



ACT
Government
Education

Set up for Success: An Early Childhood Strategy for the ACT

Phase Two Implementation Plan



Minister's Foreword

Ensuring that every child in the ACT has access to a quality early childhood education is a key priority for the ACT Government. *Set up for Success: An Early Childhood Strategy for the ACT (Set up for Success)* commenced in 2020 to help the ACT Government to achieve this.

Set up for Success recognises that a child's early years are the foundation for their future development, providing a strong base for lifelong learning. Research continues to confirm the importance of early childhood education as an essential building block of setting children up for success.

We have now delivered the first phase of the strategy (2020-2022) through the Phase One Implementation Plan. Evaluation of Phase One has demonstrated that *Set up for Success* is already having a positive impact on children, families and early childhood professionals across the ACT.

Phase Two will be delivered between 2023 and 2025. The Phase Two Implementation Plan builds upon the great work already done throughout Phase One and the findings of the Phase One evaluation.

The ACT Government continues to recognise the importance of access to quality early childhood education, having recently announced the ACT's biggest ever investment in early childhood education, with over \$50 million in the 2023-24 ACT Budget to deliver one day per week of free universal three-year-old preschool and a range of supports for our early childhood education and care workforce.

These investments are a catalyst for transformational change and will help ease the ongoing cost of living challenges that we know many Canberrans are facing. Implementation of supports for the early childhood education and care profession will ensure they are valued and can continue to deliver quality early learning to children across the ACT.

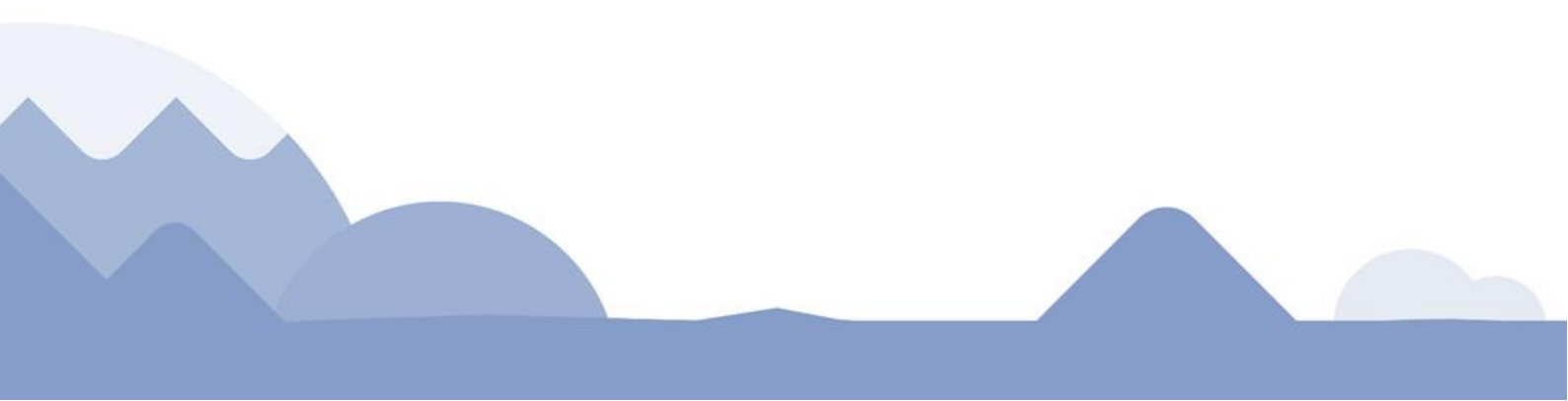
I'm excited to see the benefits that Phase Two will bring to early childhood education in the ACT. Phase Two will build on the vital supports delivered in Phase One whilst boosting supports for the professionals whom so many families rely on for their child's early education and care.

Set up for Success reflects the voices of the ACT community and those who work in the early childhood education and care sector. We look forward to continuing to work with early childhood professionals, children and their families and the broader ACT community to deliver the Phase Two Implementation Plan.



Yvette Berry

Minister for Early Childhood Development



About this Implementation Plan

Set up for Success: An Early Childhood Strategy for the ACT (*Set up for Success*) sets the direction for early childhood education and care in the ACT. It is based on overwhelming national and international evidence^{1 2} – as well as sustained and meaningful conversations with children, families, experts, and the early childhood sector³ – about the importance of participating in quality early childhood education in giving children the best opportunities in life.

Set up for Success is a 10-year strategy delivered over three phases. This implementation plan outlines the initiatives to be delivered throughout Phase Two (2023-2025). Each initiative connects with one of four foundations. These four foundations reflect the fundamental priorities for early childhood education in the ACT over the next ten years. The *Set up for Success* foundations align with the *Future of Education* strategy, which includes formal school years. Both strategies support a holistic educational pathway for children from the early years all the way until they turn 18.

Set up for Success foundation	A fair start for every child	Valuing educators, values children	Every child has a story	Working together for children
Set up for Success principles	Ensuring access, equity and affordability of early childhood education	Enhancing the workforce through education, qualification and skills development	Fostering seamless transitions and supporting children's diverse needs	Connecting systems and services to maximise benefits to children
Future of Education foundation	Students at the centre	Empowered learning professionals	Strong communities for learning	Systems supporting learning
Future of Education principle	Each student treads their own educational pathway and should be empowered to make informed decisions about how their learning environment operates	Teachers are expert professionals, highly skilled at working with students to guide them through their learning journey	A strong education system requires a strong community, with schools acting as a hub for education and support services	The systems that support learning must acknowledge the importance of early intervention and promote equity of opportunity and excellent outcomes for all learners

The delivery of Phase Two builds on initiatives delivered throughout Phase One (2020-2022) and has been informed by the findings of the evaluation of Phase One. Evaluation of *Set up for Success* is an ongoing process which assists the ACT Government to adapt key initiatives to a changing education and care landscape.

Ensuring that *Set up for Success* is able to meet its objectives requires ongoing collaboration and consultation with early childhood professionals, providers, external services, families and children. The ACT Government recognises and values the continuous partnerships and collaboration required across sectors and communities to guide the significant suite of reforms under *Set up for Success*.

¹ *Lifting our Game: Report of the review to achieve educational excellence in Australian schools through early childhood interventions*, 2022, NSW Government

² *BELONGING, BEING & BECOMING: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*, 2022, ACECQA

³ [Early Childhood Strategy Consultation Sessions: Final Report – Feedback on early childhood education and care in the ACT, 2019, ACT Government](#)

Building on from the achievements of Phase One

The evaluation of Phase One of *Set up for Success* demonstrated the immediate impact of actions undertaken between 2020 to 2022. The evaluation indicated the following successes:

- Increased access to free, quality early childhood education for three-year old children from priority cohorts
- Improved learning and development outcomes for children who have participated in the three-year-old initiative through observations of families and educators who work with these children
- Increased partnerships and collaboration with and between services, settings and community organisations
- Increased knowledge and information sharing between services and settings
- Enhanced supports for children and families transitioning to four-year-old preschool
- Enhanced connections and support for families experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage
- Increased access to professional development opportunities including through targeted coaching from the Early Childhood Community Coordinators and Preschool Pathways Partners, and
- Improved partnerships across the ACT Government and the community which is contributing towards alignment of approaches and the delivery of integrated services to children and their families.

The evaluation also highlighted areas for future focus which have been used to inform the Phase Two Implementation Plan and actions. These actions are outlined in this plan under each of the *Set up for Success* Foundations.

A small number of Phase One initiatives were delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These will be finalised within Phase Two and have been incorporated into this plan.

Foundation: A fair start for every child

This foundation aims to improve access to quality early learning and development opportunities targeted to the individual needs of each child and to provide culturally safe and supported learning environments for all children. It is founded in increasing access, equity and affordability of early childhood education to ensure all children receive the benefits of quality education in the two years before formal school. A fair start for every child also requires ensuring that developmental needs and learning difficulties are identified early, and that wrap around supports are provided for children and their families as early as possible.

Phase One under this foundation focused on delivering free quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) for those who need it most – children experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage. Phase Two will see a focus on expanding this offering by delivering universal access to one free day per week of preschool for all three-year-old children in the ACT.

EVIDENCE: What the research tells us

Set up for Success: Phase One Evaluation Report (2023) provides evidence of the benefits of access to quality early learning for priority three-year-old children in the ACT. This includes access to learning opportunities that would have been otherwise unavailable, as well as benefits to children’s social, physical and mental health and development. These benefits are evidenced through parent, child and educator reflections.

Starting Better: A Guarantee for Young Children and Families⁴ (2021) asserts that increasing access to early childhood education would lead to a “triple dividend” for the Australian economy by improving the long-term productivity and workforce participation of future generations, increasing earning potential for families by easing care arrangements, and increasing job security for early childhood professionals.

Ensuring Equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children in the Early Years⁵ (2019) is a discussion paper developed by Early Childhood Australia and SNAICC – National Voice for our Children. It draws together research on early childhood education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and discusses best practice approaches including incorporating culture, fostering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ownership, leadership and employment, and actively engaging parents and communities.

Fostering Effective Early Learning Study⁶ (2018) presents a substantial research base on the benefits of attending high quality education and care for children’s positive behavioural and learning outcomes. The study also notes that the early home learning environment is a powerful predictor of future educational and career success, and high-quality education and care settings offer children from disadvantaged backgrounds added benefits both while they are in this setting and also through partnerships with parents to enhance home learning environments.

Lifting our Game⁷ (2017) describes the impact of quality early childhood education on later school outcomes, as well as a range of other benefits including on employment prospects, physical and mental health, lower contact with the justice system, and less reliance on social services generally. The report asserts that across various measures, quality early childhood education consistently delivers a return on investment that ranges anywhere from 200% to 1700%. A key recommendation is to move towards universal access to 600 hours per year of quality early childhood education for three-year-olds.

⁴ [*Starting Better: A Guarantee for Young Children and Families*, 2021, Centre for Policy Development](#)

⁵ [*Ensuring Equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children in the Early Years*, 2019, Early Childhood Australia and SNAICC – National Voice for our Children](#)

⁶ *Fostering Effective Early Learning Study: A review of the current international evidence considering quality in early childhood education and care programmes – in delivery, pedagogy and child outcomes*, 2018, Iram Siraj, Denise Kingston, Catherine Marguerite Neilsen-Hewett, Steven J. Howard, Edward Melhuish, Marc de Rosnay, Elisabeth Duursma and Betty Luu

⁷ *Lifting our Game: Report of the review to achieve educational excellence in Australian schools through early childhood interventions*, 2017, Susan Pascoe and Deborah Brennan

A fair start for every child

OUTCOMES: What we aim to achieve

Increased access, equity and affordability of early learning for all children

- Quality early childhood education supports positive outcomes across a child's life trajectory and ensures all children can lead happy, healthy and successful lives. It enables higher educational achievement, better physical and mental health outcomes, lower contact with the justice system, and higher rates of employment, leading to long-term social and economic benefits.
- Access to quality early childhood education prior to formal school is one of the few proven strategies for lifting outcomes for all children, and two years has more impact than one. This is particularly true for children experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage. Delivering equitable access means a more equitable society in which every child can succeed.

Culturally safe and supported learning environments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

- Providing access to culturally safe and relevant early learning supports children's development.
- Expanding access to Koori Preschool for three- and four-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children supports the *ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2019-2028* and the ACT's work towards the national *Closing the Gap* strategy.

ACTIONS: What we will do

- Provide universal access to one day per week, 300 hours per year, of free three-year-old preschool
- Explore the introduction of formative assessments to assist with identifying the needs of children
- Explore flexible options for access to extended hours of ECEC
- Investigate mobile preschool and 'Families as First Teachers' models that could apply in the ACT
- Investigate providing meals at low cost or no cost to children in ECEC services and OSHC, focusing on families experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage

Continuing Phase One Actions

- Continue to provide access to two days per week, 48 weeks per year of free, quality early childhood education for up to 500 priority three-year-olds
- Continue to increase the number of partnered providers delivering places for priority three-year-olds to enhance access for children experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage
- Provide up to 100 additional places in Koori Preschool for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander three-year-olds
- Increase awareness amongst the community of Koori Preschool to support enrolments and engagement
- Recognise early childhood education in ACT law

PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATION: Who we will work with

- Children and families
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- Early childhood education and care services
- External services including community services organisations
- Community Services Directorate, Health Directorate, and Canberra Health Services
- Koori Preschools, including at Jervis Bay School
- Play Groups, Playschools and Nature Play Groups
- ACT Teacher Quality Institute

INDICATORS: How we will know we are making an impact

- Improved access to free, quality early childhood education for three-year-olds
- Increased engagement with Koori Preschool for three- and four-year olds
- Increased cultural integrity of all early childhood learning environments

Foundation: Valuing educators, values children

This foundation recognises that quality interactions with children drive their development and that the ECEC workforce must be professionally recognised in rewarding, empowering, and sustainable ways. Early childhood educators have a significant impact on children's early learning experiences. Their roles can often be misunderstood and undervalued. The initiatives outlined below aim to enhance the Territory's workforce by developing, attracting, upskilling and retaining qualified educators now and into the future.

Phase Two will focus on implementing a range of workforce initiatives through delivery of an ACT specific ECEC workforce strategy. Efforts will focus on ensuring the sector is supported through capability development, professional learning and networking across the sector, and clearer career pathways into and through the profession.

EVIDENCE: What the research tells us

Set up for Success: Consultation on key initiatives of Phase One (2022) summarises the findings of a consultation process held between April and June 2022 to seek input from the ECEC sector, families, educators and the wider community, including on development of an ECEC workforce strategy for the ACT. The report identifies key areas for the ACT Government to focus in order to support the ACT ECEC workforce including areas for professional learning and development.

Starting Now: The first steps to delivering the best early childhood system for Australia (2022) highlights the need for Commonwealth, State and Territory governments to work in collaboration to deliver a high-quality early childhood system. The report identifies workforce planning as a key principle of system redesign and highlights that a highly skilled and valued workforce underpins high quality service provision.

Taking the first step in an inclusive life⁸ (2022) provides an overview of a survey conducted since 2010 by Children and Young People with Disability Australia with its members. Whilst the report indicated that most young children with a disability were made to feel welcome in ECEC settings, it indicated that more could be done to support early childhood educators, aides, and support staff to access training that would provide a supportive, enriching and inclusive environment.

Quality ratings by socio-economic status of areas⁹ (2020) finds that early childhood education services in areas experiencing more disadvantage, are less likely to meet National Quality Standards including around teaching quality. This means that initiatives that enhance the workforce and improve teacher quality should especially benefit children and families in these areas.

Early Childhood Strategy Consultation Sessions: Final Report¹⁰ (2019) shows consultation participants recognised the value of early childhood educators in a child's early years. Concerns were raised that this value is not always reflected in a disjointed workforce with inconsistencies in degrees and other types of qualification, registration, and pay. Participants supported initiatives including ongoing professional development, particularly to help the workforce develop expertise in supporting families with particular needs.

Lifting our Game report¹¹ (2017) explains that the most important factors in the quality of early childhood education are the education, qualifications, and training of the workforce. These factors are directly related to better outcomes for the children participating in ECEC.

Valuing educators, values children

⁸ *Taking the first step in an inclusive life – experiences of Australian early childhood education and care, 2022, Helen Dickinson, Dr Catherine Smith, Dr Sophie Yates, and Dr Anne Faulkner*

⁹ *Quality ratings by socio-economic status of areas: Occasional paper 7, June 2020, Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority*

¹⁰ [*Early Childhood Strategy Consultation Sessions: Final Report – Feedback on early childhood education and care in the ACT, 2019, ACT Government*](#)

¹¹ *Lifting our Game: Report of the review to achieve educational excellence in Australian schools through early childhood interventions, 2017, Susan Pascoe and Deborah Brennan*

OUTCOMES: What we aim to achieve

Enhanced professionalism of the early childhood workforce

- Ensuring all ECEC educators have access to quality development opportunities will promote quality teaching and increase staff retention, so the workforce continues to upskill and grow over the long term.
- Providing scholarships so that more people enrol in and complete early childhood degrees, supporting higher educator qualifications linked to improved learning outcomes.
- Recognising and valuing early childhood educators as skilled professionals, promote improved conditions, increase retention and workforce stability, and support moves towards higher pay in the industry.
- Recognising the importance of the ECEC profession, which is made up of majority women, promoting gender equity and supporting the ACT Government's commitment to the ACT Women's Plan 2016-2026. This ensures women's work is valued and promotes greater economic security for women.

Purposeful partnerships between different settings

- Supporting purposeful partnerships between settings will support educators to share professional learning and collaborative planning through meetings, visits to each other's sites and sharing documents. Creating opportunities for coaching and mentoring will help to drive innovation and quality improvement.
- Establishing relationships between ECEC services and schools will ensure children and families can be better supported, and educators have more opportunities to grow their skills and connections.

ACTIONS: What we will do

- Establish a program in culturally inclusive and responsive early childhood educational practices
- Amend the ACT teacher professional regulatory framework to include qualified early childhood teachers
- Establish a professional learning and resource portal for educators
- Establish professional learning network to share professional expertise
- Offer scholarships to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators working in Koori Preschool

Continuing Phase One Actions

- Develop a cross-sector ACT ECEC workforce strategy, including educator professional standards and coaching and mentoring opportunities
- Continue to provide targeted supports to ECECs and ACT public schools partnered in a Community of Practice to ensure the effectiveness of these relationships
- Continue to deliver the early childhood degree scholarship program

PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATION: Who we will work with

- Early childhood professionals
- ACT Public Schools and Koori Preschools, including at Jervis Bay School
- ACT Teacher Quality Institute
- Unions
- Community of Practice partnerships
- External training providers
- Tertiary institutions and universities, including the University of Canberra Early Childhood Degree program

INDICATORS: How we will know we are making an impact

- Increased professional recognition of the early childhood education and care workforce
- The workforce has access to learning and development opportunities
- Clearer career pathways into and through the profession
- Improved partnerships, information sharing and linkages across settings

Foundation: Every child has a story

This foundation focuses on acknowledging and meeting the needs of each child. Supporting seamless transitions between settings, in which children's stories travel alongside them and these stories are acknowledged and valued from one setting to the next, is crucial to this. Children should transition between settings confidently and parents should be supported and recognised as their child's first teacher.

Phase One included a strong focus on understanding children's educational and developmental needs, supporting continuity through transitions, and supporting parents as first teachers. Phase Two will focus on expanding and enhancing information sharing and transitions processes and supports across the ACT, ensuring alignment between ECEC services and schools and further supporting parents as their child's first teacher.

EVIDENCE: What the research tells us

***Early Childhood Strategy Consultation Sessions: Final Report*¹² (2019)** illustrates that the community understands positive transitions are important for children and families. Consultation participants felt that transitions must be proactive and supported face-to-face information sharing where possible, backed-up by written materials such as a transition statement.

***Transition to school: Communication and relationships*¹³ (2019)** describes a best-practice communication and relationship-based approach to transitions to school. It outlines a model where communication is a key underlying process that supports positive relationships and unpacks elements of the model that will help educators build and maintain relationships with children, other educators, families, and communities.

***Early Years Transitions: Supporting Children and Families at Risk of Experiencing Vulnerability*¹⁴ (2017)** reviews literature, particularly in Australia, to identify strategies for facilitating positive transitions to school for children at risk of experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage. It notes that the quality of transitions can have significant impacts on later educational achievement, and that the transition to primary school is the key educational transition most children will experience. For children who may be experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage, transitions can be especially fraught as their lives are likely to already be highly complex. Strategies including accurate identification and attention to children experiencing vulnerability, creating partnerships and building professional expertise, communicating genuinely with children and families, and continuing to invest in research and evidence-based practice are key recommendations of the report.

***Early Childhood Australia Code of Ethics*¹⁵ (2016)** outlines expected and appropriate professional behaviour in the early childhood sector. Included in the Code are commitments to supporting families as first teachers, actively engaging with families, and building collaborative relationships with communities and services to support children and families. The fact that the peak body for early childhood professionals recognises the importance of family partnerships highlights the value of this approach in early childhood.

***Starting School: A Pivotal Life Transition for Children and their Families*¹⁶ (2012)** recognises the importance of positive transitions from ECEC to more formal schooling. It highlights strategies for improving transitions, including sharing information via transition statements, involving families at all stages, and ensuring professionals work together to plan and share knowledge.

¹² [*Early Childhood Strategy Consultation Sessions: Final Report – Feedback on early childhood education and care in the ACT, 2019, ACT Government*](#)

¹³ *Transition to school: Communication and relationships*, 2019, Kathryn Hopps, Early Childhood Australia

¹⁴ *Early Years Transitions: Supporting Children and Families at Risk of Experiencing Vulnerability – Rapid Literature Review*, 2017, Victoria Department of Education and Training

¹⁵ *Revisions to the Code of Ethics in 2016 were led by Lennie Barblett, Anne Kennedy, Catharine Hydon and Stephanie Jackiewicz.*

¹⁶ *Starting School: A Pivotal Life Transition for Children and their Families*, Family Matters, 2012, Australian Institute of Family Studies

Every child has a story

OUTCOMES: What we aim to achieve

Seamless transitions

- Effective transitions rely on schools, educators and families working together to make sure the child's story is passed along and their needs are met across settings. Effective transitions are strengths-based and ensure families and children are active participants in sharing their stories.

Inclusive learning practices and environments

- Building on the requirements of the National Quality Framework for inclusive environments from the very beginning of a child's learning experience helps place children at the centre of their learning. Embracing diversity and setting children up with learning environments where they can feel safe and valued supports their learning and helps celebrate every child's story.

Recognising, supporting and valuing families as first teachers

- The early years set the foundation for every child's social, physical, emotional and cognitive development. Parents play an important role in supporting their child's educational journey. Supporting parents and families means empowering them to make informed choices about early childhood development, quality early learning options, and being able to access supports they need.
- Enabling early childhood settings, including ECEC services and schools, to actively share a child's story with each other, means the child can transition through their learning journey seamlessly. Supporting wellbeing for children and families encourages a more connected system and helps ensure we are better placed to meet the child and family's needs.

ACTIONS: What we will do

- Investigate enrolment in learning and development from birth
- Examine the alignment between funding and child-needs
- Increase capacity for differentiated practice through training on play-based learning with intentionality
- Empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and kinship carers as their child's first teacher

Continuing Phase One Actions

- Develop and implement an ACT-wide approach to effective transitions between services for children through expansion of the Continuity and Transitioning Framework
- Consider further steps to ensure parents and carers feel engaged and supported throughout transition processes and are confident to support their child
- Develop enhanced supports for ACT public schools and OSHC providers to support delivery of OSHC in the preschool environment and to encourage effective partnerships and communication
- Enhance delivery of Early Years Learning Framework focused on respectful relationships and gender diversity

PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATION: Who we will work with

- Parents, carers, and families
- Early childhood education and care services
- ACT Public Preschools
- Community of Practice partnerships with Out of School Hours Care providers
- Community Services Directorate, Health Directorate, and Canberra Health Services

INDICATORS: How we will know we are making an impact

- Transition practices are conducted in a systematised and sustained way
- Services are supported to meet the needs of all learners
- Children feel safe and connected to their service or preschool
- Families are recognised as their child's first teachers and engage with settings

Foundation: Working together for children

This foundation recognises that children derive the most benefit when education, health and community services work together. Not only does this deliver the greatest benefits for children it is also cost effective for government and service providers. Connected services support connected communities, which wrap around children and families, helping them to recognise that they belong and are safe.

Phase Two will focus on building on the partnerships developed in Phase One to support the delivery of initiatives like quality ECEC and enhanced wrap-around supports for children.

EVIDENCE: What the research tells us

Starting Now: The first steps to delivering the best early childhood system for Australia (2022) highlights the importance of collaborative efforts across national, state and territory governments to deliver a high-quality early childhood system. The report identifies three key national priorities for system reform to be delivered over the next decade: improving affordability and accessibility; ensuring a skilled workforce; and joint design of a high quality universal early childhood education system.

Framework to inform development of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Strategy¹⁷ (2021) sets out evidence-based approaches to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to thrive in their early years, and to enjoy the lifelong benefits that flow from such an experience. The Framework highlights the importance of family and community involvement in designing, operating and participating in the education of their children.

Codesign in the Indigenous policy domain: Risks and opportunities¹⁸ (2021) discusses literature on codesign and particularly its prospects for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs policy. It highlights that power imbalances – which are always at issue in codesign processes between Government and communities – are particularly salient in these contexts. Other issues include resource imbalances, the need to recognise the multitude of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices, and the difficulty of balancing incremental changes with deeper reforms. Transparency, engagement with respected community representatives, openness of potential outcomes, and avoidance of conflicts of interest are key to effective codesign processes in which participants can see their views represented in the real outcomes. The paper concludes that codesign, done well, represents a key opportunity for shared sovereignty in the Australian context.

Early Childhood Strategy Consultation Sessions: Final Report¹⁹ (2019) indicates there is support for engaging communities in ECEC including linking to existing relationships between families and trusted service providers, and ECEC services reaching out to families to connect them with other systems such as health and community services.

Safe and Supportive Families and Communities for Children²⁰ (2012) highlights the fundamental role of community in keeping children safe and fostering supportive environments both within the family and beyond. Importantly, this includes collaboration between services, to provide multidisciplinary solutions to issues that arise and ensure early support can be provided as often as possible.

¹⁷ *Framework to inform development of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Strategy, 2021, Australian Government*

¹⁸ *Codesign in the Indigenous policy domain: Risks and opportunities, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research discussion paper, 2021, Michael Dillon*

¹⁹ [Early Childhood Strategy Consultation Sessions: Final Report – Feedback on early childhood education and care in the ACT, 2019, ACT Government](#)

²⁰ *Safe and Supportive Families and Communities for Children: A Synopsis and Critique of Australian Research, Child Family Community Australia paper, 2012, Lalitha Nair*

Working together for children

OUTCOMES: What do we aim to achieve?

Connected services and systems

- Building stronger connections helps to create an environment where community services can connect with families through a 'no wrong door' approach. Improving service access by connecting systems in these ways maximises the benefits to children from the investments in early childhood services.
- Reducing duplication, improving communication and information-sharing help ensure that children and families remain at the centre of considerations. Developing tools that support whole-of-government measures and approaches to early childhood development.

Improving the focus on early childhood in the ACT's planning and land decisions

- Building early childhood education considerations into decisions about spatial and physical planning matters in the ACT will ensure sustainable availability of community based early childhood education.
- Unlocking options in the future, including the potential for services to be co-located with ECEC sites and school sites will ensure that the ACT's planning decisions consider the needs of children in the Territory's growing communities.

ACTIONS: What are we doing?

- Develop a whole of government measurement framework for early childhood development 0-8
- Work towards incrementally expanding the ECEC offer in ACT public preschools
- Improve connections between Maternal and Child Health, Child Development Service, Child and Family Centres, and ECEC services
- Amend the *Education Act 2004* to incorporate early childhood, including encouraging information sharing between schools and other services, including ECEC and OSHC

Continuing Phase One Actions

- Explore how a government funded preschool service could provide a full day of ECEC for children
- Finalise a structured capacity planning framework to better manage long term development of ECEC service provision across the Territory
- Continue to work in partnership with ECEC providers to recognise and leverage the value of OSHC licence agreements and government lease agreements

PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATION: Who do we work with?

- Community Services Directorate, Canberra Health Services, Justice and Community Safety Directorate, ACT Health Directorate
- Australian Government and states and territories
- ECEC providers including OSHC providers
- ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- Jervis Bay and Wreck Bay communities
- Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate

INDICATORS: How we will know we are making an impact

- Improved partnerships and connected systems across Government for more seamless service delivery

Measuring the impact of Phase Two

The research highlighted throughout the Phase Two Implementation Plan provides the evidence base. It is widely acknowledged that children who participate in quality early learning in the two years before formal school are more likely to make a successful transition to school, stay longer in school, continue to further education, and fully participate in employment and community life as adults.

Measuring the impact of the Phase Two will be achieved through the *Set up for Success* evaluation framework.

The evaluation of *Set up for Success* incorporates several components:

- Evaluation of initiatives delivered in each phase
- Evaluation of the overarching outcomes of the strategy
- Evaluation of the phased approach to universal access to three-year-old preschool.

Evaluation is conducted using a multidimensional approach for qualitative and quantitative data collection and considers individual, population and system outcomes. Various sources of internal (Education Directorate) and external data are drawn upon to evaluate the impact *Set up for Success* is having on children, families and educators in the ACT. This impact is measured against the indicators identified throughout the Phase Two Implementation Plan.

In the medium to long-term, the ACT Government will be able to follow the educational journeys of children who participated in quality early childhood education as they move through the education system. Various types of school data will help paint a picture of the longitudinal impacts of *Set up for Success* on successive cohorts of children over the ten years of the strategy and beyond.

The findings of evaluation activities help guide future policy and practice decisions that impact children, families, the ECEC workforce and the sector. Evaluation of Phase Two will help inform the implementation of Phase Three.

The long-term impacts of *Set up for Success* will be felt by every child who benefits from better access to early learning opportunities, from the care of the skilled and dedicated educators who guide children through their learning and support them through transitions, and from well-connected systems and service provisions.

