



Children First Alliance

2019 Policy Statement: Summary

Early Childhood Education and Care can make a difference

- All children should have the best start in life.
- The early years are critical for children because during these years children experience the most rapid period of growth and change across the human lifespan.¹
- Quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) contributes to the development of lifelong skills, resilience and well-being that can immunise against future disadvantage and harm.
- For children experiencing disadvantage, these benefits are even more profound.
- However, we know that children experiencing disadvantage are less likely to attend ECEC.
- One in five ACT children are developmentally vulnerable when entering school.² This is concerning because children who enter school developmentally vulnerable often fail to catch up, with 10 per cent remaining behind through middle school years.³
- The ACT Government has acknowledged the importance of ECEC through their commitment to the development of the *ACT Early Childhood Strategy (Strategy)* and to introduce universal access to ECEC for three-year-old children.
- The Alliance has identified four priorities for ECEC to work collaboratively with the ACT Government to ensure all children have the best start in life.

Priority areas and recommendations

1. Support children and families experiencing disadvantage to access and engage in ECEC.

- Establish a framework and process that enables strong working relationships between the Community Services, Health and Education Directorates to ensure that there is continuity of services for children who access Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) and require other supports.
- Support wrap around services for children in ECEC who have complex needs, that allows flexibility to provide the range of services that children may require to keep them healthy, safe and well.
- Fund Liaison Officer Positions within the community sector to work alongside and within Early learning Centres (ELCs) to act as a point of contact between ELCs, community and health services

¹ Van Leer, B. (2006). *A Guide to General Comment 7: 'Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood'*. UNICEF: United Nations.

² ACT Labor (2016) ACT Labor's Education Platform: *Making Canberra's education system even better*

³ Lamb, S, Jackson, J, Walstab, A & Huo, S (2015). *Educational opportunity in Australia 2015: Who succeeds and who misses out*. Centre for International Research on Education Systems, Victoria University, for the Mitchell Institute, Melbourne: Mitchell Institute.

across the Government and for purpose sectors to ensure continuity of education and care for children.

- Work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities to improve access for ECEC for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
- Work with the Australian Government to improve the processes used by the Inclusion Support Programme (ISP) to ensure that children who require additional assistance to engage in ECEC and Out of School Hours Care (OSHC) have timely access to the funding and supports.

2. Work with the Australian Government to provide ongoing universal access to ECEC for three and four-year-old children.

- Work with the Australian Government to establish a permanent and ongoing commitment for access to 15 hours of preschool per week for four-year-old children.
- Work towards the introduction of universal access to Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) for three-year-old children as committed to in July 2018 and ensure that adequate support and services are available for children experiencing disadvantage.
- Adopt the principles identified by the Children First Alliance in introducing universal access of ECEC for three-year-old children. These principles are:
 - Prioritise children experiencing disadvantage;
 - Grow, develop and value the ECEC workforce; and
 - Focus on quality.

3. Value and invest in the ECEC workforce to ensure high quality education for children.

- Support the development of a new national Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) workforce strategy to support the recruitment, retention, sustainability and enhanced professionalisation of the workforce, thereby improving service quality and children's outcomes.
- Ensure that the focus on 'workforce and qualifications' in the *ACT Early Childhood Strategy* includes funding to support professional development opportunities across the ECEC workforce and backfilling to allow educators to be away from work to engage in these opportunities.
- Work to address the difference in pay and conditions for ECTs and Educators working in the ECEC sector.
- Provide registration under the Teacher Quality Institute (TQI) for ECTs working in ELCs in the ACT.

4. Ensure that planning processes support the development of a strong ECEC sector.

- As occurs with ACT schools, introduce a need, viability and proximity assessment for new ELCs in the ACT that considers:
 - The need for the centre as determined by the existing demand for services and consideration of current and projected population changes and growth.
 - The proximity of the centre to other existing centres.
 - The impact of the centre on the viability of existing centres, including their capacity to ensure that centres are able to be staffed by qualified ECEC educators and teachers.

About the Alliance

The ACT Children First Alliance (the Alliance) is a network of longstanding for purpose providers of children's service in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), including early learning centres (ELCs), family day care, preschool and outside school hours care.

There is a significant body of research that demonstrates the importance of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) on a child's social, emotional, educational and economic wellbeing across the lifespan. Despite this, more than one in five ACT children were developmentally vulnerable when entering school. The Alliance was established to develop and communicate a shared vision for ECEC in the ACT and to ensure that all children have access to ECEC.

The nine community ECEC providers that make up this Alliance operate 43 ELCs. Together these ELCs provide 3,491 places to children. The Alliance has nine Founding Members:

- Anglicare NSW South, NSW West & ACT
- Belconnen Community Service
- Communities@Work
- Community Services #1
- Goodstart Early Learning ACT
- MOCCA
- Woden Community Service
- YMCA Canberra
- YWCA Canberra

A copy of the 2019 Policy Statement is available at www.childrenfirstalliance.org