

# **Set up for success: An early childhood strategy for the ACT**

**Goodstart Early Learning Submission  
June 2022**

## INTRODUCTION

Goodstart Early Learning (Goodstart) is a not-for-profit social enterprise and is the largest provider of early childhood education and care in the nation with more than 660 centres located across every state and territory, including 7 in the Australian Capital Territory.

Our purpose is to ensure all Australia's children have the learning, development and wellbeing outcomes they need for school and life. All children should be supported to participate in quality early learning and care, regardless of where they live in Australia, their family circumstances, their inclusion support needs, or their early learning setting. Our purpose means we work in partnership with the sector, Governments, and the community to improve outcomes for all children – not just the children who attend a Goodstart service.

We welcome the ACT Government's commitment to early childhood education and care and the opportunity to participate in the *Set up for Success* consultation process. We would also support the ACT Government in ensuring the voices and perspectives of First Nations children, families and educators are heard and reflected in the Government's deliberations and strategy. Our submission responds to each of the three information papers with insights and evidence from our unique perspective as the nation's largest provider of ECEC and the second largest provider of preschool programs behind the Western Australian Government.

In relation to the significant preschool reform agenda, we have been impressed by the early success of the *Quality early childhood education for three-year-olds* initiative and the commitment by the ACT Government to offer two years of preschool to children at risk. We believe this provides a solid foundation to build on with opportunities to expand the eligibility requirements for this program to provide a broader group vulnerable children and First Nations children access to free, high-quality preschool programs in our centres in the two years before school.

However, Goodstart does not support the proposed approach for distributing the Commonwealth's funding to sectors rather than services. Instead, we think the Directorate should pass the per child funding onto the services that children are attending so those children can directly benefit from this investment - as intended by the Australian Government. We are extremely concerned that the proposed approach will mean that many children in the ACT will continue to miss out on the significant funding that they are entitled to, and further that this will not deliver on the intent of the Preschool Reform Agreement.

Urgent action is also required on the workforce crisis affecting ECEC, and both levels of Government must address wages and the pipeline of ECTs using the levers available in the short-term as part of the sector Workforce Strategy, while longer term structural reforms are pursued.

Finally, in relation to the proposed recognition of early childhood in the *Education Act 2004*, Goodstart strongly supports the Directorate's position that early childhood education and care has a central role in the realisation of the rights of the child and therefore should be universally available on an equity basis. We support and have implemented a proactive approach to enrolment, attendance and participation across our network that is focussed on inclusion, and the wrap-around supports a child or family may need to meaningfully participate. We are a sector leader in this regard, with considerable investment in our social purpose and systems in place at the enterprise and centre levels to identify and support children at risk of missing out and analyse trends from our unique dataset. We would be pleased to share our experiences and would welcome the opportunity to meet with the Directorate and/or arrange visits to our services to showcase high quality and inclusive early learning and care in action.

## Recommendations

1. Adjust the proposed approach and instead ensure that the Commonwealth's \$1340 per child funding is passed on to benefit each child in the service they are attending, with funding allocated to the delivery of the preschool program and/or to reduce out-of-pocket costs for families. Our preference would be for a model like South Australia, Queensland, Victoria and New South Wales where per capita base subsidies contribute to the cost of delivering a high-quality program, including resources and support for the early childhood teacher and a component of targeted fee-relief for families.

2. Building on the early success of the *Quality early childhood education for three-year-olds* initiative, expand the eligibility criteria for this program to provide free preschool to all First Nations children and children experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage in the two years before school.
3. The final ACT workforce strategy should include:
  - a) Commitment to continuing free VET courses for Cert III and Diploma qualified Educators
  - b) Accelerated degree programs for diploma qualified educators, modelled on the Victorian program that directs funding to time off the floor to complete practicum teaching requirements and provides support and mentoring for students throughout their course
  - c) The development of professional standards that are relevant to early childhood settings and support early childhood teachers in the ECEC sector in the ACT to be recognised and registered as teachers, noting this is also a high priority under the National ECEC Strategy.

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**IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO DISCUSS ANY PART OF THIS SUBMISSION IN FURTHER DETAIL, PLEASE CONTACT:**

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# SUBMISSION

## 1. Preschool reform

### ***LDC services play a vital role in delivering preschool in the ACT***

In signing the National Preschool Reform Agreement in December 2021, the ACT Government commenced long-awaited reform to improve access and participation in free or low-cost preschool programs and target increased support to children experiencing disadvantage in the year before school. We applaud this commitment and urge the Government to consider it as a foundation to build on for all three- and four-year-olds.

With many families preferring long day care-based preschool for the age-appropriate environment it offers to children and the flexibility it provides to working families, the long day care sector plays a vital role in delivering preschool programs in the ACT. According to the latest data, 37% of children in the ACT rely exclusively on the LDC sector for preschool in the year-before-school, while 36% rely on school-based preschool and 26% attend both settings.<sup>1</sup>

This is consistent with Goodstart's own data which shows 99% of children attending our preschool programs attend for 2 or more days in the ACT, meaning that we deliver a full 'dose' of preschool to our children, even where they may also be attending a school-based program. Our services are also highly inclusive, with almost 40% of our preschool children defined as vulnerable and disadvantaged and 3.2% Indigenous. For these reasons, it is important that the ACT Government's investments in preschool ensure that LDC preschool services are high quality and affordable.

### ***'Funding to follow the child' needs to reach every child***

*Information paper references: How can we support participation/attendance in preschool programs across the ACT, particularly for families experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage?*

The new requirement for funding to follow the child should deliver improvements in the ACT and mean that from 2023, families that choose an LDC service for their child's preschool program will benefit from their allocated Commonwealth preschool funding of approximately \$1340 per child. This funding should be used to improve the quality of the preschool program through quality improvements, better educational resources; resourcing incursions and excursions; supporting the Early Childhood Teacher; and potentially reducing out-of-pocket costs for families. This would equate to approximately \$3.7 million per annum to support children that currently access their preschool program in LDC services (based on existing enrolment patterns).

However, Goodstart is extremely concerned that the ACT Government's proposal to allocate funding to 'sectors' rather than actual services will not benefit every child as intended under the PRA. This proposal would do nothing to address cost barriers for families and there is no way to ensure that this funding can be distributed equitably to benefit each child with the potential for educators in relatively affluent services to receive a disproportionate amount of funding. Additionally, as the Information Papers acknowledged and experience in other jurisdictions has shown over time, programs such as these are often under-utilised, with funding carried across years or not spent at all. It is therefore highly probable that this approach would mean many children do not benefit at all from the Commonwealth's investment, and much needed funding is forfeited under the Preschool Reform Agreement.

This is a threshold issue for Goodstart, and we urge the Government to instead look towards the funding models and guidelines adopted in Victoria, South Australia and Queensland (and the new model under development in NSW) that will ensure the full amount of per child funding is passed onto the services where children are attending. Ideally, this funding could then be directed towards investing in improving program quality with additional fee relief for families that need it. The spending rules in South Australia and Victoria already support this approach with Queensland and New South Wales currently considering their spending guidelines for 2023.

For example, the Queensland Kindergarten Funding Scheme provides funding to services which can be allocated for quality initiatives such as above award wages and conditions, additional non-programming time,

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). (2022a). [Preschool Education, Australia](#).

professional development, additional resources, and activities present in high quality preschool programs like incursions and excursions. Services are audited regularly to ensure funding guidelines are complied with and families can see and experience the benefits of this investment. The scheme also provides additional fee subsidies for families on equity grounds effectively rendering kindergarten free for over 8000 families using long day care.<sup>2</sup>

As a national provider, Goodstart has relevant experience working across jurisdictions and would be pleased to work with the ACT Education Directorate and other stakeholders towards developing effective funding guidelines that will appropriately safeguard Territory and Commonwealth investments and ensure these provide maximum benefit to children in the ACT.

**Recommendation 1** – Adjust the proposed approach and instead ensure that the Commonwealth’s \$1340 per child funding is passed on to benefit each child in the service they are attending, with funding allocated to the delivery of the preschool program and/or to reduce out-of-pocket costs for families. Our preference would be for a model like South Australia, Queensland, Victoria and New South Wales where per capita base subsidies contribute to the cost of delivering a high-quality program, including resources and support for the early childhood teacher and a component of targeted fee-relief for families.

### **Children experiencing vulnerability require additional investment to reduce out-of-pocket expenses and provide wrap around supports**

*Information paper references: Ways funding could be used to support delivery of quality preschool programs in non-government early childhood education settings; How could the funding to non-government early childhood education settings under Funding Follows the child be used to enhance quality in the sector?”*

Children facing vulnerability or disadvantage benefit most from access to early learning but are the least likely to attend. Cost, transport, inability to navigate Government bureaucracy and other social and cultural issues can all be barriers.

Government needs to invest more to support vulnerable and disadvantaged children to participate in early learning, particularly to reduce out-of-pocket costs for low-income working families with irregular working hours (such as those working in retail, hospitality, and many care sectors) and who need the flexibility that LDC provides to support their work patterns. This has been achieved in other states through the provision of targeted subsidies that aim to remove cost barriers for families choosing LDC for their preschool experience and through the expansion of programs combining outreach and wrap around support for vulnerable children and families. This approach has proven both efficient and effective in other jurisdictions.

These measures are particularly warranted when considering that families in Canberra pay more for early childhood education and care than anywhere else in the country and almost 40% of Goodstart’s ACT preschool enrolments are defined as vulnerable and disadvantaged.<sup>3</sup> Fortunately, the ACT and all other states and territories can leverage the incoming Labor Government’s commitment to increase the maximum rate of CCS from 85% to 90% from 2023 and target subsidies to cover the remaining out-of-pocket fees for vulnerable children and families. South Australia, Victoria, Queensland and New South Wales already provide targeted subsidies to deliver free or low-cost preschool for vulnerable and disadvantaged and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children – noting some particularly marginalised families consider LDC based preschool as a preferable setting to schools for a range of reasons including the perception that LDC is more nurturing and child-friendly, and previous negative experiences that parents and family members have had with the formal schooling system.

Three-year-old preschool programs have also been found to be effective pathways to ensuring that children participate in at least 600 hours of preschool at aged four. There is therefore significant opportunity to build on the early success of the ACT’s *Quality early childhood education for three-year-olds* initiative by expanding eligibility requirements to include not just those children who are referred by services, but all children from low income and jobless households, children with disability, refugee and visa holders, and all

<sup>2</sup> See <https://earlychildhood.qld.gov.au/funding-and-support/grants-tenders-and-funding/QKFS>

<sup>3</sup> Goodstart definitions align with the Report on Government Services and provide that Children in Vulnerable Circumstances belong to at least one of these five risk groups: Child at risk of abuse or neglect, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin, Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD), low SES, and/or diagnosed condition or disability. Each of these children is easily identified using existing markers collected in long day care providers Child Care Management Systems (CCMS).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. In addition, where families prefer to stay in an LDC preschool program for the year before school, this program should be expanded to cover four-year-olds.

Goodstart has also found that families experiencing complex disadvantage and vulnerability sometimes need help to overcome barriers to accessing the ECEC system. While cost is a barrier, navigating bureaucratic processes and building trust and confidence with services can also be substantial barriers. The Increasing Access and Participation (IAP) program was introduced at Goodstart to help highly vulnerable children – and their caregivers to navigate and access the ECEC system. Under the IAP a Family and Community Engagement Worker supports children and families experiencing vulnerability with enrolment into our centres, including outreach to assist families to navigate barriers to enrolment, advocating for the benefits of early learning and care, registering for childcare subsidies with Centrelink, and by providing a dedicated liaison person to work with local services and government agencies. The IAP is now in place in South Australia, Victoria and Queensland and could be adapted to suit the ACT context.

**Recommendation 2** – Building on the early success of the Quality early childhood education for three-year-olds initiative, expand the eligibility criteria for this program to provide free preschool to all First Nations children and children experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage in the two years before school.

### ***Existing Commonwealth data should be used to track attendance and better target funding to vulnerable children and families***

Goodstart agrees with the Information Paper on limitations to the application of SEIFA data. In our experience, SEIFA data is most valuable where it is used to direct funding at a service level and not at a family level because the SEIFA bands will always mask higher and lower income households.

A far more accurate way of targeting support for children and families could be achieved using household income information which is reflected in the rate of childcare subsidy that a family receives.

All services have access to this information and would be able to assist the Directorate to identify and target support to children and families that need it most. For example, support could be targeted where:

- A child is eligible for the maximum CCS rate of 85/90%<sup>4</sup> - because these children are in households on \$70,015 or less.
- A child is only eligible for 24hrs of CCS a fortnight – these children are in low-income households where at least one parent does not meet the CCS activity test

The Child Care Management Systems (CCMS) required to deliver the CCS also collects accurate child level data about the number of actual hours attended which should be used by the Commonwealth and states and territories in assessing whether each jurisdiction meets the attendance targets that will be established under the PRA.

### ***Some children are likely to benefit from a higher dose of preschool***

In many cases, children who are developmentally vulnerable or who are experiencing other forms of disadvantage are likely to benefit from a higher dose of high-quality preschool. The evidence supports both an additional year, now provided for children at risk via the *Quality early childhood education for three-year-olds* initiative and increasing the days of entitlement each week from the current 15 hours.

Goodstart strongly supports a minimum dose of three days a week for vulnerable and disadvantaged children. Providing an entitlement to three or more days also means these children are more likely to receive the minimum dose of 600 hours required under the Preschool Reform Agreement.

In relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in services, Goodstart is also supportive of increasing the minimum entitlement to services that are high-quality, culturally safe, and inclusive.

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<sup>4</sup> The rate will increase from 85% to 90% in 2023 under the incoming Labor Government.

## ***A discussion paper on the preschool outcomes measure paper should be released for sector feedback***

Goodstart supports the introduction of nationally consistent outcomes measurement in preschool and notes that to meet the timeframes under the Preschool Reform Agreement, it is important that Government releases a discussion paper to the sector for considered feedback. We would encourage the ACT Government to lobby the Australian Government to release the work conducted by the former Ministers' Preschool Outcomes Expert Advisory Group for consultation.

We agree the final measurement tool(s) should be child-focussed and easily administered by ECTs. Additionally, the final instrument should take account of:

- existing frameworks and practices in ECEC
- child and family characteristics including family income
- the quality of program experienced by the children (not only the service level quality, including where preschool is delivered by an LDC)
- where a child is attending two or more preschool services with regard to which setting they attend most (e.g., school-based and LDC-based preschool.)
- the total hours attended, noting many children attend more than 2 days a week, with the average across our network being closer to 3 days. Over time this data could then be used to develop Australian evidence on the ideal dose for different cohorts of children

Goodstart takes a holistic approach to assessing children's progress which includes a strong focus on using the planning cycle, summative and formative assessments and critical reflection to plan for children's learning and progression. We know that each child learns and develops at a rate that is unique to them. Educators and teachers can be more responsive when they have a deeper understanding of a child's strengths, interests and development.

We have been implementing the Early Years Toolbox within our centres for children aged from 3 years. The Toolbox is a series of iPad-based apps and are child level assessment tools to support us to meet our purpose of improving children's learning outcomes - particularly in the areas that evidence tells us makes the most difference for children: Language and communication, and Numeracy. Toolbox is just one tool we use to assess children's learning and development at a point in time. It is summative assessment that allows us to consider children's development at their chronological age and informs educators as to whether the child is developing as expected – at Goodstart we use this information alongside other observations and assessments to inform our plan and program for children.

## **2. Workforce priorities**

Goodstart supports the aim of the ACT ECEC Workforce Strategy to raise the profile of the education and care workforce, valuing the work of educators, and supporting increased professional recognition. The ECEC sector has long struggled to attract and hold educators and teachers given the unique characteristics of the ACT labour market offering many opportunities for higher wages. In the first four months of 2022, the ECEC sector in the ACT lodged an average of 118 new vacancies for educators per month, compared to an average of 64 new vacancies per months in the first four months of 2020. Average monthly vacancies for early childhood teachers also rose from 32.5 in 2020 to 36.5 in 2022.<sup>5</sup>

The COVID pandemic has made what was a challenging situation for the ECEC workforce in the ACT considerably worse, with attrition rates noticeably higher in our centres. Goodstart teachers in educators are paid well above award rates. But our current funding levels do not allow us to match the wages and conditions paid to teachers and educators in ACT schools. This needs to be addressed, and needs to be a shared priority between the Commonwealth and the Territory Governments as they develop and implement their early childhood workforce strategies.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://labourmarketinsights.gov.au/our-research/internet-vacancy-index/>

Goodstart is committed to working with all levels of government to address the workforce crisis, **Appendix 1** provides further information about how this can occur. Actions that should be prioritised in the final ACT Strategy include:

### ***Addressing Wages and conditions***

Addressing work pay and conditions requires urgent action by both levels of government and cannot afford to be delayed via lengthy investigation activity under the National Workforce Strategy. It is important that the ACT Government considers and acts on the levers available to it as a matter of priority.

LDCs play a critical role in delivering preschool programs, led by degree-qualified early childhood teachers (ECTs). Continuity of teaching should be seen as crucial to maintaining the quality of preschool programs and is currently an ongoing challenge in our sector. As the Information Paper acknowledges, it is extremely difficult for long day care centres to match the salary and conditions offered in government preschools and in schools. Currently, 5.2% of long day care centres have staffing waivers in place, mostly because they don't meet the ECT requirements of the National Quality Framework. Attracting and retaining ECTs in long day care centres will be essential in meeting the benchmarks established by the National Preschool Reform Agreement.

In 2016, the Victorian Government committed to ensuring wage equity for teachers working in public schools and in large parts of the not-for-profit sector, and increased funding accordingly. We would encourage the ACT Government to commit to doing likewise, at the very least in preschool programs for three and four year olds. This would help ensure that children are more likely to receive the benefit of continuity of learning in teacher-led preschool program regardless of setting. Investing in early childhood teachers must be seen as a crucial element of funding the delivery of preschool programs in long day care centres. The acute shortage of qualified teachers and educators is not just happening in the long day sector, but it will impact on the ability of centres being able to provide places for families when they want it and on the ability for the ACT to meet the targets set under the Preschool Reform Agreement.

Direct subsidies could be used in the ACT to establish wage parity between ECT rates in LDCs and schools. These have been successful in other jurisdictions. A retention bonus of \$5,000 could also be provided to ECTs delivering preschool programs for three- to five-year-olds in LDCs if they work for their employer for the full 40 weeks of the school year.

### ***Increasing the pipeline of VET-qualified educators***

Goodstart would encourage the ACT Government to continue to support free TAFE courses in ECEC at both the Certificate III and Diploma levels. Given the workforce shortages in the sector, cost should not be a barrier of entry into ECEC courses.

### ***Increasing the pipeline of early childhood teachers***

Delivering high quality preschool programs in the ACT will require investments to increase the pipeline of ECTs choosing careers in early childhood education and care services. There are four key pathways this can be achieved:

1. Increasing the number of school leavers enrolling in early childhood teaching courses by promoting careers in the sector.
2. Increasing the number of overseas teachers entering Australia by actively promoting careers in offshore markets.
3. Increasing the number of Diploma-qualified educators upskilling to become early childhood teachers.
4. Encouraging early childhood teachers to stay in the sector or return to the sector.

An effective workforce strategy needs to work on all four pathways.

In a Territory strategy, Goodstart would argue that upskilling Diploma-qualified educators to upgrade to teaching qualifications is one of the most effective tools available to rapidly expand the pipeline of ECTs. The Victorian Government is leading the way by partnering with universities to develop accelerated early childhood (0-5) degrees that provide recognition of the previous qualifications and experience of Diploma-qualified educators, direct funding to time off the floor to complete practicum teaching requirements and



provide support and mentoring for students throughout their course.<sup>6</sup> The demand from educators in Victoria to enrol in these programs has been immense, and we would expect the experience would be similar in the ACT. The University of Canberra does not currently offer a suitable birth to five, three-year course for acceleration, although other universities (e.g., New England, Southern Queensland, Deakin) offer courses online that are recognised by ACECQA.

### ***Professional standards of teachers and educators***

Goodstart supports investment to raise the professional capability of early childhood teachers and educators through mentoring programs, professional development and networking opportunities.

We also support developing the ability for early childhood teachers in the ECEC sector in the ACT to be recognised and registered as teachers, noting this is a high priority under the National ECEC Strategy (action FA1-2). We believe that New South Wales and Victoria provide effective models for teacher registration that could pick up the following principles:

- Registration should be based on completion of an early childhood teaching qualification recognised by ACECQA, including specialty birth to five degrees of either three or four years duration
- Completion of a birth to five degree would result in an age 'restriction' on registration, that is, the teacher would be qualified to teach in early childhood settings but not in schools
- Professional standards that are relevant to early childhood settings
- Mentoring and supervision arrangements would need to be developed and funded to support graduate teachers moving to proficient registration
- Registration should be nationally consistent to support the Automatic Mutual Recognition deregulation imitative objectives
- Registration should be initially voluntary, but we are open to a discussion about moving to mandatory registration in the longer term

Goodstart does not support moving to a professional registration system for Diploma and Certificate qualified educators at this stage. We note that this is a medium-term priority under the National ECEC Workforce Strategy (action FA1-6), and that considerable research and consultation across the sector would need to be undertaken first to establish such a process. This needs to be a national effort leading to nationally consistent standards, and we would encourage the ACT Government to work within the national strategy with other jurisdictions to progress this work.

**Recommendation** – The final ACT workforce strategy should include:

- a) A commitment to ensure the availability of free VET courses for Cert III and Diploma qualified Educators
- b) A new fully funded, accelerated degree program for diploma qualified educators, modelled on the Victorian program that provides funding to time off the floor to complete practicum teaching requirements and provides support and mentoring for students throughout their course
- c) The development of professional standards that are relevant to early childhood settings and support early childhood teachers in the ECEC sector in the ACT to be recognised and registered as teachers, noting this is also a high priority under the National ECEC Strategy

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.vic.gov.au/innovative-early-childhood-teaching-courses>

### 3. Recognising early childhood in ACT law

Goodstart strongly supports the Directorate's position that early childhood education and care has a central role in the realisation of the rights of the child and therefore should be universally available on an equity basis. Building from the principles and commitments under the *Mparntwe (Alice Springs) Education Declaration*, recognition of pre-primary education in the *Education Act 2004*, should therefore:

- acknowledge that education begins from birth and that preschool sits within a broader ecosystem made up of the family, community and early childhood services;
- enshrine the needs and particular rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to access high-quality, culturally safe and appropriate early childhood and preschool services;
- provide all children access to high-quality preschool programs in the two years before school;
- acknowledge and provide for the delivery of preschool across multiple settings including non-government long-day-care services and Aboriginal preschools;
- reflect that children experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage may require more preschool and wrap-around supports proportionate to their needs to participate meaningfully and reap the benefits of early childhood education; and
- allow for data sharing and transition planning to occur between preschools and primary schools, regardless of the setting where a child attends preschool.

Goodstart is also supportive of the Directorate's proposal to adopt a proactive approach to enrolment, attendance and participation, and notes this will look different for children under compulsory school age where the focus should be on inclusion, and the wrap-around supports a child or family may need to enable meaningful participation. Goodstart is a sector leader in this regard, with considerable investment in inclusion programs and systems in place at the enterprise and centre levels to identify and support children at risk of missing out. More information on Goodstart's pro-active approach to inclusion and participation is included at **Appendix 2**.

## Appendix 1 – ECEC workforce recommendations for the Australian government

**The problem:** The shortage of qualified early childhood educators and early childhood teachers is worsening each month, limiting the capacity of early learning and care services to enrol children. While the shortage has been exacerbated by COVID-19 (particularly the Omicron wave), it will not subside when the pandemic fades. The sector therefore requires targeted intervention by government to build supply in the shortest possible timeframe, with action to begin in 2022. We recommend that the Australian Government adopt the following policy measures, which are listed in order of priority:

### 1. Extend support for traineeships

The Boosting Apprenticeship Commencements (BAC) wage subsidy has coincided with strong growth in traineeship commencements in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). Enrolments in ECEC traineeships jumped by 72.6% in the period January-June 2021, compared to the same period in 2020 (we are awaiting full-year results). We should seek to extend this impact, by extending the BAC program for ECEC traineeships for a further 12 months (beyond 31 March 2022) and supporting employers to allocate sufficient staff to mentor new trainees.

#### Action:

- Extend the Boosting Apprenticeship Commencement subsidy for ECEC by 12 months.
- Pay a grant of \$5,000 to each service taking on a new trainee, to support mentoring.

**Estimated impact:** If 20% of long day care centres take on one trainee each under the extended BAC program, this will add 1,688 educators to the workforce. Funding these centres to take a senior educator 'off the floor' for induction and mentoring in the first 6-12 weeks would support strong retention of the new trainees.

**Timeframe:** Short-term. New traineeships in 2022 would deliver fully qualified early childhood educators in 2023.

### 2. Support upskilling for VET-qualified educators

The shortage of qualified early childhood teachers (ECTs) is particularly acute, but could be addressed rapidly by enabling experienced, VET-qualified educators to upgrade to degree level via an accelerated route.

#### Action:

- Co-fund a national fast-track program for early childhood educators with diploma qualifications, to upskill them to ECT level (Bachelor or equivalent) in less than the usual 3-6 years.
- Develop a scholarships program to support educators to upskill to a Bachelor qualification by offering additional paid leave to undertake practicum requirements, time off the floor to study and funding for teacher mentors.

**Estimated impact:** There are approximately 52,792 diploma-trained educators in the sector who would be eligible to upskill. Based on a conversion rate of 15%, that could produce a potential pool of 7,918 educators upskilling. There are programs that can be scaled to meet the national demand for qualified early childhood teachers. The Victorian Government's Early Childhood Innovative Initial Teacher Education program (780 diploma-qualified educators in early 2022, across five universities) and its Upskill Program (offered from 1 July 2022 for 100+ annual enrolments) are attracting strong enrolments. If enrolments were replicated in other states and territories on a population basis, we would see an additional 2,220 – 5,000 enrolments in an ECT qualification.

**Timeframe:** Medium-term. Once the program is established, commencing students could expect to graduate as ECTs in around 18 months for accelerated degrees and 2.5 years for those studying and working part-time. Given the strong positive outcomes of this measure for preschool education, it would be appropriate for state and territory governments to contribute to the costs. Employers in the early learning and care sector would also contribute, for example, through facilitating release and backfilling of positions, and providing support for students at the workplace level.

### 3. Run a national workforce campaign

The Children's Education and Care National Workforce Strategy has recommended a national communications campaign to promote early learning and care careers. However, this has been accorded only medium priority, meaning it should be delivered within six years (by 2028). The latest Job Outlook data indicates that we will need another 7,000 teachers by 2023 and 30,000 educators for the ECEC sector, so waiting six years to deliver on this strategy is too long.

#### Action:

- Fund immediate development of the workforce campaign, for launch within 12 months.

**Estimated impact:** A short digital marketing campaign (6 weeks) could expect to record around 4 million views and generate 40,000-60,000 visits to a campaign website (based on ELACCA's Big Roles in Little Lives campaign). If conversion of website visitors to course enrolments was only 2%, this would mean an additional 1,000 enrolments in an early learning qualification.

**Timeframe:** Short- to medium-term. The campaign will generate results over 1-4+ years (based on qualification timelines). The campaign should enable direct contact with employers and education and training providers, via a central information hub. It would also support school-based traineeships (see Item 4).

### 4. Initiate a national push for more school-based traineeships

There are not enough students taking up school-based traineeships (SBTs) in early learning and care. Retail qualifications attract more than twice the number of student trainees as the Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), and both retail and business traineeships have been on a strong upward trajectory in schools since 2019, while demand for ECEC has flatlined<sup>2</sup>. Building career attraction, including respect for the role of early childhood educators, needs to start in schools.

#### Action:

- Coordinate a national effort to increase the uptake of school-based traineeships in early learning and care.

**Estimated impact:** Lifting enrolments in a school based ECEC traineeship by 25% could produce an additional 270 educators, ready to work from the time they leave school.

**Timeframe:** Medium-term. SBTs typically run for two years.

### 5. Lift the priority of early childhood educators and teachers in skilled migration

Priority skilled migration offers the fastest route to filling vacancies for early childhood educators and teachers.

**Action:**

- Add early childhood educators and early childhood teachers, at all qualification levels, to relevant occupation lists: the Priority Migration Skilled Occupation List; Medium and Long-term Strategic Skills List; and the Regional Occupation List.
- Amend the Working Holiday Maker rules to enable visa-holders to work in early learning and care services, including for extended periods.
- Run a marketing campaign in the UK to support uptake of the forthcoming three-year Working Holiday Maker visa by early childhood educators.
- Streamline the recognition of overseas qualifications for early childhood teachers (particularly from the UK and Ireland).

Estimated impact: If we increase the (pre-pandemic) number of qualified ECTs migrating from the UK and Ireland alone by 20%, we can fill 100 vacant ECT positions almost immediately.

**Timeframe:** Short-term.

## Appendix 2 – Our Social Inclusion Strategy

Our investment to support vulnerable children is underpinned by our social inclusion strategy which consists of four pillars and six areas of focus.

The four pillars are:

1. **Universal:** Approaches aimed at improving the universal base for quality and inclusion across the whole Goodstart network.
2. **Targeted:** Approaches aimed at focused support & programs in selected centres for vulnerable children and families
3. **Advocacy:** Ensuring a specific focus on advocacy for vulnerable children and families
4. **New Service Models** – The development of specific initiatives, including new service models, in collaboration with syndicate and other partners aimed at building the evidence base about what works best for vulnerable children.

And our six areas of focus are:

1. Building strong relationships with children and partnerships with families
2. Being community connected
3. Respecting and celebrating diversity
4. Improving health and wellbeing
5. Accessing specialist support
6. Improving organisational systems.

### Representation of vulnerability in Goodstart

As an inclusive organisation, all children, families, and educators are welcome at Goodstart. Our centres and teams of educators work in partnership with thousands of families across Australia to deliver high quality, inclusive and community connected early learning programs to benefit all children and their learning, development and wellbeing. We actively support all children to participate in our services, irrespective of their abilities, developmental capabilities or life circumstances.

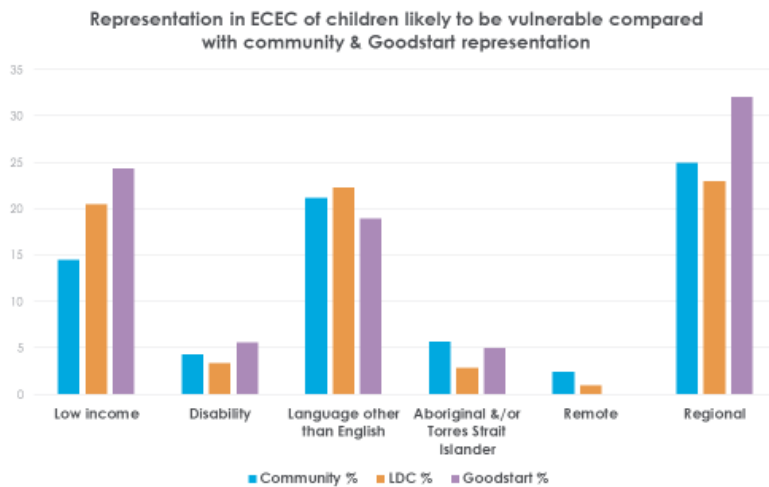
Across Australia, 39% of children attending our services have at least one indicator of vulnerability. Over 4,400 children attending Goodstart have a disability or developmental delay, which is 6% of all children at Goodstart and is proportionately higher than other ECEC providers. The table below demonstrates our higher representation of children likely to be vulnerable compared with community and the sector.

### Beyond Goodstart

Our social purpose is to support all Australia's children, not just all children in Goodstart centres. We are committed to advocating on behalf of children and explaining the importance of quality early learning and other policy issues that benefit children and families, including early childhood education, workforce participation, welfare, disability support, mental health and wellbeing as well as social inclusion and equality.

We work closely with The Early Learning and Care Council of Australia, Early Childhood Australia, the Australian Council of Social Services, United Voice, the Australian Childcare Alliance, the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth, and our Founding Members on early learning and care policy issues.

# How do we compare?



We have proportionally more low income families & children with disability than the community and sector.

We have slightly fewer children with a Language Background other than English.

We have more Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children than the sector but not at community levels.

Data accessed from Report on Government Services 2019



## Inclusion and early intervention at Goodstart

### Social inclusion at Goodstart

Inclusive practice is a fundamental part of our way of working. As an inclusive organisation, all children, families and educators are welcomed at Goodstart. Quality early learning begins with secure, nurturing relationships between educators and children. Each and every day, our centres and teams of educators work in partnership with thousands of families across Australia to deliver high quality, inclusive and community connected early learning programs to benefit all children and their learning, development and wellbeing.

We actively support all children to participate in our services, irrespective of their abilities, developmental capabilities or life circumstances. We provide a national support structure that assists with accessing funding support, additional staff training and enrolling children needing additional support. We try to maximise all available funding and support, so a child can fully participate in early learning but, sometimes, there are administrative delays that risk the child not having the support they need. As a not for profit and in line with our social purpose, we often fund inclusion support until government funding is approved. However, red tape and funding delays often mean that, in other services, children are being excluded.

To truly support social inclusion, we fund additional educators (outside ratio) to support children with additional needs, we work hard to ensure our early learning environments are suitable for children of all abilities and we continuously develop and invest in our educators to enable them to offer the best possible care and education for all children. Our key initiatives that support vulnerable children across the country are outlined below.

### Programs and practice

Understanding a child's strengths and skills, authentically partnering with families and collaborating with other early childhood professionals, such as allied health practitioners, is critical to the successful inclusion and participation for children with a diagnosed disability, developmental delay and/or additional needs within an early childhood education and care setting. Listed below are a few of the programs we have implemented to make sure all children and families feel a sense of belonging and feel safe, nurtured and valued.

At Goodstart, inclusive practice is supported by a network of social inclusion coordinators and access to an Inclusion Support Helpdesk and support continuum, which highlights the elements and considerations of inclusive practice.

### **1) Enhancing Children's Outcomes (EChO) centres**

EChO centres offer enhanced services over and above the universal base of education and care. We invest in proportionately disadvantaged communities using our unique EChO model to enhance learning, development and wellbeing outcomes for very vulnerable children, along with supporting their families and building their communities.

Services include additional teachers, child and family practitioners, speech pathologists, occupational therapists and social inclusion coordinators. We also offer playgroups, visiting service providers, food rescue and re-distribution, referral and support in the local community and scholarships for eligible children. Importantly, educators and allied health professionals work together in the centre creating a practice uplift.

### **2) Family Connections program**

At the heart of our inclusion strategy is our foundational social inclusion professional development program, Family Connections. We have partnered with allied health professionals and other support agencies to develop and deliver this unique program to enhance outcomes for children and their families in vulnerable circumstances. It is delivered over a 12 month period to centre directors and educators and includes a monthly face-to-face professional learning session, additional on-the-floor coaching in centres, facilitated centre team meetings and mentoring for centre leaders.

Family Connections aims to strengthen practice and relationships between educators, children and families by focusing on their strengths, resources and aspirations to generate improved child outcomes. Importantly, the program supports centres in building connections with community services. Family Connections is delivered in Learning Circles over the duration of a year and covers topics such as leading change for children, attachment-based practices, communication, social, emotional, sensory development and play, partnerships with families and community links.

### **3) Intensive Individual Support Plans (IISP)**

The IISP provides an additional educator over a 12-week period to support the inclusion of a child with ongoing high support needs. The additional educator provides relationship-based intensive support. Training and mentoring support is provided to the centre and additional educator by either a Goodstart Child and Family Practitioner, Occupational Therapist or Speech Pathologist, depending on the presenting needs.

Goodstart invests approximately \$440,000 per year to support these very vulnerable children. One of the criteria for being eligible for an IISP is ineligibility for the Inclusion Development Fund (IDF) or providing evidence that ISP support is not sufficient to meet the full support needs to overcome the inclusion barrier. This means that there is a direct correlation to children being supported through this approach, children who require significant levels of support to overcome their inclusion barrier, and lack of appropriate access to the Inclusion Support Program (ISP).

### **4) Increasing Access and Participation Project (Victoria and South Australia)**

The research tells us that the children who would benefit most from early learning are also the ones most likely to miss out. We also know that children who start behind, stay behind. To support some of our most vulnerable children, Goodstart Early Learning partnered with the Department of Education and Training (DET) and the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) in Victoria to support children known to child protection to access and participate in early childhood education and care. We employed a Family Community Engagement Worker to provide outreach for families, connect with external services, support social inclusion and upskill existing centre teams around the support needs of the child and family.



Through this program, over 250 vulnerable children are now engaged in early learning and participating regularly. Centre teams are working with families around their child's needs, through the development of Emotional Support Plans, and have engaged medical and allied health professionals to support development and wellbeing, were required. Families are also supported to access Child Care Subsidy, Additional Child Care Subsidies and other support funding.

## **5) Early Learning Fund (ELF)**

Goodstart and The Benevolent Society have partnered together to establish the ELF to help improve access to quality early childhood education and care by removing cost as a barrier and supporting children's participation early learning.

The ELF offers scholarships to Indigenous children, refugee and humanitarian entrants, families in hardship and children at risk of abuse and neglect. In 2019, the ELF supported 390 children at a cost of approximately \$330,000.

## **Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children at Goodstart**

### **Reconciliation**

We are deeply committed to reconciliation, and we're focused on creating employment opportunities and forging stronger employment pathways for our First Nations Peoples. In July 2014, we partnered with Reconciliation Australia to develop our inaugural Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). Since then, over 600 of our centres have started their journey to develop a Reconciliation Action Plan for their own communities and nearly half of these are published by Narragunnawali. We also now have a Goodstart Stretch RAP 2020 – 2023.

### **Internships**

In 2015, Goodstart partnered with CareerTrackers, a non-profit organisation established to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander university students to successfully complete their tertiary education. The non-completion rate of tertiary education for First Australians is significantly higher than that for non-Indigenous Australians. CareerTrackers' aim is to significantly increase rates of qualification completion and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples into sustainable employment.

Goodstart is the first education organisation in Australia to offer these internships in partnership with CareerTrackers and we've grown our intern pool from 3 to 20 interns since its inception. The program has multiple elements, providing support and professional growth to students. Goodstart provides a workplace where students can gain experience in early childhood teaching roles as well as roles in other disciplines within centre support teams.

### **Community of Practice**

A key part of our inclusive practice is creating culturally safe and welcoming environments. We have implemented an Engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Educators Community of Practice program at Goodstart. The Community of Practice aims to increase workforce participation by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and overcome barriers to Indigenous children participating in early learning. The model enables solutions to be created and addressed locally, aiming to create culturally safe and competent early learning centres, strengthening local community connections and relationships.

We also support cultural safety in our services by training educators, centre support staff and central office staff in cultural competency, using the Arrilla platform.

### **Fitzroy Crossing educator secondment and cultural immersion program**

In 2016, at the invitation of the Marninwarntikura Women's Resource Centre and the Baya Gaway Early Learning Unit in Fitzroy Crossing (WA), Goodstart Early Learning entered into a partnership to establish an Educator Secondment and Cultural Immersion Program.

This program is a two-way cultural learning program, which involves Goodstart providing two qualified educators each school term (8 educators per annum) to work at the Baya Gawiy Early Childhood Learning Unit alongside local educators. This enables the Centre to operate with consistent staffing and deliver a high quality early learning program, to support access for highly vulnerable children and families within a remote, disadvantaged community.

The program in Fitzroy Crossing also highlights the critical importance of two-way learning and reconciliation. For each 12-week period, the participating teachers and educators have a unique opportunity to live, work and become immersed in an Aboriginal community, with the aim of enhancing cultural understandings and practice that can be applied when they return to their own communities.

Over the four years of the partnership program:

- Baya Gawiy has maintained consistent child numbers through continuous, qualified staffing.
- The two-way cultural exchange has enabled Goodstart educators to authentically embed practice in their home Centre, strengthen community connections and relationships in their local community and progress their own, and their Centre's reconciliation journey.
- Baya Gawiy educators have gained professional development opportunities through shared collaboration on educational practice and engaged in external professional learning programs, otherwise unachievable due to staff shortages.
- We have demonstrated the power of genuine community partnerships in responding to and delivering on community aspirations for children.