

SMALL STEPS, BIG FUTURES REPORT



everyone's family

APPENDIX 2 PRESCHOOL PARTICIPATION REPORT 2019

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY

The Smith Family pays respect to the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Country in the communities in which we work throughout Australia and their connection to their lands, waters and communities. We pay respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures, and to Elders, both past and present. We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as Australia's First Peoples and Custodians of the Land. We acknowledge that the land on which our workplaces are located are the lands of the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Country.

INFORMATION ON THIS REPORT

The *Preschool Participation Report* forms part of the *Project Interim Report* that was submitted to the Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) in December 2019 by The Smith Family. It was originally called the *National Research Report*.

It has been renamed as the *Preschool Participation Report 2019* and is included as an appendix in the *Small Steps, Big Futures Report* as it has been the foundation of this qualitative report. The *Small Steps, Big Futures Report* is the final report for the Preschool Attendance Strategies Project submitted to DESE in April 2021.

To the best of our knowledge, all the information in this Appendix report is correct as of 20 December 2019 when it was originally submitted. It is acknowledged that in the interim period there has been further research released and additional programs and practice implemented in jurisdictions across Australia with a purpose to increase participation in preschool.

THE SMITH FAMILY

The Smith Family is a national charity founded in 1922 to improve the lives of children living in disadvantage in Australia. Our vision is a better future for young Australians in need. Our mission is to create opportunities for them by providing long-term support for their participation in education. This mission is founded on the belief that every child deserves a chance to thrive.

The Smith Family takes a place-based approach and is currently working in over 90 low SES communities across every state and territory. Over half of these are regional communities.

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INTRODUCTION

This Preschool Participation Report 2019 is included as Appendix 2 of the Small Steps, Big Futures Report for the Preschool Attendance Strategies Project (the Project). The purpose of this Report is to synthesise existing research and to document programs and practice in Australian jurisdictions to increase preschool¹ participation. Given that this area has been very well documented, including through a range of public inquiries, this research is not intended to cover the full gamut of the preschool situation in Australia. Rather it will identify, where possible, good practice and critical success factors for increasing preschool participation².

REPORT METHODOLOGY

Each jurisdiction was invited to provide to the Project available reports and evaluations on programs or initiatives designed to increase participation in preschool programs for children in the year before full-time school. In addition, recent papers, evaluations or research were identified. A smaller selection of key documents were chosen for particular analysis.

The Project examined available data to determine whether it was possible to identify patterns of preschool engagement across the country.

- The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) collects annual census data on preschool attendance (the Collection). Some argue that the Collection is flawed as attendance data is captured for one week during winter and extrapolated for a full year of attendance.
- The Productivity Commission's Report of Government Services (RoGS) uses ABS Preschool Collection data to conduct analysis on preschool participation. The report calculates enrolment rates for each state for the year before full-time school (YBS), as well as reporting preschool expenditure data for governments and families. However, the analysis of preschool participation in RoGS is limited by the issues above for the ABS Collection.
- The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) reports on whether children attended preschool before commencing school, but this provides no insight into dosage and is only collected on a three yearly cycle. It is also collected through teacher reports rather than systematic data collection and data linkage (O'Connell et al, 2016 p 29).

As accurate data was considered an important input to the Project, jurisdictions were invited

to provide any additional available data to help the Project identify the location and scale of the concern regarding preschool enrolment and attendance. Few jurisdictions were able to provide any data not already in the public domain, and only one jurisdiction provided data that could be referenced in any way. It is clear that the publicly available sources mentioned above are the best national data currently available.

Although attendance data is limited, the best available data still provides an indication of attendance. The Project acknowledges this limitation, recognising that research and policy will continue to rely on this until better sources are available.

REPORT STRUCTURE

Part 1 of this report sets out the context for the Project, describing preschool benefits, and the way the literature describes barriers to preschool. In Part 2 we explore the policy context for preschool in Australia, drilling down to what each jurisdiction has put in place to support preschool participation. The challenges to understanding children's participation and what works are discussed in Part 4 along with the report's key findings.

¹ The language used to describe formal early learning settings in the year before school differs across jurisdictions. For ease of reading, this document uses the term "preschool" to describe this.

² Participation is used broadly throughout this report to denote enrolment and/or attendance.

PART 1: PRESCHOOL PARTICIPATION CONTEXT

CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT IN THE FIRST YEAR OF SCHOOL

The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) provides a national indicator on children in their first year of school across five developmental domains³, offering insights on the cumulative impact of a range of factors on a child's development, including access to preschool learning.

As shown in Table 1, a significant proportion (21.7 percent) of all Australian children are vulnerable in one or more of the AEDC domains. Higher proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (41.3 percent) and those living in Australia's most disadvantaged communities (32.3 percent) are developmentally vulnerable in their first year of school.

Children's ability at school entry has been shown to influence their academic trajectories through school (Brinkman et al, 2013). The AEDC domains have been shown to predict children's later literacy and numeracy outcomes as measured by NAPLAN in Years 3, 5 and 7 (Australian Government, 2015a). Children who were vulnerable in one or more of the domains at age five, were more likely to be in the bottom 20 percent of all students'

scores on NAPLAN assessments in Years 3, 5 and 7, than children who were not vulnerable on any AEDC domain. Longitudinal analysis shows that a child's development when they enter school has a strong and persistent relationship to how well they continue through primary school (AIHW, 2015). This reinforces the longer term importance of children's level of development as they start school.

Table 1: Proportion of children vulnerable on 1 or more domains on the AEDC, 2018

	All Australian children	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children	Children living in Australia's most disadvantaged communities (Quintile 1)
Percentage vulnerable in 1 or more of the 5 AEDC domains	21.7	41.3	32.3
Percentage vulnerable in 2 or more of the 5 AEDC domains	11.0	25.8	18.5

Source: Australian Government, 2019a

³ The domains are: physical health and wellbeing; social competence; emotional maturity; language and cognitive skills; and communication skills and general knowledge.

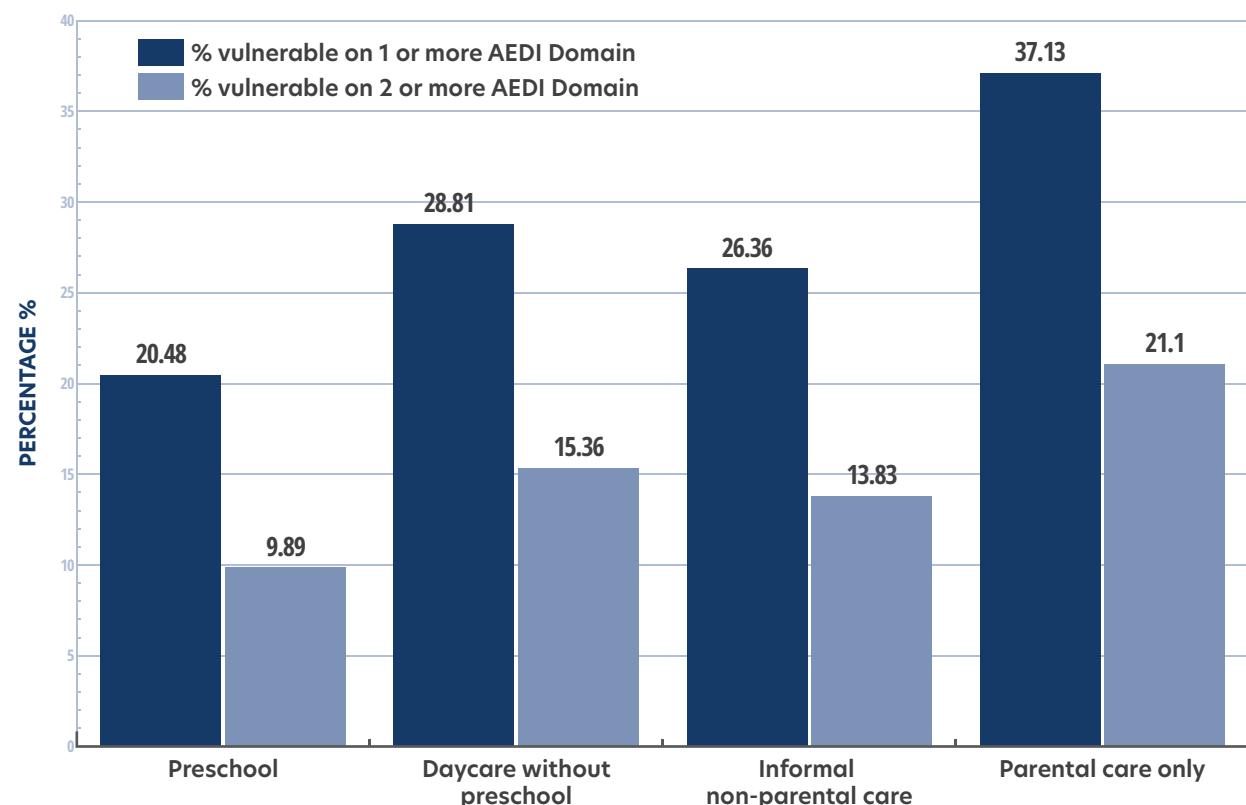
THE BENEFITS OF PRESCHOOL

It is widely recognised that participation in high quality early childhood education (ECE), including preschool, is beneficial to all children (AIHW, 2015). A range of research also indicates that children from disadvantaged backgrounds particularly benefit from such participation, through the promotion of early learning and reduced vulnerability (AIHW, 2015; Heckman, 2008; and Harrison et al 2012; all cited in O'Connell et al, 2016).

CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT IN THE FIRST YEAR OF SCHOOL AND PRESCHOOL ATTENDANCE

AEDC data also contributes to an understanding of the benefits of preschool attendance. As Figure 1 shows, children who attended preschool were less likely to be developmentally vulnerable across all five developmental domains, compared to children in other forms of care⁴.

Figure 1: Proportion of children developmentally vulnerable on AEDC domains by care type, [2009]

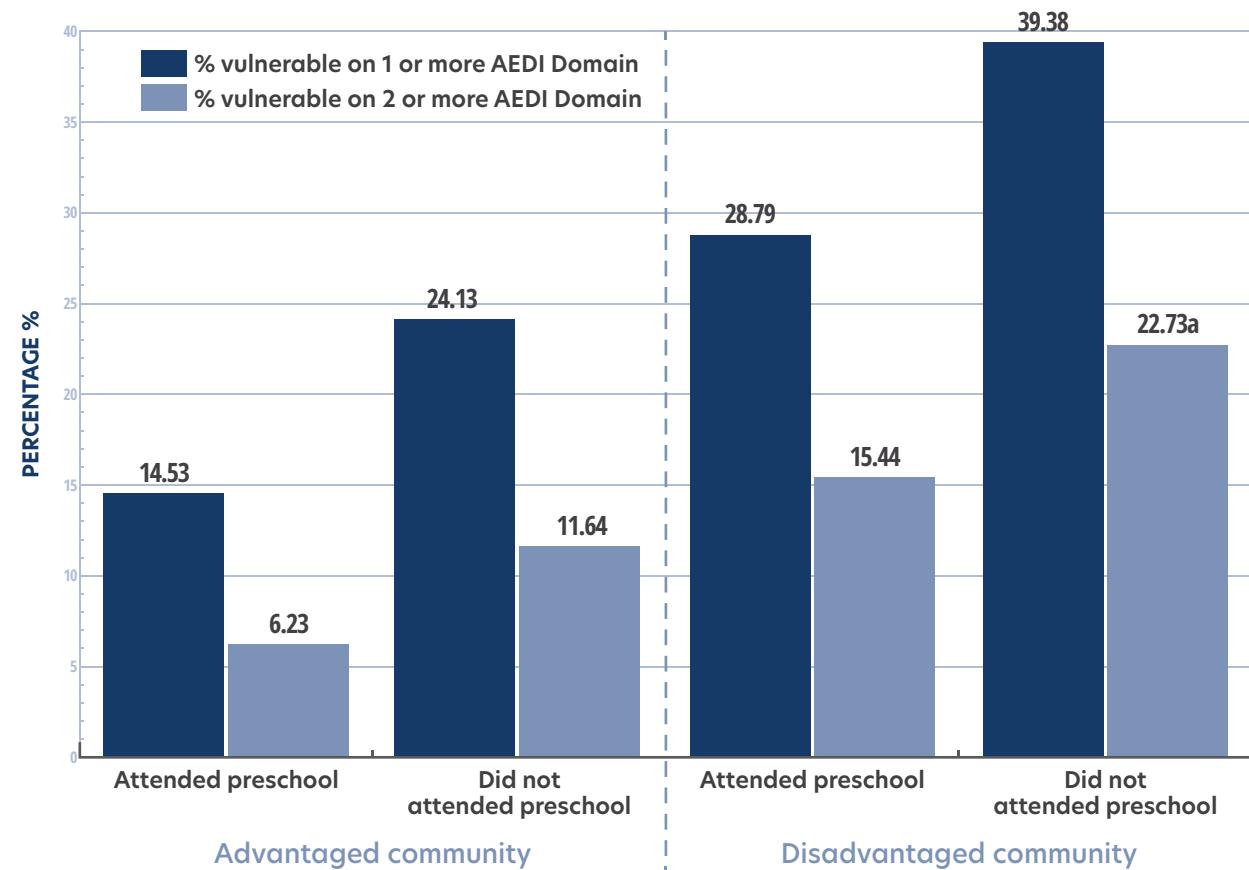


Source: Australian Government, 2014a

⁴ Preschool, childcare and playgroup attendance data for the AEDC is collected through teacher report rather than systematic data collection and data linkage, so it should be interpreted with some caution as it reflects limitations in available data (O'Connell et al, 2016, p 29).

Figure 2 below also shows that preschool attendance for this cohort did not fully alleviate the gap between children living in advantaged and disadvantaged communities. This likely reflects that there are other factors beyond preschool attendance that also impact on children's level of developmental vulnerability. However, it may also reflect the fact that the AEDC collection does not assess the level of quality of the preschool programs these children attended, nor does it indicate the number of hours they receive each week and their level of attendance. Factors such as quality, dosage and attendance are crucial to ensuring that preschool delivers positive outcomes for disadvantaged children.

Figure 2: Proportion of children developmentally vulnerable, by preschool and community socioeconomic status, [2009]



Source: Australian Government, 2014a

POSITIVE PRESCHOOL EXPERIENCES

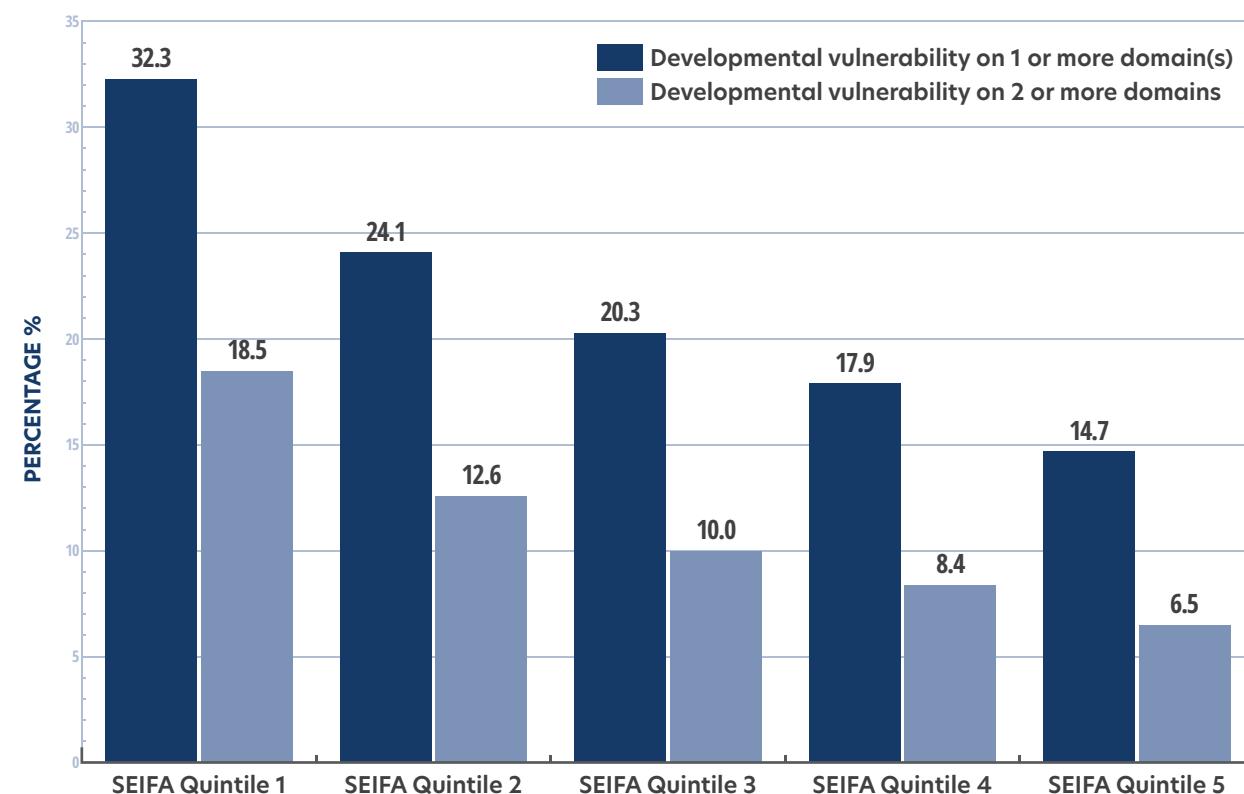
A summary of key research with regards to positive preschool experiences, particularly for children living in circumstances of socioeconomic disadvantage, explores issues of quality, dosage, span of dosage and session duration.

O'Connell et al (2015) note that there is broad consensus on what constitutes quality in early education and summarise this as:

- **Process elements** shaping the dynamics of daily occurrences in early learning and care settings, such as children's interaction with caregivers and other children, learning opportunities activities and health and safety measures; and
- **Structural factors** that facilitate these interactions and learning activities, such as child to adult ratios, the size of each group of children and the formal education and training of caregivers.

The AECD shows there is a relationship between disadvantage and vulnerability, with 32.3% and 18.5% of children in the most disadvantaged locations experiencing vulnerability on one or more and two or more domains respectively, compared to 14.7% and 6.5% of children in the least disadvantaged locations (see Figure 3). As discussed previously in this report, evidence shows that participation in a quality preschool program offers a protective factor against vulnerabilities for children in disadvantaged locations, however, there is an inverse relationship between ECE service quality and locational disadvantage (see Figures 4 and 5).

Figure 3: AEDC results for children vulnerable on one or more and two or more domain(s), [2018]



Source: Australian Government 2019a

Figure 4: Quality ratings for NQF approved preschools/kindergartens by SEIFA quintile.

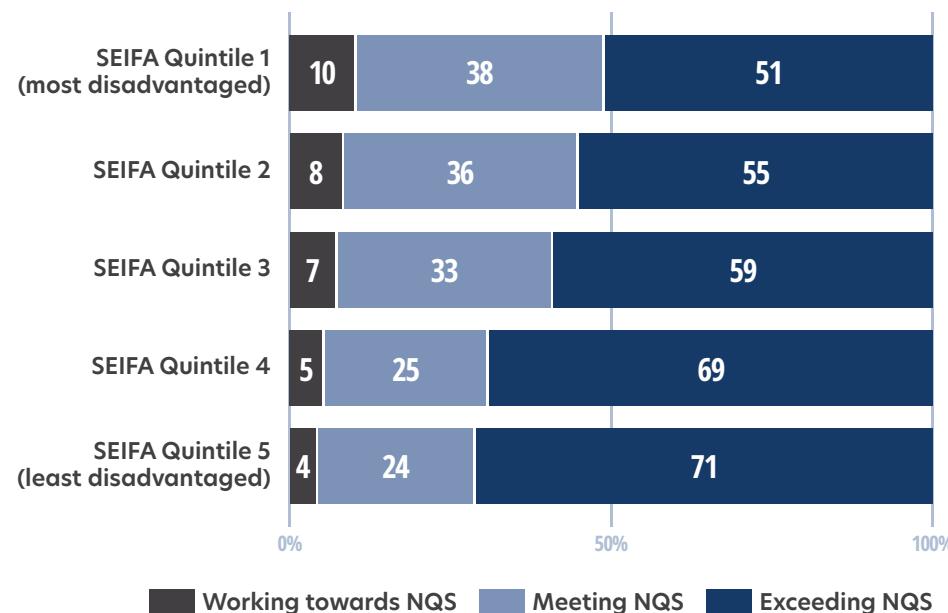
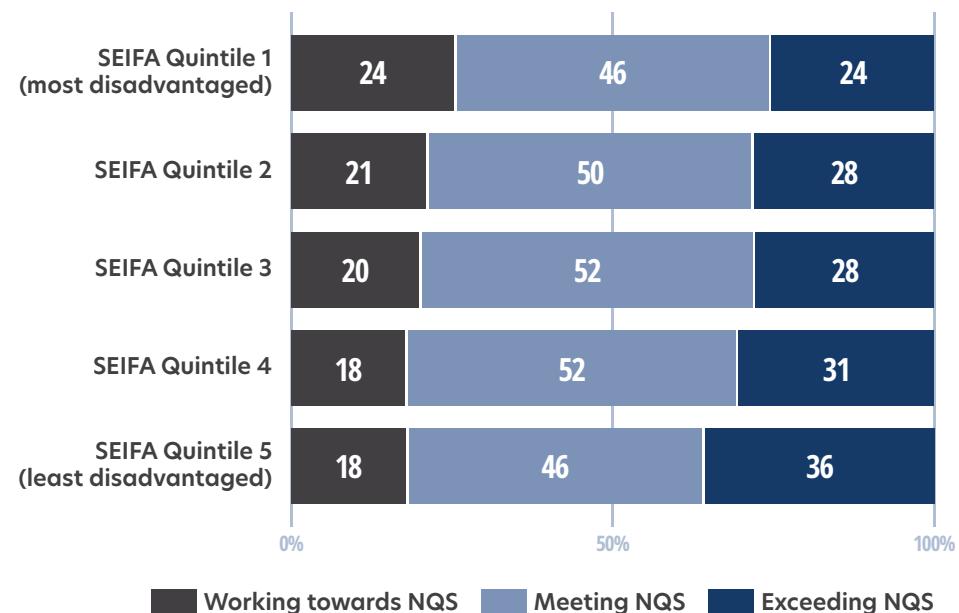


Figure 5: Quality ratings for NQF approved long day care services by SEIFA quintile.



Source: ACECQA⁵

The notion of dosage is a relatively recent addition to the vernacular on early childhood education, having only emerged as a consistent part of research/practice design post-1990s (Claessens & Garrett 2014). Current research has identified dosage to be important, with fifteen hours per week emerging as the generally accepted baseline for a minimum dosage of preschool participation in Australia (see for example O'Connell et al 2015).

In contrast, AIHW (2015) notes there is a dearth of literature on the optimal number of hours of attendance at a preschool program and that it is not clear that 15 hours per week is optimal from a child development perspective.

There is some evidence that full days may be more beneficial than part days for preschool children, however, this is highly dependent on quality service delivery. Poor quality or 'sub-par

delivery' means that the gains that might be made by greater exposure are negated. Greater dosage of poor quality preschool education is likely to produce detrimental outcomes, and both US and Australian research suggests that young children living in circumstances of social and economic disadvantage are particularly vulnerable to the negative impacts of poor quality preschool (Vandell et al, 2010).

⁵ These graphs were developed by ACECQA for the Project using ACECQA data to reporting period end June 2019 mapped to ABS SEIFA ratings.

The span of dosage is also important. Two years of preschool education is more beneficial than one year, especially for children who are more vulnerable. It has been suggested for example that two years of high quality ECE for 15 hours per week provides the same protective factor as having a tertiary educated mother (Sylva et al, 2010). An extended period of preschool participation (even if attendance is part time, over two years) appears to be more positively impactful than a shorter period of intense participation (for example full-time days for a few months) (Fox & Geddes 2016).

BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION

A range of research suggests there are a number of structural and contextual factors that influence disadvantaged families' decisions to participate in early education services, including preschool. O'Connell et al (2016) summarise these as:

- Parents' preferences and beliefs about child development and the value of early education
- Access and availability, including cost, operating hours, location and lack of private and public transport
- Services not meeting need
- Poor coordination between services
- Limited access to specialist supports for children with additional needs
- Lack of publicity about services

- Complex paper work and enrolment processes
- Lack of trust in services and fear of judgemental attitudes and behaviours.

SNAICC (2019) adds that barriers to participation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families also include:

- Lack of Aboriginal leadership and involvement in service delivery
- Cultural barriers such as lack of service cultural competence
- Social and neighbourhood characteristics like past experience and community level distress.

The Project intends to interrogate these barriers directly with families and practitioners in a number of communities in participating jurisdictions during Stage One, to hear from families and practitioners not only what they consider the barriers to be, but their ideas on what would work to reduce those barriers⁶. The Stage One Interim Report will include a summary of the consultations undertaken and a suite of strategies that could be implemented to improve preschool participation.

LOOKING BEYOND "HARD TO REACH"

Families who do not participate in preschool programs are often defined as being 'education-averse' and this is often broadly assumed to be the main barrier to preschool participation. A meta-analysis of the literature on disadvantage and educational access identified a total of 32

understandings of what are characterised as 'hard to reach' families. However it noted that this actually conceals a more complex array of different categories of barriers including involuntary isolation, health-related challenges and a lack of skills to bridge the gap between family and service (Boag-Munroe & Evangelou, 2012). Research in the UK also highlights the shortcomings and limitations of the 'hard to reach' dichotomy that has come to frame educational engagement for parents from lower socio-economic status families (Watt L, 2016).

The meta-analysis (Boag-Munroe & Evangelou, 2012) also explored the literature on families who are described not just as hard to reach but as 'hard to engage', noting two broad categories of families are discussed. One group is those who might be understood as 'voluntarily isolated', perhaps because they feel engagement might be stigmatising or threatening, such as refugee and asylum seeker families or families experiencing drug or alcohol misuse. The second group are those who have reservations about participation in the service, with a wide range of reasons cited for these families' non-engagement, again confirming the complexity of factors which are at play. The meta-analysis concludes that the reasons why families who might benefit from services are often not being engaged are multiple and potentially complex, with it being unusual for one barrier to exist in isolation.

⁶ During Stage Two, the project will undertake user centred design to develop and test strategies to overcome barriers to participation.

THE VIEWS OF FAMILIES IN DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES

Australian research with families from disadvantaged backgrounds regarding their participation in preschool is limited. Hence it is anticipated that the deeper consultations undertaken as part of Stage 2 of the Project will contribute significantly to understanding the factors which support or impinge on these families' participation in preschool.

A study of 101 families from disadvantaged communities in NSW, with children aged three to five years, explored their views and practices in engaging with early childhood education (Grace R et al, 2014). While these families identified a number of barriers in line with the list presented above (O'Connell et al 2016), perceptions of quality were seen as being a driving force shaping reticence to enrol in a preschool program for some of these families. This suggests that a deeper examination of the decision making frameworks used by families to assess preschool appropriateness is required.

The following discussion distils research findings which highlight the complex set of factors which can underpin a family's decision to either disengage or not engage at all with a preschool program. The factors can be grouped and viewed through the lens of safety, as this lens captures the majority of these findings.

SAFETY

Perceptions of safety are important in shaping a parent or carer's decision to engage with a preschool. Qualitative research with parents and carers of preschool age children, across a number of Australian studies, highlights a range of different ways in which safety plays a role in either enabling or inhibiting preschool engagement for vulnerable families.

i. Personal and family safety

Research by Brennan et al (2014) highlights that for some families who did not enrol or participate in preschool services, a more immediate need to ensure a safe and secure family home and environment assumed a greater priority. Housing instability, financial insecurity and threats of violence, were all identified as factors that shaped a decision to not enrol in a preschool program. Pressing needs to organise secure, safe and affordable housing, quite naturally, assumed greater importance for parents and carers seeking to protect their children.

ii. Centre safety

Centre safety is important and pivotal in shaping a parent or carer's decision to send a child to preschool (Grace R et al, 2014). This includes factors such as transport, physical layout of a centre, and the felt safety and security of the service and routine provided to children.

iii. Cultural safety

Cultural inclusion, or what might be termed cultural safety, is also a vital factor for many parents and carers in shaping their decision to commit to preschool learning (Krakauer J, 2016). A number of concerns have been raised by families which can be considered relevant to the notion of cultural safety including: a reassurance that an early learning environment is respectful of a family's culture and language; whether a program provides sufficient opportunity for a child to feel acceptance and share culture; and the desire to have children participate in and learn about other cultural experiences (Harrison et al, 2012).

iv. Economic safety

A more nuanced understanding of the economic factors that either inhibit or enhance access to preschool is also required. Work situations of parents and carers change, and so too do the social circumstances of families. The policy and subsidy structures in place to facilitate access to preschool are often premised on static and dichotomous classifications (employed versus unemployed, welfare versus non-welfare dependent). Brennan et al (2014) note that absolute descriptions rarely apply to families who are living in circumstances of financial vulnerability and a state of flux impacts low income families and in turn their engagement with education and care services in the early years.

PART 2: PRESCHOOL ACROSS AUSTRALIA

POLICY CONTEXT - UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Universal Access to preschool is intended to ensure that a quality preschool program is available for all children in the year before full-time school. In the 2019/20 budget, the Australian Government committed \$449.5 million to extend the National Partnership on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education (ECE) until the end of 2020. The funding is intended to ensure that every child will continue to have access to a quality preschool program for 600 hours (15 hours a week) in the year before full-time schooling.

While Australia has lagged behind comparable countries over recent decades, the Universal Access National Partnership (UANP) was a significant turning point. Investment from governments to provide all Australian children with access to 600 hours of preschool education in the year before full-time school has resulted in considerable change (Early Childhood Australia, 2017).

As noted elsewhere in this report, there is considerable evidence to demonstrate the developmental benefits of participation in high quality ECE and in particular benefits for children from low socioeconomic backgrounds in high

quality preschool programs. While recognising the intersections between the two components of the ECE service system, particularly from an end user perspective, the focus of this overview is on preschool service provision.

ENROLMENT

UANP arrangements appear to have contributed to higher preschool enrolment rates. In 2008, an estimated 77% of children were enrolled in a preschool program. By 2018, this had increased to an enrolment rate of 100% under the UANP. While this represents a significant achievement, this is probably an overestimate of enrolment in Australia for the reasons outlined below.

In 2016, the ABS introduced a new method of calculating the number of children who were expected to be following their preschool year with full-time school the next year. It is called the state-specific Year Before Full-Time Schooling (YBFS) and takes into account the preschool and school age entry provisions of the state and territory in which the child usually resides. This alternative method of calculating the number of children in preschool under the UANP uses all 4 and 5 year olds enrolled in preschool as the numerator and the estimated residential population of all 4 year olds as the denominator.

The different populations in the numerator and denominator for this calculation often result in reported enrolment rates above 100%.

The YBFS methodology shows that in 2018, 91% of children are enrolled, which implies that there is still one in ten children missing out.

The representation of children enrolled in a preschool program in the year before full-time school who are from special needs groups, is similar to their representation in the community for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children from remote and very remote areas. In contrast the representation of disadvantaged children (SEIFA IRSQ Quintile 1), children from a non-English speaking background and children with a disability, is lower than their representation in the community (Productivity Commission, 2019).

ATTENDANCE AT 600 HOURS PER YEAR

The attendance data collected in the ABS National Collection (the Collection) is based on a reference period in August. For the purposes of the Collection, a child is considered to be attending if the child is enrolled in a preschool program and has attended the program for at least one hour during the reference period. The Collection date is the first Friday in August of each year. Some jurisdictions elect to adopt a two-week reference period that includes the census week.

The reference week provides a snapshot of preschool attendance. It does not provide insight into the reasons why children are not attending (e.g. whether it is driven by explainable absences).

In regards to data provided through the child care system, under the new child care package, providers are required to report actual attendance times from 14 January 2019 (the first full Child Care Subsidy fortnight in 2019), ensuring attendance in centre based day care is accurately recorded and consistently reported across jurisdictions. Previous data collected for children attending preschool through the child care system represented billable hours only, as opposed to the actual attendance time for a child.

Table 2: Overall enrolment and enrolment for at least 600 hours in preschool, for the year before full-time school, 2018

	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA	SA	TAS	ACT	NT	AUS
All Enrolled	90,661	79,120	58,409	33,831	19,723	6,238	5,699	3,220	296,932
%	84.4	94.2	90.1	98.8	97.0	100.0	100.0	89.7	91.0
Enrolled 600 hours	84,760	77,785	56,606	33,066	19,434	6,198	5,603	3,155	286,641
%	93.5	98.3	96.9	97.7	98.5	99.4	98.3	98.0	96.5
Vulnerable children % enrolled for 600 hours	90.0	98.5	96.0	98.4	99.0	99.7	100.0	98.0	95.4

Source: ABS Preschool Education, Australia, 2019 (cat. no. 4240.0)

Note: Vulnerable and disadvantaged is measured as SEIFA Quintile 1 which is a geographical index of relative socio-economic disadvantage produced by the ABS. Figures are unreliable for the ACT which is in a very small geographical area.

Until the new attendance reporting data under the child care system is made available, the most reliable data currently available is from the dedicated preschool sector. This data shows that while there has been a very significant increase in the proportion of children enrolled in a preschool program, including in the year before school and for 15 hours or more per week, many children are not attending at this rate as shown in Table 2.

It is important to note that although this is the most reliable available data, the dedicated preschool sector which accounts for just over 40 per cent of the total preschool sector. The attendance rate for at least 600 hours per year is just over 70 per cent, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Attendance for at least 600 hours in preschool for the year before full-time school, 2018 – Dedicated Preschools only.

	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA	SA	TAS	ACT	NT	AUS
Enrolled for at least 600 hours per year	25,003	40,020	16,390	26,510	11,234	5,083	2,791	2,086	129,142
Attended for at least 600 hours per year	20,147	30,365	12,604	15,908	6,470	4,030	1,901	1,217	92,662
% Attendance rate	80.6	75.9	76.9	60.0	57.6	79.3	68.1	58.3	71.8
Vulnerable children % attended for 600 hours	75.1	69.5	74.0	55.0	49.4	75.6	56.4	29.5	66.0

Source: ABS Preschool Education (*unpublished Tablebuilder*), Australia, 2018

Note: Vulnerable and disadvantaged is measured as SEIFA Quintile 1 which is a geographical index of relative socio-economic disadvantage produced by the ABS. Figures are unreliable for the ACT which is in a very small geographical area.

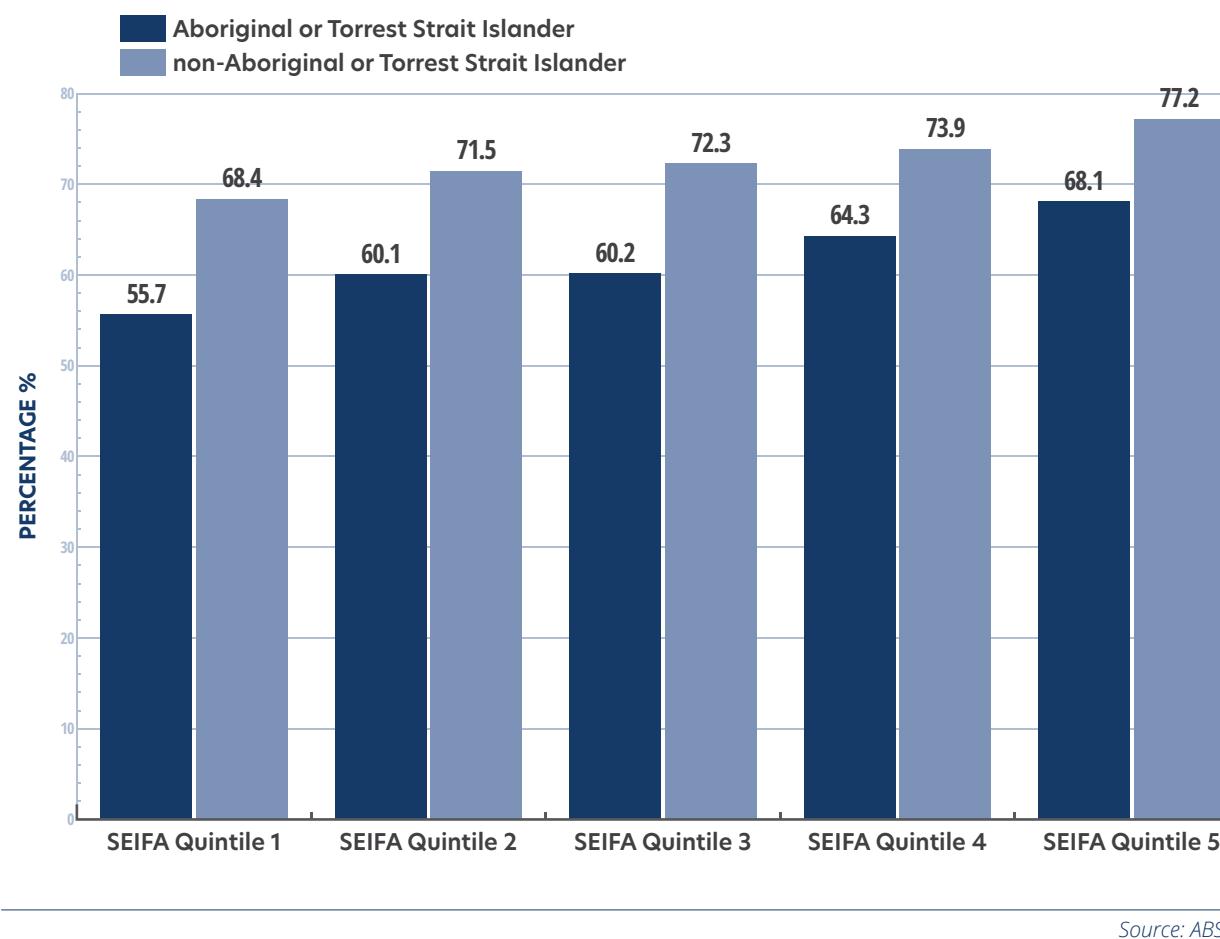
As Table 3 shows there are significant proportions of children from communities of all levels of advantage-disadvantage who are not attending preschool for 600 hours or more. These attendance rates however decline as the level of community disadvantage increases.

Figure 6 also shows that despite very high proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children being enrolled in preschool for 600 hours or more, across all community types,

they are less likely than non-Indigenous children to attend at this level. In 2017, only 68% of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children enrolled in a preschool program attended for 600 hours or more a year. While this was an improvement from 2016 (65%) it was still 10 percentage points below the 2017 rate for non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children of 78% (Australian Government, 2019).

Attendance at 600 hours or more varies considerably across jurisdictions for all children and for different groups of children. In 2017 for example, the rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children varied from 73% in Queensland to 36% in South Australia and 33% in the Northern Territory. This compared to the non-Indigenous rates of 77% in Queensland to 60% per cent in Western Australia (ABS Preschool Education, Australia, 2018).

Figure 6: Attendance Rates (600 hours or more) by Indigeneity and community disadvantage (SEIFA), [2018]



SERVICE DELIVERY

The Early Childhood Education sector provides a range of services for children based on their age and education, care and development needs. ECE services provide the following broad service types:

- **Child care services**—provide education and care services to children aged 0–12 years including the following service types: long day care (LDC); family day care; outside school hours care (OSHC); occasional care; and other care.
- **Preschool services**—are services that deliver a preschool program. A ‘preschool program’ is a structured, intentional, play-based learning program, delivered by a qualified teacher, aimed at children in the year or two before they commence full-time schooling.

While, a mix of service provision exists within all of the states and territories, two distinct models can be identified (Dowling & O’Malley, 2009). The first is where preschool is primarily funded and delivered by government (Government Model), and the second is where the government subsidises preschool but the service is primarily delivered by non-government agencies (Non-Government Model), as shown in Table 4.

While no state or territory system fits wholly within one or other of these models, the provision of preschool in the Australian Capital Territory, the Northern Territory, South Australia, Tasmania and Western Australia can be said to align more closely with the first model and in New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria, government subsidises services that are delivered by other agencies. However, all jurisdictions involve a mix of the two and the reality is more complex than the models suggest (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2013).

PRESCHOOL SERVICES

State and territory governments are responsible for the delivery of preschool in Australia. As a result of this, there is considerable variation in between jurisdictions the nomenclature and in the preschool starting age (see Table 5).

Table 4: Government and Non-Government models of preschool

Model 1: Government model	Model 2: Non-government model
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The state/territory government owns, funds and delivers the majority of preschool services. Preschools are treated in much the same way as primary and secondary schools. The jurisdiction may provide supplementary funding to preschools, but generally not to preschools in long day care centres, because they attract Commonwealth funding through the Child Care Subsidy. The jurisdiction owns 70-90% of preschools. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The state government subsidises preschool services that are provided by non-government organisations. Preschools in long day care centres charge some fees and attract Commonwealth funding through the child care system. The state or territory government owns fewer than 20% of preschools, and these are generally targeted at disadvantaged communities, in contrast to government schools, which are comprehensive.

Source: Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2013

Table 5: Preschool programs in Australia

State/ Territory	Program name	Age of entry—preschool program in YBFS	Age of entry—school
ACT	Preschool	4 by 30 April	5 by 30 April
NSW	Preschool	Generally aged 4 and 5	5 by 31 July
NT	Preschool	4 by 30 June	5 by 30 June
QLD	Kindergarten	4 by 30 June	5 by 30 June
SA	Preschool	4 by 1 May	5 by 1 May
TAS	Kindergarten	4 by 1 January	5 by 1 January
VIC	Kindergarten	4 by 30 April	5 by 30 April
WA	Kindergarten	4 by 30 June	5 by 30 June

Source: Productivity Commission, 2019

The current system of delivery of preschool education within and across different states and territories is complex and multifaceted, with services being provided in a mix of contexts, including kindergartens, stand-alone preschools, long day care settings, early learning centres, and preschool programs within the government and independent school sectors. Provision of services involves complex layers and connections between government, voluntary and church groups, public education systems, independent, Catholic and other religious schools, community organisations, free-market forces, small business owner-operators and major commercial childcare companies, plus of course families and children. Navigating this complexity can be challenging for all families, particularly those experiencing vulnerability.

The wide variations in how and where preschool programs are delivered is highlighted in Table 6 which shows the proportion of preschool enrolments by service type by state- territory.

Table 6: Proportion of preschool enrolments by service type by jurisdiction, [2018]

SERVICE TYPE	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA	SA	TAS	ACT	NT
Government preschool	6%	12%	3%	60%	55%	53%	50%	69%
Non- government preschool	27%	37%	28%	21%	4%	16%	2%	3%
Centre Based Day Care	67%	51%	69%	19%	41%	32%	48%	28%

Source: ABS Preschool Education, Australia, 2018

PART 3: PRESCHOOL IN THE STATES AND TERRITORIES

OVERVIEW

This section sets out key programs being implemented by state and territory governments which have a direct or indirect focus on supporting preschool enrolment and attendance over time. While there is often overlap from both a policy and service delivery perspective, programs are broadly categorised as follows:

1. Programs or initiatives specifically designed to increase Preschool program participation (enrolment and/or attendance) in the year before full-time schooling (YBFS); and
2. A range of Early Childhood (birth to five or six) programs which may encourage participation in preschool in the YBFS.

VARIED POLICY, PRACTICE AND FUNDING APPROACHES

As set out in the previous section, the Preschool program landscape is differentiated according to the policy approach taken by each state and territory, with variants across the various parts of the sector through which preschool programs are delivered.

Distribution of UANP funding is also different across states and territories, with not all governments providing funding and/or fee relief for preschool programs in Long Day Care (LDC) settings, notwithstanding a clear articulation in relevant agreements requiring all children to be funded regardless of settings. In some states and territories funding to LDCs is generally only received if the child is exclusively attending an LDC. If a child is also attending a standalone preschool or school based preschool UANP funding is directed to the preschools. As part of consultations undertaken with the sector for this report, this issue has been flagged as a barrier to participation by some Long Day Care providers.

All states and territories have responded to the range of international research demonstrating the power of quality early childhood education and parental engagement from birth, to improve children's cognitive, health and social

development. Nobel Prize winning economist James Heckman (2007) has shown that the economic return on investment in the early years is higher than at any other time in a child's development. More recently, The Front Project (2019) estimates that the return on investment for early childhood education is 1:2, with positive effects felt across educational attainment, workforce participation and tax revenue. Over the past 20 years or more, state and territory governments have been implementing and progressively refining a range of Early Childhood initiatives designed to identify the most vulnerable families for intervention, and to support parents to provide positive home learning and developmental environments and care for their children from birth to the start of school. While intended outcomes for these initiatives may be broader than increasing preschool participation, these programs may, through linking families to the service system, provide a pathway to participation.

WHAT IS KNOWN ABOUT HOW EFFECTIVE THESE APPROACHES ARE?

There are range a of data anomalies, differences in 'counting rules', data collection differences, and other data issues in this area of service delivery (Productivity Commission, 2016). While it is clear that there has been a substantial increase in preschool enrolment and attendance since 2010, and considerable anecdotal evidence about cohorts of the population who are less likely to access preschool services, it does not appear possible to drill into the details of service usage longitudinally or by location. In addition while there are a broad range of universal and targeted programs focussed across the continuum from conception to age 5, there is no overarching, consistent evaluation framework and program-by-program evaluations are sporadic and inconsistent in approach.

Therefore, it currently does not appear to be possible to answer the question of the extent to which approaches by State and Territory Governments to support preschool enrolment and attendance have been successful, or to clearly define what works for whom in what circumstances.

PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES ACROSS STATES AND TERRITORIES

In order to document programs and initiatives in place to increase preschool participation across Australia, the Project obtained information directly from jurisdictions to ensure that information was accurate at the time of writing.

Table 7 identifies a range of programs or initiatives, by state and territories, that are specifically designed to increase preschool participation in the year before full-time schooling, while Table 8 identifies a range of Early Childhood (birth to age five or six) programs which may encourage participation in preschool in the year before full-time schooling.

Table 7: Programs or initiatives specifically designed to increase Preschool participation in the Year Before Full-time Schooling

Australian Capital Territory	Strategy Focus: The ACT Education Directorate are currently developing an Early Education Strategy for the ACT. Four key elements are guiding the development of the Strategy: increasing access, equity and affordability; enhancing the workforce and their qualifications; ensuring seamless transitions from education and care to school; and maximising the benefit to children from money spent.
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No programs or initiatives specifically targeted at increasing preschool participation in the year before formal schooling

New South Wales		Strategy Focus: Ensuring: Universal access; Choice and sustainability; Quality learning environments; Support for diverse needs.		
PROGRAM OR INITIATIVE	DETAILS	KEY DRIVERS	EVALUATION?	
<i>Start Strong</i>	Start Strong aims to improve affordability of early childhood education and increase the number of children participating for 600 hours in a quality early childhood education program in the year before school. Three year olds in community preschools are also provided funding to improve access and affordability as part of this program.	Universal access for children in the two years before school, with a focus on equity cohorts.	External Evaluation	Not Publicly Available
<i>Mobile Preschool Contracts</i>	Opt-in fixed term contracts for mobile preschools to support the provision of sustainable service delivery and universal access in regional and remote areas.	To achieve universal access to preschool in rural and remote NSW.	No Evaluation	
<i>Start Strong Community Safety Net Program</i>	The Community Safety Net program has been established to support children in very remote regions in NSW, with the NSW Government working with peak bodies to establish preschool programs in selected communities where there is currently no access to formal early education programs.	To achieve universal access to preschool in rural and remote NSW.	No Evaluation	
<i>Disability and Inclusion Program</i>	The Disability and Inclusion program provides funding and support to enable children with disability and additional learning needs in community-based preschools to participate in a quality early childhood education on the same basis as their peers.	Inclusion of children with a disability and additional needs.	External Evaluation (1 year review)	Not Publicly Available

<i>Non-Price Barriers to Preschool Participation</i>	Research project being conducted by Macquarie University to measure the impact of non-fee interventions on low SES participation in early childhood education.	To better understand the non-price barriers to preschool participation.	Research in progress
<i>Community Grants Program</i>	The Community Grants program provides funding to eligible early childhood education services to enable them to promote educational access for Aboriginal children and children from low income families, as well as develop initiatives that will improve educational experiences or outcomes for those children already attending a service.	Increase the number of Aboriginal children and children from low income families participating in 600 hours of quality early childhood education in the two years before school as well as improve the outcomes for children attending the service.	No Evaluation
<i>Capital Works Grants Program</i>	The Capital Works Grants program provides funding to enable eligible early childhood education services to develop innovative approaches to improve access to quality services and increase community preschool places in areas of need and demand.	Increase access to and participation in early childhood education for children in the two years before school.	No Evaluation

Northern Territory	Strategy Focus: Working with and through community networks. Key focus on supporting vulnerable groups and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in particular to participate.		
PROGRAM OR INITIATIVE	DETAILS	KEY DRIVERS	EVALUATION?
<i>Families as First Teachers (FaFT)</i>	FaFT is an early learning and family support program for children aged birth to 4 years of age and their families/ carers.	FaFT sets a solid foundation for future education through the delivery of quality child centered early learning that builds parent capacity; encourages literacy and numeracy at home and fosters the transition to preschool.	Indigenous Education Strategy Evaluation currently underway

<i>Families as First Teachers – Stay Play Learn (FaFT-SPL)</i>	FaFT-SPL combines the FaFT and preschool programs in small very remote communities to ensure children in those communities have access to quality early learning programs.	The delivery of quality early learning programs for children aged 0-5 and their families based on the Abecedarian Approach Australia that combines the FaFT program and preschool.	Indigenous Education Strategy Evaluation currently underway
Queensland		Strategy Focus: Universal and targeted access approach with preschool services delivered through long day care services and stand-alone kindergarten services. The Queensland Government also delivers kindergarten programs via the eKindy and kindergarten in remote communities' initiatives. Key focus on engaging vulnerable families, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.	
PROGRAM OR INITIATIVE	DETAILS	KEY DRIVERS	EVALUATION?
<i>The Refugee and Asylum Seeker Early Childhood Pilot</i>	Supports children and families from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds to participate in kindergarten and other early learning opportunities. The pilot provides kindergarten fee subsidies and enrolment support, access to 'soft entry' playgroup programs for families, and delivers professional development to support kindergarten services to be more culturally inclusive and trauma informed.	The Refugee and Asylum Seeker Early Childhood Pilot.	No Evaluation
<i>Let's Yarn about Early Learning, sharing stories from communities, families and Elders, including the Elders as Story Tellers social marketing campaign</i>	Elders and community leaders share the importance of learning, culture, language and identity in the early years. This is done through videos, radio ads, articles and photos.	To increase kindergarten participation rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and set children up for a lifetime of learning.	New program Not yet evaluated
<i>Deadly Kindies Campaign</i>	Encourages children and their families' access to allied health services and health checks, and provides a range of promotional materials and resources to assist parents to enrol their child in kindergarten.	To highlight the importance of healthy children and early years learning and increase Kindergarten participation.	No Evaluation

<i>eKindy</i>	Comprehensive ‘at home’ kindergarten program for children in the year before Prep who cannot easily access a centre-based program due to isolation, medical condition or itinerant family circumstance. eKindy ‘pods’ enable children enrolled in eKindy to undertake part of the program in a supervised, small group setting (generally on a school site) providing peer-socialisation opportunities to the children.	Access for vulnerable families.	No Evaluation
<i>Kindergarten in state schools including remote communities</i>	Children in selected regional, remote and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities can attend kindergarten at their local state school in either a composite or non-composite setting.	Access for vulnerable families and areas of market failure.	No Evaluation
<i>Queensland Kindergarten Funding Scheme</i>	Supports services with the cost of delivering an approved kindergarten program and to help ensure the cost of kindergarten is not a barrier for families.	To increase kindergarten participation rate for all Queensland children, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage.	Independent review of the Queensland Education ECE funding and delivery arrangements underway https://earlychildhood.qld.gov.au/funding-and-support/grants-tenders-and-funding/optimising-outcomes-for-children
<i>Kindergarten Inclusion Support Scheme (KISS)</i>	Provides funding to support kindergarten services deliver inclusive programs for children with disability. The Scheme is also supported by the Specialised Equipment and Resources for Kindergartens (SERK) program that provides kindergarten services with free access to equipment and resources to support children with disability.	Inclusion of children with a disability.	As above

South Australia	Strategy Focus: The Attendance Policy and Attendance Matters 2018 – 2021 strategy promotes the importance of education from the earliest years of life and throughout the schooling years and will guide the efforts of preschools and schools to engage children and young people to stay at school and emphasises the important connection between positive wellbeing and learning outcomes.		
PROGRAM OR INITIATIVE	DETAILS	KEY DRIVERS	EVALUATION?
<i>Indigenous children with impaired hearing program</i>	Provides speech pathology support for Aboriginal preschool children who have suffered from a conductive hearing loss due to otitis media. Supports access to and participation in mainstream preschool.	Access to and participation in preschool.	No Evaluation
<i>Preschool bilingual program</i>	Supports access to and participation in department preschools for children from non-English speaking backgrounds who are unable to speak English when they commence preschool.	Access to and participation in preschool.	No Evaluation
<i>Subsidies to support preschool access for Indigenous children and vulnerable and disadvantaged children</i>	Preschool subsidies (targeted to Indigenous children and concession card holders) that facilitate access to preschool in approved childcare centres, non-government schools and preschools to reduce fees for families.	Access to preschool.	No Evaluation
<i>Transport for Aboriginal children</i>	Several Government preschools dedicated to Aboriginal children operate a bus to collect and return children from preschool.	Addressing transport as a barrier.	No Evaluation
<i>Rural Care Program</i>	Long day care, before and after school child care service operated in departmental preschool sites in small rural communities. Facilitates transition to preschool.	Promotes young children's development and learning by increasing access to high quality early childhood education and care.	No Evaluation
<i>Inclusive Education Support Program</i>	Supports children with disabilities to attend their local preschool by the provision of grants to employ support staff to assist children to engage in learning. Additional funding is available for children requiring extensive adjustments to their learning programs (between 8 to 15 hours per week).	Inclusion of children with disabilities.	No Evaluation

<i>Additional funding for higher levels of adjustment</i>	Additional funding is available for children requiring extensive adjustments to their learning programs (greater than 8 hours per week)	Inclusion of children with additional needs.	No Evaluation
<i>Inclusive Preschool Programs (IPPs)</i>	Special options programs for preschool children with disability and complex needs to optimise their learning outcomes within a preschool setting. The programs provide families with a preschool education option for their child where the staff have specialised education, knowledge and expertise.	Inclusion of children with disability and complex needs.	No Evaluation
<i>Speech and Language Programs</i>	Provides intensive support for children whose severe, specific language and/or speech impairment is their primary area of need. Provides families with a specialised preschool option for their child that is co-located and integrated into a preschool service.	Inclusion of children with severe, specific language and/or speech impairment.	No Evaluation
<i>Attendance social media campaign – pilot</i>	Social media campaign “Every day missed is a barrier to learning” distributed through video, posters, postcards, flyers and website.	Highlights importance of attending preschool and school every day to families.	Currently being evaluated. limited information may be available in first quarter of 2020

Tasmania	Strategy Focus: Pregnancy to Eight Years Strategy launched in November 2017. The Strategy outlines shared purpose and practices for all Tasmanian service providers that focus on improving the education, health and wellbeing outcomes of children from pregnancy to eight years.		
PROGRAM OR INITIATIVE	DETAILS	KEY DRIVERS	EVALUATION?
<i>Kindergarten</i>	All Tasmanian Children are entitled to access kindergarten services if they are 4 years old on 1 January in any year. They are part of primary schools. https://www.education.tas.gov.au/parents-carers/early-years/kindergarten/ https://greatstart.tas.gov.au/	Positions preschool participation as the norm in schooling.	Has significant longevity and is embedded in Tasmania’s state education system—subject to system level review/ evaluation processes

<p><i>Launching into Learning (LiL)</i></p>	<p>Free program to support the development of children, from birth to 4 years old, and their families.</p> <p>In the most recent public report subsequent outcomes remain the same, that attending LiL makes a difference for all SES cohorts, and the greater the attendance, the greater the outcomes.</p> <p>https://www.education.tas.gov.au/parents-carers/early-years/launching-learning-lil/</p> <p>https://greatstart.tas.gov.au/</p>	<p>Transition into Kindergarten and building connection for families with their local school.</p>	<p>Internal and External Evaluations Completed</p> <p>Launching into Learning Longitudinal Study 2007 – 2014 was released in 2013 focusing on the 2011 cohort.</p> <p>https://publicdocumentcentre.education.tas.gov.au/Documents/Launching-into-Learning-Longitudinal-Study-2007-2014-Report-2013.pdf</p> <p>Also includes broader system level evaluation/ review.</p>
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<i>Child Family Centres</i>	<p>Child and Family Centres (CFCs) are designed for children from birth to age 5, and their families to be supported and access health and wellbeing services. CFCs are based in 12 Communities around Tasmania.</p> <p>https://www.education.tas.gov.au/parents-carers/early-years/child-family-centres/</p> <p>https://greatstart.tas.gov.au/</p>	<p>Access for children and their families to services, particularly those that support improved child outcomes.</p>	<p>Internal and External Evaluations Completed</p> <p>https://www.telethonkids.org.au/projects/tassiekids/</p> <p>Reports for Tassie Kids will be published in 2020.</p> <p>Previous Telethon Kids report on CFCs:</p> <p>https://www.telethonkids.org.au/globalassets/media/documents/brain--behaviour/tas-cfc-evaluation-report-web.pdf</p> <p>Also includes broader system level evaluation/ review.</p>
<i>Working Together – supporting early learning</i>	<p>Provides eligible children experiencing vulnerability and/or disadvantage with access to government-subsidised free early learning places at quality education and care services.</p> <p>https://www.education.tas.gov.au/about-us/projects/working-together/</p>	<p>Increase participation in quality early learning.</p>	<p>External evaluation completed</p> <p>https://publicdocumentcentre.education.tas.gov.au/Documents/WT3-Pilot-Evaluation-Report-Clear-Horizon.pdf</p>

Victoria	Strategy Focus: While there is no current overarching strategy, The Early Childhood Reform Plan outlines the Victorian Government's vision for the early years. This plan will deliver systemic change, targeted at supporting the children who need it most.		
PROGRAM OR INITIATIVE	DETAILS	KEY DRIVERS	EVALUATION?
<i>Koorie Kids Shine</i>	<p>Initiative is aimed at improving the awareness and availability of kindergarten for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.</p> <p>Internal evaluation of the effectiveness of the strategy was undertaken, to inform the next phase of intervention. The evaluation is not publically available.</p>	Increasing participation in kindergarten.	Internal Evaluation Completed
<i>Kindergarten for all Three-Year Old Children</i>	A subsidised kindergarten program for all three year olds so that every child will have access to two years of kindergarten from 2020.	Increasing access to Kindergarten to two years.	No Evaluation
<i>CALD Communications Pilot</i>	A Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communications pilot to increase awareness and participation amongst CALD communities.	Increasing participation to Kindergarten for CALD communities.	No Evaluation
<i>Kindergarten Attendance Pilot</i>	Small project in two local govt. areas that will explore options on how best to capture kindergarten attendance information.	Identifying how to best to capture attendance data to better understand attendance patterns and trends in Kindergarten.	No Evaluation
<i>School Readiness funding</i>	<p>School Readiness Funding assists kindergarten services to access programs and supports, and engage with specialists such as speech pathology and language and literacy experts who can help children and build the capabilities of families and educators.</p> <p>Services are already using School Readiness Funding to improve children's participation. For example, breakfast clubs are reducing barriers to participation for vulnerable families, and trained facilitators are working to engage vulnerable families known to child protection.</p>	Extra support for kindergartens to help children to get the most out of their early learning.	No Evaluation

<i>Kindergarten Fee Subsidy</i>	Funding to promote kindergarten participation by enabling eligible children to attend a funded kindergarten program free of charge. This is paid in addition to per capita funding.	Increase participation and attendance of children from vulnerable families.	No Evaluation
<i>Pre purchased places</i>	The Government purchases and reserves places for children who may otherwise miss out on a kindergarten program through barriers such as enrolling late, moving into new areas, or being cared for out of home. Pre-purchased places come at no cost to families and carers.	Increase enrolment of vulnerable families who would otherwise miss the deadline.	No Evaluation
Western Australia			Strategy Focus: Due to the school-based preschool delivery model in Western Australia, Kindergarten teachers, students and parents have access to the full range of support services and programs available to schools to maximise attendance and address students' learning needs. Supporting children's learning prior to school entry is focused on forging partnerships with families and community-based non-government organisations to deliver an integrated suite of family-centred initiatives.
PROGRAM OR INITIATIVE	DETAILS	KEY DRIVERS	EVALUATION?
<i>Good Start, 1995</i>	Legislated entitlement for all four-year-olds to enrol and attend Kindergarten for free at a public school. State Government commitment pays an average of 75% of the cost of Kindergarten in non-government schools so the cost of Kindergarten is comparable to all other years of schooling (for which the Commonwealth contributes significant funding).	To optimise children's development and learning.	Unknown
<i>Teacher Registration</i>	All teachers in all schools—including in Kindergarten—must be fully qualified and registered teachers.	To optimise the quality of all programs in all WA schools.	Unknown
<i>National Quality Standard in schools, K-2</i>	All public and non-government schools are required to incorporate the National Quality Standard into program planning and improvement across the early years of schooling to Year 2.	To optimise the quality of early childhood programs (K-2) in all WA schools.	External Evaluation Edith Cowan University in 2017

<i>Attendance Tool Kit</i>	An Attendance Tool Kit has been developed for use within the public school system, including Kindergarten.	To improve attendance.	No Evaluation
<i>System-level student attendance policies, procedures, and monitoring systems</i>	<p>Kindergarten is subject to the same mandatory public school attendance monitoring and follow-up requirements stipulated in policies and procedures that apply to all years of schooling.</p> <p>Further, Kindergarten enrolment and attendance records are maintained in the State's public school Student Information System (SIS) and Student Attendance Reporting (SAR) system, along with all other public school students' records. These systems enable schools to easily monitor and act on low or declining Kindergarten attendance, provide for system-level oversight and accountability on schools, and the transfer or records when students move into full-time schooling or change schools (including Kindergarten).</p>	To maximise regular attendance.	No Evaluation
<i>Kimberley Schools Project</i>	<p>A collaborative project involving Western Australia's public and non-government school sectors and the WA Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development working on four integrated areas of innovation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted teaching, especially early literacy and numeracy. • Early years: community co-design initiatives that build on and improve existing services, and engage families as their children's first teachers through KindiLink. • Regular attendance: community partnerships to deliver strategies that aim to resolve issues of non-attendance. • Student and community engagement: co-designed community initiatives that build positive relationships between the school and the community. 	To improve Kimberley students' engagement and learning across Kindergarten to Year 12.	No Evaluation

<i>Remote School Attendance Strategy</i>	<p>This initiative funded under the Australian Government's Indigenous Advancement Strategy is designed to increase school (including Kindergarten) attendance by Aboriginal students. Further information about the strategy is available from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • https://www.niaa.gov.au/indigenous-affairs/education/remote-school-attendance-strategy • https://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/annual_reports/2016-17-HTML/content/remote-school-attendance-strategy.html 	To improve Aboriginal students' participation and attendance.	No Evaluation
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Table 8: Range of Early Childhood (birth to five or six) programs which may encourage participation in preschool in Year Before Full-time Schooling

Australian Capital Territory			
PROGRAM OR INITIATIVE	DETAILS	KEY DRIVERS	EVALUATION?
<i>Support At Preschool (SAP) – service under the Network Student Engagement Team (NSET) ACT Education Directorate</i>	<p>SAP is a service under NSET that works with schools to support the inclusion of children with developmental delay and disability in their preschool year. SAP support is provided to schools where substantial or extensive adjustments are required to support the child in the play-based preschool program.</p> <p>This is a targeted program that supports children with developmental delay and disability rather than a universal offering. Support is provided for a specific period of time rather than on an ongoing basis.</p>	Inclusion of children with developmental delay or disability.	No Evaluation
<i>Prep for Pre Program</i>	<p>Five week program runs across a range of early childhood settings and provides children with experience of what preschool will be like to manage their anxiety and build skills as well as providing support for parents to be effective ‘first teachers’ and engage in their child’s early education. Program provides opportunities for early intervention services to offer supported pathways and developmental assessments for children experiencing vulnerability prior to starting preschool. In 2020 the ACT Government will be expanding the Prep-for-Pre program across a range of early childhood settings.</p>	Ensuring that families have positive experiences when engaging with preschool.	Evaluation Completed
<i>Early years engagement officers</i>	Early Years Engagement Officers to effectively connect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families between Koori Preschools, schools and Child and Family Centres.	Supporting enrolment and attendance in programs at both Koori Preschool & the Child & Family Centres as well strong outcomes and engagement for children and their families.	No Evaluation

<i>Koori Preschool Program</i>	Provides 3-5 year old children with rich, play-based experiences aligned with the Early Years Learning Framework, in a culturally safe environment that includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives across the curriculum. Children under the age of three can attend with a parent or carer.	To develop strong partnerships with families, support parent engagement in children's learning, increase enrolment and attendance, and link families with other programs that strengthen community and cultural connections.	Evaluation Completed https://www.education.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/1098676/Evaluation-Report-Early-Childhood-Schools-and-Koori-Pre-Program.pdf
<i>Child and Family Centre programs (Playgroups)</i>	Playgroups run by Child and Family Centres. Some playgroups specifically cater for groups such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, culturally and linguistically diverse families, parents or carers who have experienced mental health concerns, or people who have experienced family violence.	Connecting families with the community and a range of services they may need.	No Evaluation of ACT specific playgroups but strong evidence base for the effectiveness of playgroups more broadly
<i>Village for Every Child</i>	A collective impact initiative funded by the ACT Government and implemented by Uniting Care Kippax and support partners. The initiative gets key stakeholders in the community to come together with strategic focus and work collaboratively to accomplish a population-wide outcome to a complex social problem.	Working towards every child growing up in Belconnen getting a positive start to life and every parent being empowered, equipped and supported to do their best possible job of parenting.	No Evaluation

New South Wales

PROGRAM OR INITIATIVE	DETAILS	KEY DRIVERS	EVALUATION?
<i>Aboriginal Families as Teachers</i>	Aims to strengthen the ability of Aboriginal families to build a developmentally rich home learning environment, to support children's early learning and participation in a quality early childhood education program.	To support the active participation of Aboriginal families in early childhood education.	External Evaluation Not Publically Available

<i>Start Strong Pathways</i>	Helps support educational engagement of children too young to receive a preschool education, support pathways to preschool and promote the importance of early childhood education to parents and communities.	To increase engagement for children prior to participation in a preschool program.	No Evaluation
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Northern Territory			
PROGRAM OR INITIATIVE	DETAILS	KEY DRIVERS	EVALUATION?
<i>Northern Territory Early Childhood Transitioning Package (NTECT)</i>	Supports collaborative relationships to enable the implementation of sustainable practices and processes that ensure that schools, families and children are ready for school.	To provide a rubric for positive transitions for young children and their families from preschool to school.	Process evaluation planned in 2020
<i>Early Entry to Preschool</i>	Children living in very remote areas can attend preschool from the age of three, provided they are accompanied by a parent/guardian. Children living in very remote communities can enrol in and attend preschool from the age of three years and six months. Preschool is offered free of charge and operates for 15 hours per week.	Provide an additional year of preschool to all children living in very remote Northern Territory communities.	Not located

Queensland			
PROGRAM OR INITIATIVE	DETAILS	KEY DRIVERS	EVALUATION?
<i>Early Years Places</i>	<i>Early Years Places</i> support families with children aged from birth to eight years old to access early childhood education and care, child and maternal health and family and parenting support services. Located in over 50 communities across Queensland.	To support pathways to preschool and promote the importance of early childhood education to parents and communities.	Not located

<i>Connect 4 Children</i>	<p>Through the <i>Connect 4 Children</i> strategy, DoE will partner across community, government and industry in priority locations across Queensland to enact evidence-informed strategies that are reflected in Birth to five plans.</p> <p>Child, family and community perspectives will guide decision-making about early years priorities and next steps in each locality including accessing targeting initiatives to improve the well-being of children in the community.</p> <p>It is anticipated many targeted approaches will support children and families to access kindergarten programs and support transitions from home to early childhood programs and onto school.</p>	<p>Improve well-being in the year before school.</p> <p>Support smooth transitions into kindy and onto schooling.</p>	New program not yet evaluated
<i>Pathways for Early Learning and Development (PELD)</i>	A cross-disciplinary and multi-generational service model designed to improve the learning and development outcomes of children, aged birth to 5 years, living in families who were experiencing vulnerability due to multiple and complex issues.	To support vulnerable children and families by embedding an early childhood learning and development focus within established family support services.	No Evaluation
<i>KindyLinQ</i>	Free 12 month pre-kindergarten learning program for three-year old children to be launched and trialled in 2020 through selected state schools.	Soft entry to Kindy to encourage active participation in play-based learning.	New program to commence in 2020

South Australia			
PROGRAM OR INITIATIVE	DETAILS	KEY DRIVERS	EVALUATION?
<i>Family Day Care</i>	Educators promote preschool in their local community and will often address multiple family/children barriers. Educators also support communication between the preschool and child's parent/carer, and work with support services and multiple agencies involved in the care of the child to ensure consistent preschool attendance.	Offers families affordable, personalised care by a qualified educator in a safe and nurturing home based environment.	No Evaluation

<i>Guardianship Family Day Care (GFDC)</i>	Supports children in temporary short-term care to have access to quality early childhood education and care in a home environment (aligned to the Departments' Family Day Care model).	To keep children in care out of a commercial care venue.	No Evaluation
<i>Children and Family Centres (CFCs)</i>	Four children and family centres have been established in SA providing early childhood programs and services for Aboriginal children from the antenatal phase to eight years of age, and their families. Children and family centres have a strong focus on supporting Aboriginal families with young children and reflect a philosophy of acknowledgement, engagement and inclusion of Aboriginal history, culture and community. Open to all members of the community, services include preschool, occasional care, Learning Together programs, playgroups and a range of parenting and health programs.	Early Years teams work together to ensure culturally responsive programs that support engagement, interactions and quality early childhood education.	No Evaluation
<i>Families as First Teachers</i>	Supported playgroups held in the APY Lands. Anangu Educators support cultural inclusiveness and provide staff who speak Pitjantjatjara.	Encourages families in the APY Lands to engage in early childhood education. Local data indicates that families who attend playgroups and the Children and Family Centres are likely to attend preschool.	No Evaluation
<i>Learning Together and Learning Together at Home</i>	The Learning Together program helps families with children from birth to 4 years of age become more involved in their children's learning. Some locations offer specific activities for younger mothers and Aboriginal families. Learning Together at Home is a home visiting program which supports families and guides parents in helping their children learn and develop through play. Evaluation shows attendance rates at co-learning spaces are high. Positive outcomes re child behaviour and child and parent confidence.	Children who engage in the program are more likely to be enrolled in and attending preschool.	Evaluation Completed University of Newcastle 2007 https://www.education.sa.gov.au/teaching/curriculum-and-teaching/curriculum-early-years/learning-together

<i>Aboriginal Family Literacy Strategy</i>	The program provides an additional teacher allocation to nominated preschools to support Aboriginal 3 year old children and their families to be fully engaged in the preschool program with the aim of improving educational outcomes. An evaluation will be completed in early 2020.	Improving educational outcomes (specifically literacy).	No Evaluation
<i>Preschool age 3</i>	Aboriginal children and children who are or have been in care are entitled to 12 hours per week of government operated preschool services from the age of 3.	Pathways to preschool.	No Evaluation
<i>Children's Centres for Early Childhood Development and Parenting (Children's Centres)</i>	Bring together care, education, health, community development activities and family services for families and their young children. Programs delivered for 0-3 year olds support a natural transition to preschool on the same site.	Pathways to preschool.	Evaluation Completed https://www.education.sa.gov.au/sites/default/files/sa-childrens-centre-evaluation.pdf?acsf_files_redirect
<i>Occasional Care</i>	Provides care for children in communities where there are limited child care options. This program is located on preschool sites which facilitates transition to preschool for families.	Increasing access to preschool.	No Evaluation
<i>Play Centre Program</i>	In rural communities where there are insufficient eligible children to establish or maintain a preschool service, the department can provide support for a children's service in that area through the establishment of a playcentre.	Provision of an early learning and development service in the absence of a preschool.	No Evaluation

Tasmania			
PROGRAM OR INITIATIVE	DETAILS	KEY DRIVERS	EVALUATION?
<i>Aboriginal Early Years Education Workers</i>	Aboriginal Early Years Education Workers are based in Child and Family Centres (CFCs) and work closely with families of Aboriginal children from birth to five years of age to engage in early years initiatives, including Launching into Learning, pre-Kinder and at Child and Family Centres, which enhance their children's learning. https://www.education.tas.gov.au/parents-carers/school-colleges/aboriginal-education-services/	To support the active participation of Aboriginal families in early childhood education.	Subject to system level review/ evaluation processes
<i>B4 Early Years Coalition</i>	The B4 Early Years Coalition connects people and organisations from across the Tasmanian community who are committed to supporting children, pregnancy to 4 years of age and their families. https://b4.education.tas.gov.au/ https://greatstart.tas.gov.au/	For everyone to value support and work together for the early years.	Subject to system level review/ evaluation processes
<i>Learning in Families Together (LIFT)</i>	An initiative that builds confidence and skills in parents and carers in order to support their children's literacy and numeracy learning at home. It encourages collaboration between home, school and the community to help lift learning outcomes for students. https://www.education.tas.gov.au/parents-carers/parent-fact-sheets/learning-families-together-lift/ https://greatstart.tas.gov.au/	Engaging parents and carers in their children's learning at home.	Subject to system level review/ evaluation processes

<i>Libraries Tasmania – including Rock and Rhyme and Storytime</i>	<p>Libraries offer opportunities for family literacy – adults and children learning together – at sites throughout the state. Many Libraries Tasmania sites have regular free 30-minute Rock and Rhyme and Storytime sessions. These sessions provide families with ideas about how to help develop children’s language and literacy at home. Rock and Rhyme is ideal for babies up to two years of age, Storytime is aimed at pre-schoolers aged between two and five years.</p> <p>https://www.libraries.tas.gov.au/courses-events/Pages/kids.aspx</p> <p>https://greatstart.tas.gov.au/</p>	<p>Support families in developing children’s early language and literacy skills.</p>	<p>Subject to system level review/ evaluation processes</p>
<i>Educational Adjustments</i>	<p>Educational Adjustment funding is the Department’s new funding model to provide schools with the appropriate resources to enable them to provide students with disability the educational adjustments needed. This will apply to students who have been moderated by Inclusion and Diversity Services as requiring Supplementary, Substantial or Extensive educational adjustments under the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data for Students with disability.</p> <p>In the new model Kinder students moderated to the new levels of educational adjustment will be included in the Educational Adjustments funding.</p> <p>https://www.education.tas.gov.au/supporting-student-need/educational-adjustments/</p>	<p>Equity and inclusion.</p>	<p>Subject to system level review / evaluation processes</p>

<i>Early Childhood Intervention Service</i>	<p>Early Childhood Intervention Service (ECIS) is a statewide service working in partnership with families of very young children 0-4 years. ECIS maximises the developmental achievements of young children with developmental delays and disabilities; meets the needs of their families for knowledge, skills and support in raising their child; and enhances the capacity of the community to implement positive and effective systems to include young children with disabilities.</p> <p>https://www.education.tas.gov.au/parents-carers/early-years/early-childhood-intervention-service/</p>	Equity and inclusion.	Subject to system level review / evaluation processes
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Victoria			
PROGRAM OR INITIATIVE	DETAILS	KEY DRIVERS	EVALUATION?
<i>Early Start Kindergarten</i>	Funding to support children from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children and families backgrounds and those who have had contact with Child Protection to access kindergarten two years before school. Children must be 3 by 30th of April in the year they will start and the kindergarten program must be delivered by a bachelor qualified teacher.	Access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to early preschool program.	<p>Internal Evaluation Completed in 2017</p> <p>Outcomes informed place based strategies and interventions not publically available.</p>

<i>Access to Early Learning</i>	<p>Access to Early Learning (AEL) is a targeted early intervention program which enables three-year-old children from families with multiple and complex needs to participate in universal education and care.</p> <p>AEL provides an experienced, and degree-qualified facilitator who works with families, educators and services to support a vulnerable child's sustained participation in 15 hours of kindergarten program per week. There are seven sites in Victoria.</p> <p>The intervention uses a strategic focus on children's learning and education and tailored responses to the specific family barriers to participation and outreached in-home learning activities to strengthen parents' capacity to support their children's learning.</p>	<p>Addressing cost alone is insufficient to ensure participation in universal kindergarten programs by children from families with multiple and complex needs.</p> <p>A multi-level and holistic response is required to sustain attendance.</p>	<p>External Evaluation Completed</p> <p>The evaluation of the program by Murdoch Children's Research Institute in 2017 indicated a high and sustained attendance into the year before school by children supported by AEL.</p>
<i>Early Childhood Agreement for Children in Out of Home Care.</i>	<p>The Early Childhood Agreement for children in Out-of-Home Care (the Agreement) was refreshed in 2018 with 11 partners. The Agreement outlines the shared responsibility for the engagement of children in out-of-home care in universal education and care with a focus on participation in funded kindergarten programs, immunisation and health assessments.</p>	<p>Children in out-of-home-care have poorer educational outcomes and miss out on early childhood education.</p>	<p>Internal Evaluation Completed</p>
<i>LOOKOUT Early Childhood Pilot</i>	<p>LOOKOUT Centres were introduced in 2016, to support and monitor the engagement of children in out-of-home care in schools. In 2018/19 the approach was extended into early childhood, with a view to ensuring children access kindergarten. 13 Early Childhood Learning Advisors are placed in areas of high need across. They work closely with Local Government, Child Protection and service providers to ensure children are identified and connected with services.</p>	<p>Children in out-of-home-care have poorer educational outcomes and miss out on early childhood education.</p>	<p>No Evaluation</p>

<i>Local Government, Maternal and Child Health and Playgroups</i>	<p>Local government plays a critical role in kindergarten planning, service provision and infrastructure and promotes participation through central enrolment schemes and as the provider of Maternal and Child Health services.</p> <p>Through the Early Years Compact, the Department works with local government and key partners to address the systemic barriers to identification and enrolment of children experiencing vulnerabilities.</p> <p>Supported playgroups also operate across Victoria and have a critical relationship with Maternal and Child Health services to engage with families and promote early childhood education services including kindergarten.</p> <p>At a local level, collaboration between kindergarten services, Maternal and Child Health services and playgroups works towards increasing awareness of the benefits of a kindergarten program amongst families that may not have otherwise enrolled.</p>	<p>Increase enrolment and participation of families involved in these services that would otherwise not have known about kindergarten.</p>	No Evaluation
<i>Foundation House</i>	<p>The Foundation House Early Years Program works with the Department, Municipal Association of Victoria, Local Government Areas and services to improve the health, development, wellbeing and educational outcomes for children and families from refugee backgrounds.</p> <p>Priorities include building the capacity and skills of educators to understand the impact of trauma and the development of strategies to deliver inclusive services.</p>	<p>Increase kindergarten knowledge and access points to refugee families, which will encourage enrolment.</p>	No Evaluation
<i>Kindergarten Inclusion Support Program</i>	<p>This program provides services with capacity to meet the needs of children with a disability or developmental delay and complex medical needs, maximising inclusion and participation in quality funded kindergarten programs. Support can include staff training, additional staffing, access to specialist expertise and minor building modifications.</p>	<p>Increase participation and attendance of disabled or developmentally delayed children.</p>	No Evaluation

<i>Pre-school Field Officer Program</i>	This program provides consultancy services through experienced early childhood educators to funded kindergarten program staff to support the access and participation of children with additional needs in inclusive kindergarten programs.	Increase the enrolling and attendance of children with additional needs to kindergarten programs.	No Evaluation
<i>Early Years Compact with local Government and Department of Health and Human Services Victoria (DHHS)</i>	The Compact is a ten-year agreement between the Department, DHHS and local government aimed to support children and families in the early years. The Compact includes measurable objectives linked to the Government's broader reform agenda for young children and families, and strengthens the collaborative relationship between the three partners in planning, development and provision of early years' services.	Increase participation and attendance with families involved in said Government agencies.	No Evaluation

Western Australia

PROGRAM OR INITIATIVE	DETAILS	KEY DRIVERS	EVALUATION?
<i>KindiLink</i>	A play and learn initiative for three-year-old Aboriginal children in the year before they start full-time schooling. Offers high quality play-and-learn sessions for children and their parent/carer at participating schools, at no cost to families.	To improve long-term school attendance and home-school relationships.	Evaluation Completed 2018 by Edith Cowan University https://www.education.wa.edu.au/dl/7lpmn3

<i>Enhanced Transition to School project</i>	A partnership with Playgroup WA and the public, Catholic and non-government school sectors to increase the number of community-based, parent-run playgroups that have links with schools, including (in many cases) using school sites as their venue. These initiatives adopt a 'two-generational' approach to empower families, forge home-school links and build local networks to optimise children's learning.	Home-school relationships, children's transition to school collaboration with community, connectedness, early identification of issues.	Influenced by: Gregory, T., Sincovich et al (2017). The reach of Playgroups across Australia and their benefits for children's development: A comparison of 2012 and 2015 AEDC data. Telethon Kids Institute, SA. https://playgroupaustralia.org.au/resource/impact-of-playgroup-on-child-development/
<i>Child and Parent Centres</i>	Centres provide a range of easily accessible programs and services for families, including early learning programs, maternal and child health services, and child support activities. Families can visit the child health nurse at the centre and there may be speech pathologists, physiotherapists and other health professionals.	Access to services for children and families.	External Evaluation Completed: https://www.education.wa.edu.au/dl/ejzg3o

PART 4: KEY FINDINGS

WHAT WORKS? WHAT MAKES A DIFFERENCE?

Research has identified a range of best practice approaches for engaging and retaining vulnerable families in early childhood education and care. These include:

- Strengths based approaches
 - Solution focused approaches
 - Family centred practice
 - Culturally responsive and culturally safe delivery
 - Relationship based practice
 - Accessible and family-friendly environments.
- (O'Connell et al 2016).

Research with disadvantaged families (Grace et al, 2014) points to the importance of relationships as a key facilitator to engagement, noting that this applies to the relationships of both children and parents with early childhood centre staff.

This is further emphasised by a meta-analysis (Boag-Munroe & Evangelou, 2012), which noted that "one message above all stands out: services need to build relationships of trust with families and with each other" (p. 234). In this context, they suggest that services may need to address their staff gender mix, interactive style and 'principles of trust, authority and negotiation' (citing Katz et al 2007).

Part 1 of this report noted the importance of safety, including cultural safety, in shaping a parent or carer's decision to engage with a preschool. AIHW (2015) identifies that there is an increased uptake of early learning programs by Indigenous families when in a context of community partnerships, culturally relevant practices that value local Indigenous knowledge and appropriate teacher training. Similarly, Early Childhood Australia (2017) emphasises that literature shows the importance of early childhood services that are culturally affirming and which build a positive cultural identity and improve outcomes (citing Kitson & Bowes, 2010; SNAICC, 2004; and Trudgett & Grace, 2011).

Grace et al (2014) identified that co-location and integrated service provision are an important facilitator for disadvantaged families. Katz et al (2007 cited in Boag-Munroe & Evangelou, 2012) similarly draw attention to the importance of the premises and what they say about the service, service culture, how parents are consulted and targeted and how services are coordinated.

Boag-Munroe & Evangelou (2012) reinforce the need for services to be alert to the complexity of reasons why families are not engaging and take responsibility for reaching out to them in innovative ways, using new technologies where appropriate.

AIHW (2015) also notes that disadvantaged children benefit particularly from high quality preschool provision and benefit more in socially mixed groups.

CHALLENGES TO UNDERSTANDING CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION AND WHAT WORKS

There are a range of challenges as noted earlier in this report, with the current measure and collection of attendance data, with some work underway to address this. The current ABS preschool data Collection is predicated on the child attending preschool for one hour during the annual census week, so long as the program is delivered for at least 600 hours per year. This is a limited measure and does not accurately reflect whether a child is attending preschool enough to truly benefit. Attendance data in preschool is often patchy and open to multiple interpretations, so it is not always clear how many children are attending or for how long.

Further, as noted in Part 3 of this report, there are a wide range of initiatives for preschool children. However, as Tables 7 and 8 show, many of these initiatives have not been evaluated and program evaluations are not always undertaken systematically and rigorously, or shared broadly (Pascoe & Brennan, 2017). There is no overarching evaluation framework and no systematic sharing of good practice, such as jurisdictions and services

sharing their knowledge about what does and does not work. In combination this limits the impact that preschool programs can have with children, particularly those who are more vulnerable.

CONCLUSION

There is strong Australian and international evidence on the benefits of participation in quality early childhood education and care, particularly in the year before school. There is also a range of evidence that indicates that vulnerable children in particular benefit from participation, especially when it is of a duration of two years or more.

Over the last decade or so there has been a significant increase in the enrolment of children in preschool in Australia, particularly in the year before full-time school. This includes for many vulnerable groups of children, such as those from low socioeconomic backgrounds and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

However, attendance rates at the level of 600 hours or more a year, remain a challenge for significant proportions of all groups of children, particularly those from vulnerable backgrounds.

The absence of an overarching, consistent evaluation framework means that information about current initiatives and their evaluations is not strategically used to foster innovation and the development of evidence based policy. This may be driven in part by the complexity of the Australian

preschool context, but nevertheless represents a significant missed opportunity as it currently does not appear to be possible to clearly define what works for whom in what circumstances.

The Project recommends:

That jurisdictions work together to strengthen data on preschool participation to provide better insight into which children are missing out, and to support policy makers better target programs within the universal offering to those children who stand to gain the most from preschool.

That jurisdictions consider developing an evaluation framework to ensure that promising practice and evidence is shared quickly to support improvements in preschool policy and support programs.

There has been some research with vulnerable families to better understand their barriers to participation and what might support them to participate at higher levels. Some of this research importantly highlights the need to rethink how the motivations of 'hard to reach' families are interpreted. However, Australian research with families from disadvantaged backgrounds is limited and the consultations with families and their communities which form the core part of this Project, will allow us to hear firsthand the barriers that they face in engaging with preschool and significantly contribute to this understanding.

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