

Why early learning matters

Discover the lifelong benefits of early learning – and why what happens before school sets the foundation for everything after.



Early learning lays the foundation for success

- In the first five years of life, children's brains are wired to learn quickly. This is when the foundations for learning, health and behaviour throughout life are laid.
- 90% of a child's brain development happens by the age of five.
- Play-based activities and social interactions help young children develop the cognitive, social and emotional skills necessary for success in school and life.
- Early learning amplifies children's natural skills and abilities, helps them become confident learners and enhances resilience, improving lifelong outcomes.

Despite this, **1 in 5** children in Australia start school developmentally vulnerable – and the numbers are even higher in regional and remote areas, and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.



- Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are twice as likely to start school behind in language, communication and social skills.
- Research shows that children who start school behind rarely catch up – but high quality early learning can halve the gap.

The case for high quality Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

- **Child Development:** High quality ECEC supports the physical, mental and emotional development of children. The first few years of a child's life are critical for brain development, and positive early experiences can provide a strong foundation for later learning, development, and behaviour.
- **Educational Equity:** ECEC helps bridge the gap between socially advantaged and disadvantaged children. By providing all children with access to quality early education, it promotes equity and social justice, ensuring that every child has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

- **Economic Benefits:** Investing in ECEC delivers significant economic returns. Quality early education programs leads to better educational outcomes, higher earnings, and reduced social costs in the long term. This investment is particularly beneficial for children from vulnerable backgrounds.
- **Workforce Support:** ECEC enables parents to participate in the workforce, knowing their children are in a safe and nurturing environment. This support is essential for working families and contributes to overall economic productivity.

Early childhood education and care is fundamental for fostering individual growth, promoting social equity, and driving economic benefits. Investing in ECEC ensures that children have the best possible start in life, leading to positive outcomes for individuals and society as a whole.