

A National

Vision

for Early

Childhood

Education

and Care



Early childhood education and care (ECEC) has enormous benefits to child learning and development at the most profound developmental period in children's lives.

An affordable and accessible ECEC system is a key enabler of workforce participation – especially for women – and productivity that benefits the Australian economy. Investment in quality ECEC also reduces disadvantage for children.

This vision builds on strong foundations and sets out how Governments will work together as system stewards, in partnership with the sector. This will ensure that all families can get the education and care they need when and where they need it, supporting children to flourish, families to work and a strong, sustainable ECEC workforce.



PRINCIPLES



This vision is underpinned by four key principles as set by National Cabinet.



Equity: All children are supported to succeed, regardless of their circumstances and abilities. Carefully designed strategies and targeted investment provide additional support to children and families when and where they need it.



Affordability: ECEC is within the means of all families. Sustainable, flexible funding systems are in place to support providers in reducing cost barriers for all children and families.



Quality: ECEC services are culturally appropriate for their community and meet high standards in providing learning and development outcomes. Children build relationships with a stable, qualified workforce that is recognised for its critical role in the community, and families have confidence in ECEC services.



Accessibility: Geographic or cultural barriers to attending a high-quality ECEC are removed. Services are supported to provide flexible models that meet the needs of their community and link with support services where families need them.

SCOPE



This vision encompasses all forms of ECEC including preschool, long day care, family day care and out of school hours care. We recognise all forms as being essential to workforce participation as well as an environment of learning, development, and care both in the early years and during school years. The vision is also intended to intersect with broader early childhood development systems and programs.

VISION:



A Thriving Australian Society where:

Every child can access and participate in high-quality, culturally responsive ECEC, including preschool, to support their right to thrive, grow their sense of identity and connection to the world, and become confident and engaged learners.

Every parent can access an affordable, high-quality service to support their participation in the workforce, and the associated social and economic benefits.

The ECEC workforce is highly skilled, valued, and professionally recognised and the sector is supported to attract and retain workers.

Governments take a holistic approach as stewards of the ECEC system in partnership with the sector, shaping a system that is nationally coherent and connected and responsive to community needs and outcomes for families, providers, and the workforce.

OUTCOMES



All children are supported to reach their potential

- Children and families experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage receive the support they need.
- Children are engaged lifelong learners.
- Services respond to community, cultural and family contexts and can provide continuity of learning and care to children.

First nations children are empowered to embrace their identity and culture

- First Nations families feel supported to consistently access quality, culturally inclusive ECEC.
- ECEC services respect and nourish First Nations culture and kinship. We grow our First Nations and Aboriginal community-controlled workforce, recognising the importance of children seeing themselves, their identities, and cultures reflected in their environment.

Parents and carers who want to work or study can do so

- ECEC supports parents and carers, especially women, to work when they want to.
- Families get the services they need where they need them.

ECEC is an entitlement for all families

- ECEC is recognised as an essential service that all families who choose to use can access.
- Cost is not a barrier to accessing an appropriate quality service.
- Where practicable, services offer integrated education and care to support a more holistic approach to development.

- ECEC workers are valued and respected.
- A sustainable and experienced workforce builds relationships with children.

- Workers feel supported and are retained in the sector.
- New workers are inspired and supported to train and work in the ECEC sector.

Governments are stewards of the system

- The ECEC system is joined up and easy to navigate, providing connections between ECEC and broader early childhood development systems and programs.
- Governments use funding, regulatory, and policy levers within the market environment in combination with service delivery to shape a system that is sustainable, flexible, aligned to need, and driven by outcomes for beneficiaries.

Governments are aligned and accountable

- Governments take shared responsibility for the system and collaborate together and with the sector to realise shared goals.
- There is holistic governance and clear roles and responsibilities for the ECEC sector.

LEVERS



Governments, as the stewards of the system, have powerful levers available to them to shape the system to meet the vision. These levers include:

Funding: The way that funding is allocated and to whom has an enormous impact on the way the system operates. Funding policy must be an enabler, not a barrier to access.

Regulation: Laws and regulations shape the system to respond in a particular way to implement governments' overall policy intent. Safety and quality standards underpin the system.

Policy: Governments actively intervene in the system to forge strategic partnerships, broker solutions, or address particular areas of need.

ENABLERS



If we are to realise this vision, there are a number of enablers we need. Governments will collaborate with the sector to ensure these enablers are in place.

Workforce: Attracting, training and retaining a high quality workforce is a critical factor in achieving the vision.

Leadership: Quality leadership is essential at all levels: leadership from governments and within governments, leadership from prominent advocates and community members, leadership by providers and within the workforce. Leadership must be effective, clear, and aligned to the vision.

Data and evidence: Policies, models, and interventions must be underpinned by comprehensive high quality data and evidence.

Accountability framework: Clear roles and responsibilities are critical, especially with shared system stewardship.

Communities and families: Services must be shaped around the needs of communities and families of all backgrounds including First Nations people.

Philanthropy: The not-for profit sector plays a fundamental role in the sector including direct provision and the important role of philanthropic advocacy and investment.