

We pay our deep respects to Elders past and present, and their role as the first knowledge sharers for children. We follow in their footsteps.

Aboriginal peoples, working with and for children, are central in shaping our work. Their wisdom, advice, and guidance enriches our practices, creating a more inclusive and culturally safe environment for children and families.

We respect Aboriginal peoples' ways of being, doing and wise practices guiding our continual learning.

Together we walk and build stronger, more supportive Communities for all children

# Terminology

In South Australia, we acknowledge the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands on which the staff of the Government of South Australia work. We respect preference to use the term 'Aboriginal peoples' to acknowledge in written and spoken language both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.





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## Minister's foreword

Every child deserves a flying start. That's why we have set an ambitious goal to reform the early childhood system in South Australia and reduce the rate of developmental vulnerability in young children. We know that 2 years of quality early learning before starting school makes a big difference to children's development. For this reason, the Government of South Australia is delivering quality, teacher-led, play-based 3-year-old preschool from 2026.



The South Australian government has developed this infrastructure strategy to guide how we work with the early childhood sector to determine where infrastructure is needed, and to deliver infrastructure projects in a way that represents good investment.

The initiatives in this strategy will enable a strengthened collaboration between state government, local government, providers of early childhood services, and community. By working together over the long term, we can achieve our vision- that all children in South Australia will have access to a quality 3-year-old preschool program by 2032.

We understand the diversity within the sector and we want to retain this. Different families have different needs when it comes to early childhood services. Through the delivery of 3-year-old preschool, we want to support sector growth, while enacting the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care. This will include strengthening the delivery of services in the not-for-profit sector, which has not grown at the same rate as other parts of the sector.

To support planning and guide investment decisions, the Office for Early Childhood Development (OECDD) will be sharing information on its website that identifies where more preschool capacity is projected to be needed.

A combination of direct investment in government preschool infrastructure and support for other providers will be required to build South Australia's capacity for 3-year-old preschool. Investments will include expanding capacity in government preschools and making them suitable for younger learners, establishing a series of integrated hubs, and initiating a grants program to incentivise non-government providers to create additional preschool places.

As the reform rolls out, we will continue to monitor data and engage with communities to ensure infrastructure is being delivered where it is needed. We will adjust our approach as necessary to make sure we deliver the best outcomes for young South Australians and their families.

I acknowledge and thank the early childhood sector for their engagement and contributions towards the development of this strategy. I am confident that together, these initiatives will support continued growth in the number of 3-year-old children accessing preschool programs. I look forward to working with you as we implement these initiatives.



Hon Blair Boyer MP  
Minister for Education,  
Training and Skills

# About this strategy

We have set an ambitious 20-year goal to guide our reforms: to reduce the rate of South Australian children entering school developmentally vulnerable from the current 23.8% to 15%. We know that children who engage in quality early childhood education have better outcomes in the long term, and that all children benefit from participating in 2 years of preschool. This is why we have committed to implementing 3-year-old preschool across South Australia from 2026 to 2032.

New, quality early childhood infrastructure will be critical to achieving this goal.

This strategy sets out the approach for targeting the South Australian government's investment and support for early childhood infrastructure in the most effective ways possible to enable universal access to 3-year-old preschool by 2032.

The actions set out have been tested with our sector partners. They will be reviewed and adapted as needed to ensure that — as far as is predictable — infrastructure supply matches demand as more children participate in 3-year-old preschool.



## The plan to implement 3-year-old preschool

From 2026, the South Australian government will partner with long day care providers across the state who meet quality and workforce requirements to deliver 3-year-old preschool to children enrolled at their services.

The roll-out in government and other sessional preschools will be geographic, starting with:

- rural areas in 2026 and 2027
- large regional centres in 2028
- metropolitan areas in 2029 and 2030.

Growth across the whole sector is needed so, by 2032, children can access 2 years of preschool.

To facilitate the delivery of the required infrastructure supply, this strategy sets out a range of actions, with more support targeted to the parts of the sector that have not experienced growth in recent years.

We are planning for the whole sector and investing in infrastructure projects delivered by not-for-profit providers, non-government schools and local councils, and in government preschools.

## Principles

Investment in early childhood infrastructure will be guided by the following principles:



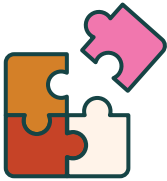
**Optimisation:** making the best use of existing capacity and infrastructure before investing in additional preschool capacity.



**Quality:** prioritising additional preschool capacity in services that are meeting or exceeding National Quality Standard ratings.



**Integration:** prioritising additional preschool capacity in services that are offering preschool alongside long day care, health and wellbeing supports, and establishing new preschool capacity in integrated or co-located settings wherever possible.



**Service diversity:** supporting a diverse South Australian early childhood sector to meet the varying needs of children and families, including through investing in providers that do not have access to capital.



**Partnerships:** coordinating planning and investment between levels of government and across the sector so the creation of additional preschool capacity is targeted, complementary and cohesive.



**Inclusion:** creating preschool environments that are safe and inclusive of all children.



**Cultural safety:** nurturing culturally safe and responsive preschool environments for Aboriginal children, their families and staff.



**Responsiveness:** adapting actions over the life of the reform to ensure there is sufficient capacity for all children to access preschool in South Australia.

# What we have heard so far

To help develop this strategy, the OECD engaged intensively with key stakeholders in the sector. Our goal was to better understand how government can support the delivery of new and expanded early childhood services where they are needed so all children can access 2 years of preschool by 2032.

There was a very strong response to our sector survey, with participation from 85% of invited long day care centres and non-government sessional preschools. This provided rich data about:

- current 3-year-old places and service configurations
- services' capacity to offer more places for 3-year-olds
- the barriers to infrastructure expansion experienced by different parts of the sector.

To further understand what supports are needed and test key elements of this strategy, we held a series of consultation sessions and workshops.

More than 170 people joined these discussions, including representatives from:

- early childhood providers
- peak bodies and unions
- Aboriginal organisations
- local councils
- Regional Development Australia.

## Learnings from these sessions

- There is strong support for 3-year-old preschool.
- Across the state, local councils play different roles in early childhood, including delivery of services, as landlords or providing advocacy or planning support to local services, and now, some are considering expanding their roles.
- Some regional communities have been working to establish early childhood services in their towns and are now considering how this work could intersect with the roll-out of 3-year-old preschool.
- Many smaller providers have not undertaken any infrastructure works and would need support.

Feedback relevant to specific actions is included throughout the strategy.





# Focus areas and actions

## 1. Infrastructure planning

### Knowing where new preschool capacity is needed

As steward of the early childhood system, the OECD is supporting sector planning. We will share information with the sector about where modelling indicates new preschool capacity is needed and we plan to keep updating this as new information becomes available. This will help ensure that our infrastructure investment is targeted to the locations that need it the most.

Around two-thirds of children are already accessing early childhood services at the age of 3. In line with the Royal Commission's recommendations, children already attending long day care will access their preschool program in that setting.

However, many families who want a place in long day care cannot access one. Although we are focused on creating additional preschool capacity, where possible, we will leverage our infrastructure planning and investment to support the creation of additional long day care (see grants section on page 13).

When planning for expanded capacity in government preschool, we are considering local early childhood supply and the potential impact on the viability of long day care services.

#### What we heard

- Our sector partners know their local communities and how to meet their needs, but they have limited visibility of broader demand. They would benefit from information about projected shortfalls in preschool capacity to support their planning processes.
- Early childhood providers, local councils and Regional Development Australia can all share rich local data and intelligence. This should be considered when planning for new preschool capacity.



#### Optimising infrastructure

Before an infrastructure solution is considered, it is expected that services will make the best use of their existing infrastructure to accommodate 3-year-old children in a preschool program.

Many providers are already considering ways to optimise existing infrastructure and capacity to support more 3-year-old children to access preschool programs.

Depending on the service type, a range of models can be, and are, used to increase access for children, such as:

- recruiting degree-qualified early childhood teachers to lead preschool programs in existing 3-year-old rooms in long day care settings
- offering preschool programs over 2 days per week
- offering more days per week
- delivering preschool to mixed-aged groups.

OECD Local teams across the state will provide support and advice to services about implementing the reforms and are available to discuss strategies to help families access 3-year-old preschool.



## Undertaking planning for an infrastructure project

Once a provider is confident of the need for more capacity in their area and that a new or expanded service would be financially viable, they need to conduct detailed project planning. This would include:

- community consultation
- design
- estimating costs
- seeking development approvals.

### What we heard

- There are complex considerations when evaluating whether to undertake an infrastructure project. For older facilities, for example, infrastructure works such as expansions may require changes beyond the proposed scopes of works, to bring the buildings into alignment with updated regulations. This has potential implications for cost and feasibility.
- Many providers, particularly those that operate a single service, felt they would need additional support to undertake the planning and pre-construction work required for an infrastructure project.

Why we are taking action	What we are doing
<p>We need a clear, shared picture of where new infrastructure is needed across the state to support the roll-out of 3-year-old preschool. This will support the state's investment decisions and provide clarity to the broader sector, including all types of providers, about where projects need to be prioritised.</p>	<p><b>1.1</b> As system steward, the OECD:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• is conducting modelling to project areas where additional preschool capacity is anticipated to be required throughout the roll-out of 3-year-old preschool</li> <li>• is sharing information about priority areas for investment</li> <li>• will update this information regularly as new data becomes available and we refine our modelling.</li> </ul>
<p>Local data and knowledge are vital to inform our understanding of preschool demand and the needs of local communities.</p>	<p><b>1.2</b> We will build on our consultation discussions and develop mechanisms for organisations such as local councils, Regional Development Australia or local networks to share information and to supplement modelling and local planning.</p>
<p>We want to support quality providers with limited infrastructure experience to plan and deliver infrastructure projects in areas of demand for preschool.</p>	<p><b>1.3</b> Supports are available for providers to undertake an end-to-end infrastructure project. This includes comprehensive written resources and testing an advisory service for smaller eligible providers by referral that need additional support. More information is available on page 14.</p>

## 2. Infrastructure delivery

### Delivery of preschool in government settings

The South Australian government will invest directly to expand government preschool facilities, where needed, and ensure each setting is appropriate for 3-year-old learners.

Public education is for every child and young person in every community across our state and our preschools and schools are the heart of local communities.

The Department for Education holds a substantial infrastructure portfolio, maintaining more than 380 preschools and children's centres. In 2024, government sites supported about 14,000 preschool enrolments, more than 40% of these in regional South Australia.

The government's 20-year infrastructure plan for South Australian public education and care, Every School a Great School, outlines how the Department for Education prioritises infrastructure investment to ensure that facilities are inclusive, fit-for-purpose, meet community and family needs, and provide engaging environments for children to learn and thrive.

Government infrastructure funding decisions for government preschools will align with the roll-out schedule for 3-year-old preschool, prioritising fit-for-purpose facilities and capacity to accommodate an increase to government preschool enrolments.

The Department for Education is committed to ensuring that all children in South Australia have equitable access to high-quality preschool education and will continue to prioritise infrastructure investments in preschools that is informed by evidence-based planning and considers local enrolment forecasts, asset condition, site capacity and readiness, population growth and community need.

Why we are taking action	What we are doing
Facilities will be configured to support the different developmental and support needs of 3-year-olds, including spaces for rest and nappy changing.	<b>2.1</b> We are building on the initial preschool infrastructure audit in 2023 to consider and plan for changes to facilities that are required.
Additional capacity will be required to support all eligible 3-year-old and all 4-year-old children to attend a government preschool.	<b>2.2</b> We will identify likely demand, consider locations where additional space is required and work with identified sites to expand capacity. We may need to build a small number of new preschools.
Where the Department for Education partners with the OECD to deliver an integrated hub, facilities may need to be expanded or configured differently.	<b>2.3</b> We will identify locations for the Department for Education-delivered integrated hubs, and work with those sites to ensure suitable infrastructure.

## Delivery of preschool in non-government settings

Our early childhood sector is diverse and vibrant. To ensure families can access services that meet their needs, this diversity is important. We want to support parts of the sector that have not grown in recent years.

The grants program and associated supports has been designed to reflect recommendation 21 of the Royal Commission. This states that investment in capital works should be predicated on the nature and quality of the the early childhood system it envisions.



### What we heard

- There is strong support for a grants program for not-for-profit early childhood providers.
- Many communities and providers would like to expand but cost is a barrier.
- Access to land, particularly adjacent to existing services can be difficult.
- Complying with state and local planning requirements and seeking development approval can be complex and time consuming.
- Many providers would need support to undertake an infrastructure project, including developing a quality grant application.
- Timing of grant rounds is important. Providers need adequate notice to submit a grant application and, if assessment processes take too long, quotes can expire, and costs can escalate.
- There may be service disruptions for a service's children and families, if they choose to expand.

Why we are taking action	What we are doing
<p>Our partners need co-investment to deliver the volume of expansions and new builds required to create capacity for universal 3-year-old preschool by 2032.</p>	<p><b>2.4</b> A grants program for new and expanded site facilities will be rolled out to help build capacity in services to undertake such projects. The first round will open in early 2025. More information is available on page 13.</p>
<p>We want to support quality providers with limited infrastructure experience to plan and deliver infrastructure projects in areas of demand for preschool.</p>	<p><b>2.5</b> Guidance will be developed for services to undertake an end-to-end infrastructure project. Comprehensive written resources will be available and for smaller providers that need additional support, an advisory service by referral will be tested. More information is available on page 14.</p>



# Preschool Infrastructure Grants Program

We are investing \$40 million over 4 years to support new and expanded preschool capacity.



## Organisation eligibility

The organisation applying for the grant must be:

- a not-for-profit organisation registered or incorporated in Australia
- a South Australian local government entity, or
- a South Australian non-government school.

## Project eligibility

The project must:

- be for a facility operated by a provider that partners with the South Australian government to offer a preschool program
- create additional preschool places
- be able to be delivered without further financial support by the state government following the provision of grant funding.

## Types of grants

- Expansion grants for facilities that offer sessional preschool or preschool integrated with long day care
- New facility grants to build new services, which must offer preschool integrated with long day care.



## Priority projects

We will prioritise projects:

- in areas identified by the OECD as having a need for additional preschool supply, but we will consider strong evidence of need based on local factors
- that support access for children who will benefit the most from preschool
- that represent good value for the government's investment, based on a number of factors, including:
  - cost-per-approved place created
  - applicant's ability to self-fund or access other sources of funding or finance
  - level of co-contribution the applicant is able to provide.



## The application process

Applications will be assessed in 2 stages:

- **Stage 1:** Information required will include early designs and cost estimates, details around tenure, information on any known site issues and responses to assessment criteria.
- **Stage 2:** Full application (if invited, following Stage 1 assessment by an internal government panel). Information required will include detailed designs and costings, full site reports and evidence of support for the project from all relevant stakeholders.



## Co-contribution model

- The government will co-contribute up to 50% of preschool-related project costs (including shared and enabling spaces such as kitchens) for the majority of expansions and new facilities. Based on applicant size and capacity to co-fund, government co-contributions of up to 80% may be considered (where this is assessed as representing good value for government investment).
- Applicants will be required to fully cover the cost of spaces to be used mainly for the care of non-preschool-aged children.
- Where the project is for a new build, the purchase of land by the applicant may be counted towards their co-contribution.
- Applicants are encouraged to secure contributions from other sources, including grants from other local, state and federal agencies or philanthropic organisations.

**Grant guidelines with full details of the grants program will be published in early 2025.**



## Sector supports for delivering preschool infrastructure projects

Planning and delivering infrastructure are complex processes and many high-quality providers have no experience in this area. We will provide sector guidance and support to help providers understand what is required and what services they need to contract at each stage of the process.



### Written resources for the whole sector

These will include:

- 'how-to' guides for planning, development, procurement and delivery stages for infrastructure
- grant application guides
- design guidelines for quality early childhood facilities.



### Advisory support

We will test a model of advisory support in 2025. Providers that need additional supports can apply to access guidance from infrastructure experts. This will be similar to coaching, with advice given, but no services undertaken on behalf of the provider.

**Details on the full program of sector supports, including how to apply for advisory support will be published on the OECD website in early 2025.**

## Establish integrated hubs to offer preschool with other services

By 2032, the South Australian government will deliver 20 integrated hubs that bring preschool together with other health, wellbeing and education offerings.

Two demonstration sites in Port Pirie and Adelaide's northern suburbs will be operating from term 4, 2025.

An evaluation will paint a picture of what has worked well, what could be improved and how best to continually improve. These lessons will inform the planning and delivery of future integrated hubs.

Integrated hubs will be a mix of newly built facilities and partnering with existing services. They will offer at least:

- high-quality early childhood education (sessional preschool or long day care)
- a 30-hour preschool program for 3-and 4-year-old children most at risk of developmental vulnerability
- child and **family** health services and
- parenting programs and supports.

The Royal Commission found compelling evidence for the benefits of stacking evidence-based services in the early years. It recommended integrated service delivery and place-based approaches are effective ways to bring services to children and families, and scaffold support where it is needed most.

Early childhood settings can be places for connected service delivery across education, health, and community programs. They can offer supports such as parenting programs and playgroups. The ability to provide these services in addition to early childhood education will often require infrastructure changes at existing preschool locations.

Integrated hubs will be established across the state in areas where communities face high levels of developmental vulnerability, so that those in most need will benefit from the 3-year-old preschool initiative.

### Roll-out planning

Community data and research is informing the statewide roll-out of integrated hubs. The results of the 2024 collection of the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC), released in early 2025, will provide further planning data. The roll-out will also consider the The Department for Education's broader infrastructure strategy and resource implications for the building sector, so that the construction industry is not overloaded, especially in regional areas.

### Integrated hubs led by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations

A co-design process is underway and may be used to inform the process of establishing 2 integrated hubs led by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations. The local community will also be involved in designing these facilities.







## Why we are taking action

Families who feel safe and connected are more likely to seek assistance when they first need it.

Communities have different strengths and face different challenges, resulting in different needs from infrastructure and place-based services.

## What we are doing

**2.6** We will establish welcoming integrated hubs that will give families opportunities to build relationships with preschool providers and other support services.

**2.7** Evidence and best practice will be leveraged from national and international research as well as existing child and family hub models to inform integrated hub design and infrastructure works. Consultation with local communities during the design and planning stages for new integrated hub services will inform infrastructure decisions. Different infrastructure options and solutions to support community needs will be explored and various service delivery methods will be tested.

# Next steps

From here we will:

- launch the first round of Preschool Infrastructure Grants in early 2025
- launch sector supports for preschool infrastructure projects
- explore how to support local planning through engaging with communities, including through local councils and Regional Development Australia
- learn from the findings of the Aboriginal co-design process to meet infrastructure needs and develop initiatives that support culturally safe services.

We will also continue to engage with the Department for Education, Infrastructure SA, Plan SA, and other government partners to ensure we plan for early childhood infrastructure that responds to the growing education and care needs of South Australian communities.

More information can be found at [www.earlychildhood.sa.gov.au](http://www.earlychildhood.sa.gov.au)







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