



Government of  
South Australia

South Australia's  
Action Plan for

# EARLY CHILDHOOD AND CHILD CARE

Council of  
Australian Governments

National Reform Agenda  
Human Capital Reform

# Table of Contents

- 1. What Is This Plan? ..... 3
- 2. National Reform Agenda ..... 4
  - 2.1 The COAG Early Childhood and Child Care Reform Framework ..... 4
  - 2.2 The Commonwealth Government and Early Childhood Reform ..... 4
- 3. South Australia’s Plan for Reforming Childhood and Child Care ..... 8
- 4. Next Steps ..... 24

## 1. What Is This Plan?

This Plan is South Australia's response to the Early Childhood and Child Care dimensions of the Human Capital Reform Program sponsored by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG).

The Plan describes how the Government of South Australia intends to improve outcomes for young children and families, improve early childhood services and develop further opportunities for reform in partnership with the Australian government over the next ten years.

This plan does not yet include South Australia's whole of government response to the report of Dr. Fraser Mustard, the 2007 Adelaide Thinker in Residence. Dr Mustard's report is expected in April, 2007, and will likely recommend new initiatives to strengthen and redirect early childhood services in South Australia. This plan will be updated once South Australia's whole of government response has been completed.

"The workplace of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will favour individuals with intellectual flexibility, strong problem-solving skills, emotional resilience, and the capacity to work well with others in a continuously challenging and highly competitive environment. In this context the personal and societal burdens of diminished capacity will be formidable, and the need to maximize human potential will be greater than ever before. ....

...as we confront the human capital needs of the future, the findings of neuroscience, behavioural research and economics all agree on the following conclusion: Prevention is more effective and less costly than remediation, and earlier is far better than later."<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Eric I. Knudsen, James J. Heckman, Judy L. Cameron, and Jack P. Shonkoff. Economic, neurobiological, and behavioural perspectives on building America's future workforce. PNAS, Jul 2006; 103: p 10161. Retrieved [2 February 2007] from [www.developingchild.net/pubs/peer/NeuroEcon.pdf](http://www.developingchild.net/pubs/peer/NeuroEcon.pdf)

## 2. National Reform Agenda

The Council's interest in how human capital is developed in Australia is based on the belief that a healthier, more skilled, competent and motivated population is the key to future prosperity. COAG has directed that human capital reform should begin in four priority areas:

- early childhood – with the aim of supporting families in improving childhood development outcomes in the first five years of a child's life, up to and including school entry;
- diabetes – with the aim of improving health outcomes focusing initially on diabetes and building on the national Chronic Disease Strategy and the Australian Better Health Initiative;
- literacy and numeracy – with the aim of improving student outcomes on literacy and numeracy; and
- child care – with the aim of encouraging and supporting workforce participation of parents with dependent children.

### 2.1 The COAG Early Childhood and Child Care Reform Framework

The COAG has agreed on three high-level indicative outcomes for early childhood development and child care:

1. To improve significantly the proportion of children that are born healthy;
2. To improve significantly the proportion of children acquiring the basic skills for life and learning; and
3. To increase workforce participation and productivity.

The COAG Human Capital Working Group subsequently identified four policy directions that are relevant to the outcomes:

1. Improving antenatal care;
2. Strengthening the health, development and learning of the zero to five year olds;
3. Enhancing the provision of early childhood education and care services; and
4. Improving the early childhood education and care workforce<sup>2</sup>.

This plan describes how the Government of South Australia will respond to the major early childhood policy directions and priority actions described by the COAG Human Capital Working Group.

### 2.2 The Commonwealth Government and Early Childhood Reform

South Australia is seeking two types of response from the Australian Government.

Improvements in areas that are the primary responsibility of the Australian Government are an essential part of the COAG early childhood and child care reform agenda. The Australian Government can make sustained national improvements in the outlook for young children and families through changes to its taxation (Family Tax Benefit), income support (especially Child Care Benefit and Family Payment arrangements) and industrial relations systems.

The introduction of a national paid parental leave scheme is a leading example of reform of this type. The introduction of a national paid parental leave scheme is one of the highest reform priorities for the Government of South Australia.

Secondly, South Australia proposes new roles and new investments by the Australian government in early childhood in South Australia, framed by a new early childhood agreement between both governments. The agreement would foster better planning and collaboration, more effective delineation of roles and responsibilities and deliver better value for current and future investments in early childhood services to both levels of government.

---

<sup>2</sup> Work on the fourth policy direction – the early childhood education and care workforce - has been deferred until after the April 2007 COAG meeting. This plan nonetheless includes preliminary analysis and options in this area.

## 2.3 Early Childhood Reform and the South Australian Strategic Plan (2007)

Early childhood reform is a key priority for the Government of South Australia. The South Australian Strategic Plan of 2007 includes targets that relate specifically to early childhood:

**T6.2 Early childhood – Year 1 literacy - By 2014 achieve a 10% improvement in the number of children reading at an age appropriate level by the end of Year 1.**

**T6.18 Aboriginal education – Early years: - Increase yearly the proportion of Aboriginal children reading at age appropriate levels at the end of Year 1**

**T6.3 Early childhood – birth weight - Reduce the proportion of low birth weight babies.**

**T6.4 Early childhood – AEDI - Improve South Australia’s performance on the Australian Early Development Index.**

Early childhood development is a key point of intervention in the wider human capital agenda described in the South Australian Strategic Plan. The Plan includes a host of targets that will be enhanced by continuing reform and investment in early childhood. For example:

**T1.1 Economic Growth - Exceed the national economic growth rate by 2014**

**T1.6 Labour Productivity - Exceed Australia’s average labour productivity growth rate in**

**T2.2 Healthy weight:- Increase the proportion of South Australians 18 and over with healthy weight by 10 percentage points by 2014.**

**T2.3 Sport and recreation - Exceed the Australian average for participation in sport and physical activity by 2014.**

**T2.4 Healthy South Australians: Increase the healthy life expectancy of South Australians by 5% for males and 3% for females by 2014.**

**T2.5 Aboriginal healthy life expectancy: Lower the morbidity and mortality rates of Aboriginal South Australians.**

**T2.6 Chronic diseases: Increase, by 5 percentage points, the proportion of people living with a chronic disease whose self-assessed health status is good or better.**

**T2.7 Psychological wellbeing: - Equal or lower than the Australian average for psychological distress by 2014**

**T5.8 Multiculturalism - Increase the percentage of South Australians who accept cultural diversity as a positive influence in the community**

**T6.1 Aboriginal wellbeing: - Improve the overall wellbeing of Aboriginal South Australians**

**T6.5 Economic disadvantage - Reduce the percentage of South Australians receiving government benefits (excluding age pensions) as their major income source to below the Australian average by 2014.**

**T6.12 Year 3 - By 2010, 93% of students in Year 3 to achieve the national benchmarks in reading, writing and numeracy**

**T6.24 Aboriginal employees -Increase the participation of Aboriginal people in the South Australian public sector, spread across all classifications and agencies, to 2% by 2010 and maintain or better those levels through to 2014.**

Each of these targets will be influenced by the successful delivery of early childhood reform in South Australia.

## 2.4 South Australia’s Commitment to Early Childhood

South Australia has a long and proud history of leadership in early childhood, and early childhood is a key priority for the Rann government. Major government reviews of the health, child protection and early childhood service systems in South Australia have made a case for improvement and the 2007 release of the *South Australian Strategic Plan* includes explicit early childhood targets.

New whole-of-government ministerial and administrative arrangements have been established to progress the early childhood reform agenda and to connect the various strands of reform in early childhood education and care, health, and child protection and family support. The recent sponsorship of Dr Fraser Mustard as Thinker in Residence will also inform the development of a whole-of-government approach to early childhood and the investments required to deliver better outcomes for young children.

South Australia has a strong base on which to build reforms, including:

- universal home visiting of newborns and their families by a qualified child and maternal health nurse
- universal early childhood education for all four year olds, and early entry at three for Aboriginal children and children under the guardianship of the Minister
- a South Australian Government sponsored state-wide Family Day Care program
- a birth to year 12 curriculum standards and accountability framework for learning

As well, the South Australian government has made major new investments in early childhood.

Through the Government's \$210m *Keeping Them Safe* program, partnerships between State agencies are delivering priority health and education services to the most vulnerable group of the State's children. 'Rapid Response' arrangements for children under the Guardianship of the Minister is one example of a new approach to the joined-up action by government on behalf of disadvantaged children.

The *Family Home Visiting* program has been expanded to reach about 60% of its target population (12-15% of the annual birth cohort) in 2006 with an additional \$6.5 million over four years. The Family Home Visiting Program provides families in need of extra help with additional support, of up to 34 nurse home visits in the first two years of their baby's life.

Twenty new *Children's Centres for early childhood development and parenting* are being created across metropolitan and regional areas. The Children's Centres provide integrated child and maternal health, child care, preschool, the first years of school and family support for children from birth to eight years of age. Over the next four years, the Rann government will spend \$13.0 million in capital funding and \$10.0 million in recurrent funding on establishing these new Centres.

Four extra Children's Centres will be established as the State redevelops its schools and preschools through new investment in the *Education Works* program. Schools and preschools engaged in the *Education Works* program will evolve into learning and development facilities for children from birth to the end of primary or secondary education.

## 2.5 South Australia's Expenditure on Early Childhood Services

In South Australia, expenditure on services for young children and families is spread across a number of government portfolios, with most being in the Education and Children's Services, Health, and Families and Communities portfolios. Comparative expenditure data, as published in the Productivity Commission's annual *Report on Government Services*, shows that South Australia's expenditure on early childhood service compares very favourably with other States and Territories.

Since February 2006, South Australia has increased spending in early childhood by an additional \$58.22 million over four years.

These funds are establishing programs and services that:

- help keep young children safe in their families,
- provide Children's Centres for Early Childhood Development and Parenting that offer a range of health, education, quality early learning and childcare and family support services; and
- provide home visiting by nurses for every new born baby within the first weeks following birth and the Family Home Visiting Program for those families requiring extra support over the first two years of a child's life.

The SA Government is undertaking an audit across government portfolios to establish the full scope of its investment in the early years. The aim of this work, which will subsequently be undertaken each year, is to track the increasing investment by Government in the early years.

## 2.6 Future Priorities

The fundamental goal for early childhood reform in South Australia is to *reduce inequality in early childhood*. Reducing inequality during the early years will lift capacity across the whole population and prepare South Australia for a better future.

South Australia believes that the task of tackling inequality in early childhood is best addressed by:

- Supporting parents – because the actions and decisions of parents, and the quality of relationships between parent and child, have the most profound and lasting impact on the health, wellbeing and learning of young children,
- Increasing the availability of early childhood services – because all young children and families need quality, accessible, appropriate and effective early childhood services, and many young children and families still miss out on what they need,
- Connecting services - because integrated well connected services across education and care, health and family support will do the best job for children and families and especially for disadvantaged children and families
- Raising quality – because higher quality early childhood services, led by highly trained early childhood professionals, will have a direct impact on young children
- Increasing evidence-based programs and promoting continuous improvement – because governments need to know that they are making a difference and that the gap between what we know about early childhood and what we do for young children and their families is closing. Communities and parents also need to understand the importance of the early years. It is vital to build an appreciation, across the community of the impact of the early years on human development throughout the life course.

### 3. South Australia's Plan for Reforming Childhood and Child Care

#### 3.1 Reforms in Brief

##### **Policy Direction One: Improving Antenatal Care**

This plan proposes to improve antenatal care through recommendations about healthy pregnancy and better birth outcomes for women who are from vulnerable and disadvantaged communities. The plan has a particular focus on culturally competent antenatal services for Aboriginal women, as well as providing better information and support for all women about the factors that can jeopardise healthy pregnancy. The plan also anticipates changes to antenatal health flowing from new National Health and Medical Research guidelines for antenatal care that are currently under development.

##### **Policy Direction Two: Strengthen the Health, Development and Learning of Children from Birth to Five**

The plan recommends strengthening the health, development and learning of children from birth to five by focusing intently on informing and engaging all South Australian parents with young children about the importance of early relationships, early learning and early brain development. It aims to improve access to proven programs for disadvantaged children and parents and to create better connections between parents and early childhood services, better information for planning and better pathways for children across the early childhood service system in South Australia. The plan proposes to upgrade the qualifications of the early childhood workforce, to connect and simplify training pathways and to build new professional competencies required in an integrated multidisciplinary early childhood system. This process has begun and will be guided by the *South Australia's Strategic Plan* and *Better Skills. Better Work. Better State – A Strategy for the Development of South Australia's Workforce to 2010*.

##### **Policy Direction Three: Enhancing the Provision of Early Childhood Education and Care Services**

South Australia will increase the number of Children's Centres for Early Childhood Development and Parenting. "Hub and spoke" arrangements will link an increasing number of other early childhood services in to support and referral networks built around our Children's Centres. This growth strategy will deliver better outcomes for children and better choices for parents.

In early childhood education and care the plan recommends that a new framework agreement designed to encourage and support planned sustainable growth and service improvement in early childhood should be established by the Commonwealth and South Australian governments. The agreement would frame the development of:

- a new integrated quality improvement system for early childhood services in South Australia,
- a new Early Learning Framework that would intensify and coordinate the efforts of early childhood practitioners and parents
- the Children's Centres growth strategy.

Collecting and analysing data on our children, our communities, and the outcomes of our programs and applying knowledge about the development of young children in South Australia is a major priority across this plan. Improving the evidence base (using existing assets such as the De Lissa Chair in Early Childhood research), evaluating the efficacy of programs, and improving the connections between and use of existing data collections across Government, are essential.

In this context the plan aims to build on the current work of Dr Fraser Mustard, the Thinker in Residence, to improve early learning opportunities and support for children and families in the early years.

Better outcomes for young children and families in Aboriginal communities are a key focus for all parts of the Early Childhood Development Plan for South Australia.

SA Government Current Commitments	Commonwealth Government Reform Proposals	SA Government Recommended Actions that Require Commonwealth Support
<b>Policy Direction 1: Improving Antenatal Care</b>		
<b>1. Improve antenatal services to respond better to the needs of all pregnant women.</b>		
SA currently uses existing national guidelines for antenatal care.	Fund development and delivery of professional training for new guidelines.  Increase access to quality antenatal and pre-conception information by incorporating relevant messages and resources into the Raising Children Network.	Develop and deliver professional training in new guidelines currently being developed through the NHMRC.  Develop and implement psychosocial assessments as part of routine antenatal visits.
<b>2. Provide targeted antenatal information and services to Indigenous, teenage and other vulnerable mothers.</b>		
The High Risk Infants Program provides training for professionals.	Extend the Enhanced Primary Care Initiative for additional GP support and case management for high risk pregnant women.	The Vulnerable Infants Services Plan recommends universal antenatal psychosocial screening and targeted intervention.
Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yangkantjara Lands substance abuse program.	Provide free antenatal care for Health Care Card holders with high risk pregnancies.	Build community understanding of brain development in antenatal and early childhood.
Community-based programs, (such as Anangu Bibi Birthing Program and Healthy For Life) encourage Aboriginal women to use maternal health services.		Expand Anangu Bibi service model to Aboriginal communities in SA.
<b>3. Encourage exchange and better linkages of health workers between Commonwealth-funded Aboriginal Medical Services and State and Territory services to create greater linkages between Commonwealth and State funded services.</b>		
Whole of South Australia co-ordination of government programs on APY Lands in co-operation with Commonwealth Departments.		Promote and implement <i>Industry Postings (Guidelines to assisting the mobility between the SA Public Sector and other organisations)</i> , including to NGOs, the private sector & the Commonwealth.
<b>POLICY DIRECTION 1</b> <b>Total funding over 4 years: \$0</b>		

SA Government Current Commitments	Commonwealth Government Reform Proposals	SA Government Recommended Actions that Require Commonwealth Support
-----------------------------------	--	---

**Policy Direction 2: Strengthening the Health Development and Learning of 0-5 Year Olds**

<b>4. Delivering better integrated early years programs and services.</b>		
<p>SA Strategic Plan includes three specific early childhood targets:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce the proportion of low birth weight babies.</li> <li>• Improve South Australia’s performance on the Australian Early Development Index.</li> <li>• By 2014 achieve a 10% improvement in the number of children reading at an age appropriate level by the end of Year 1.</li> </ul>		<p>Implement integrated early childhood information and data systems.</p> <p>Implement the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) Statewide.</p>
<p>Major reviews and policy frameworks for Health (Every Chance for Every Child), Child Protection (Keeping Them Safe) and Early Childhood Services (The Virtual Village).</p>		
<b>5. Develop effective collaborative mechanisms between Commonwealth and State and Territory governments at a State/Territory level, building on existing arrangements where appropriate.</b>		
<p>New whole of South Australia planning, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation involving three levels of government and the non-government sector.</p> <p>Co-ordination at the Cabinet level through the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Child Development.</p> <p>The De Lissa Chair of Early Childhood is partnership between the University of South Australia and Department of Education and Children’s Services.</p>	<p>Align current and future Federal and State funding for early childhood with agreed multilateral early childhood priorities in South Australia.</p> <p>Link relevant Australian Government early childhood data to South Australian data sources.</p> <p>Support whole of government governance arrangements for early childhood reform in SA.</p>	<p>Establish joint planning secretariat and data linkage between Federal and SA sources of information on early childhood development.</p>

SA Government Current Commitments	Commonwealth Government Reform Proposals	SA Government Recommended Actions that Require Commonwealth Support
<b>Policy Direction 2: Strengthening the Health Development and Learning of 0-5 Year Olds (continued)</b>		
	<p>Commit FaCSIA, Health and Ageing, Education Science and Training and Employment and Workplace Relations to a shared planning and service development agreement for early childhood.</p> <p>The next Commonwealth State and Territory Disability funding agreement to focus on improving early childhood services for children with disabilities.</p>	<p>Establish an intergenerational early childhood research and evaluation institute across SA tertiary institutions.</p>
<b>6. Enhance the integration of local services for families and their children, including through joint planning for co-located services or other forms of enhanced collaboration.</b>		
<p>Build 24 new Children’s Centres for Early Development and Parenting in metropolitan and rural communities to provide education, care, health and family support services.</p> <p>New birth to year twelve schools under the Education Works program (Four Centres and upgrade of existing government pre-school infrastructure).</p> <p>Early Childhood Initiatives Co-ordinators work at a district level to support local services.</p>		<p>Establish Child Development and Parenting Centres with aim of a centre at every primary school in SA.</p> <p>Develop sustainable local community-based interagency groups to plan early childhood services in communities.</p> <p>Ensure integrated early years programs and services to assist those who cannot access children’s centres.</p>
<b>7. Supporting parents’ participation in their children’s learning and development.</b>		
<p>Learning Together programs targeting high risk families provide inter-generational literacy and support for children’s early learning and development for children from birth to 3 and their parents.</p>	<p>Establish a national 12-month paid parental leave scheme.</p>	<p>Design and implement State-wide parent information program on early learning and development including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning Communities projects,</li> <li>• Adult learners with low literacy/numeracy levels who are parents,</li> </ul>

SA Government Current Commitments	Commonwealth Government Reform Proposals	SA Government Recommended Actions that Require Commonwealth Support
-----------------------------------	--	---

**Policy Direction 2: Strengthening the Health Development and Learning of 0-5 Year Olds (continued)**

<p>The South Australia Works: Adult Community Education Programs re-engage adults in learning and build skills in literacy and numeracy (Learning Communities).</p> <p>\$1m Books Initiative supplies books to all pre-schools and child care centres in South Australia.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning Together programs, and link with home visiting.</li> </ul>
<p><b>8. Implement the nationally agreed core competencies for professionals working with young children and their families, including through university and vocational and technical education (VTE) pre-service training and professional development (Commonwealth to advise timeframes).</b></p>		
	<p>Fund development of new core syllabus for early childhood professionals with a focus on early brain development and neuroscience.</p>	<p>Develop new core syllabus components for early childhood professionals in education and care, medicine and allied health, social work and community services.</p> <p>Develop Children’s Centres as training sites for new competencies.</p>
<p><b>9. Providing extra support to children and families experiencing high levels of disadvantage.</b></p>		
<p>South Australia provides early childhood education for all 4 years olds and for 3 year old Aborigines and children under the guardianship of the Minister.</p> <p>SA provides support for children with additional needs (e.g. disabilities, developmental delay, communication and behaviour problems) by funding a range of programs such as the Access Assistants Program, Learning Links, Preschool Bilingual Program, Preschool Support Program and Speech and Language programs.</p> <p>Vulnerable Infants Program ensures case management and inter-agency co-operation for vulnerable infants.</p>	<p>Provide free child care for vulnerable children.</p> <p>Collaboration between Commonwealth and SA government to support staff and care providers in all childcare and early childhood services to include children with additional needs.</p> <p>Increase inclusion support program funding in South Australia.</p> <p>Reform and improve respite services for families of children with disabilities.</p> <p>Fund the Vulnerable Infants Program.</p>	<p>Finalise whole of government information sharing system in child protection.</p> <p>Expand inclusion support programs to support children from birth to 3.</p> <p>Implement a Family Safety Strategy for families at risk.</p>

SA Government Current Commitments	Commonwealth Government Reform Proposals	SA Government Recommended Actions that Require Commonwealth Support
-----------------------------------	--	---

**Policy Direction 2: Strengthening the Health Development and Learning of 0-5 Year Olds (continued)**

<p>Rapid Response Program ensures children under the guardianship of the Minister are the highest priority for government services.</p>	<p>Fund expansion of the Rapid Response program to more vulnerable children and families.</p>	<p>Extend the Rapid Response program beyond children under Guardianship to other highly disadvantaged children and their families.</p>
<p><b>10. Intervening early to reduce child health and development problems.</b></p>		
<p>Every Chance for Every Child postnatal Home Visiting Program provides universal contact with every child born in South Australia.</p> <p>Family Home Visiting Program provides targeting sustained home visiting of up to 34 visits in the first 2 years of life for “at risk” families – about 12-15% of all children.</p> <p>Early Intervention Co-ordinators work with families of children with disabilities from their birth to ensure access to services.</p> <p>Neo-natal hearing tests for all new borns in South Australia</p>	<p>Fund development of an integrated screening tool for early childhood.</p> <p>Fund development of common client management system.</p>	<p>Expand screening regime for developmental delays in early childhood.</p> <p>Expand Family Home Visiting Program to all parts of the state.</p> <p>Expand inclusion support programs to accommodate children from birth to 3.</p> <p>Develop a common client management system.</p>
<p><b>11. Establish fully integrated early childhood education and care (ECEC) services for Indigenous children in rural and remote locations through more effective use of existing Commonwealth and State funding for child care and preschool services.</b></p>		
<p>Aboriginal 3 and 4 year olds attend pre-school in South Australia.</p>	<p>Share service planning and funding responsibilities for indigenous early childhood strategies in remote communities.</p> <p>Share costs of Aboriginal early language and literacy programs.</p>	<p>Establish Aboriginal Children’s Centres and networked Aboriginal early childhood services in remote communities.</p> <p>Establish culturally appropriate early language and literacy programs for Aboriginal children.</p>

**Policy Direction 2: Strengthening the Health Development and Learning of 0-5 Year Olds (continued)**

**12. Develop new and innovative service models and funding arrangements in rural and remote areas where communities have difficulty accessing ECEC.**

Many rural and remote communities in South Australia benefit from existing innovative service models eg integrated services, play centres and rural care services.

Share costs of rural care expansion and extend life of current cost sharing arrangements for existing services.

Expand the rural care program to ten more small rural communities.

**POLICY DIRECTION 2**

**Total funding over 4 years: \$56.58m**

SA Government Current Commitments	Commonwealth Government Reform Proposals	SA Government Recommended Actions that Require Commonwealth Support
-----------------------------------	--	---

**Policy Direction 3: Enhancing the provision of early education and care services.**

**13. Improving the quality of early childhood education and care services.**

South Australia has implemented measures to increase the number of qualified staff in child care:  
 50 additional training places in TAFE SA Cert II/Diploma for Children's Services.  
 Up skilling of up to 100 existing workers through traineeships in Outside School Hours Care (Diploma qualification).  
 Up skilling existing workers to Diploma of Children's Services under trainee arrangements.  
 Scholarships for existing workers to upgrade their qualifications.

Apply existing Commonwealth skills development funds to early childhood workforce development.  
 Utilise the Australian Blueprint for Career Development framework and funding for mapping and building career pathways.  
 Allocate federal Quality Assurance resources to SA.  
 Fund early language and literacy programs in Federally funded child care.

Extend scholarship and traineeship programs for early childhood professionals re skills shortage and competency gaps especially for Aboriginal early childhood professionals.  
 Pilot new career pathways for workers in early childhood development sector.  
 Strengthen focus on early language and literacy.

**14. Develop an intergovernmental agreement on a national approach to quality assurance and regulations for ECEC reporting to COAG by 2008 – all jurisdictions.**

South Australia has a birth to age 18 curriculum standards and accountability framework and supports services in its implementation.  
 SA provides professional development and training to early childhood services staff.

Develop and implement unified standards and quality accreditation system in early childhood linked to skills/qualifications of managers and workers.

SA Government Current Commitments	Commonwealth Government Reform Proposals	SA Government Recommended Actions that Require Commonwealth Support
-----------------------------------	--	---

**Policy Direction 3: Enhancing the provision of early education and care services. (continued)**

**15. Increasing the access to and affordability of early childhood education and care services.**

	<p>Increase the availability of child care places for children aged 0-2 by increasing the rate of Child Care Benefit for this age group.</p> <p>Increase the rate of Child Care Benefit for ECEC services that provide places to children who are Indigenous recently arrived refugees, have a disability or are under the guardianship of the Minister.</p> <p>Provide capital support to fund Child Care places in areas of high unmet need.</p>	<p>Progressively change existing school based early childhood services into Children's Centres (funding for capital upgrades, new business systems, upgraded leadership, professional development aiming for 60 new children's centres across a four year span).</p>
<p><b>POLICY DIRECTION 3</b></p> <p><b>Total funding over 4 years: \$1.64m</b></p>		

The total funding commitment over four years to all three Policy Directions, since February 2006 is \$58.22m.

## 3.2 Priority Actions

### **POLICY DIRECTION 1: IMPROVING ANTENATAL CARE**

#### **Priority Action Area 1.1: Better Targeting of Antenatal Information and Services to Indigenous, Teenage and other Vulnerable Women and**

#### **Priority Action Area 1.2: Improve Universal Antenatal Services to Better Respond to the Needs of Pregnant Women**

The needs of Aboriginal women in the antenatal period are well documented. The critical challenge for antenatal services for Aboriginal women in South Australia has been to ensure that antenatal services extend widely enough, particularly in more remote areas, and operate according to the nine principles in the National Strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Framework Action, that women engage early in their pregnancy with health professionals.

SA supports community-based antenatal programs such as the *Regional Family Birthing program* and the *Anangu Bibi Birthing Program*. These programs aim to improve poor birthing outcomes for Aboriginal women by Aboriginal Maternal Infant Care (AMIC) workers working in partnership with midwives. The *Healthy for Life* program which promotes healthy eating and lifestyles through engagement with Aboriginal Elders is encouraging Aboriginal women to use maternal health services.

Children's Centres for early childhood development and parenting, which offer a combination of health, early learning, family support and early education and care services located primarily in schools, are extending the reach of health services to more vulnerable women and families. Children's Centres are accessible to everyone, and offer smooth pathways into the full range of maternal health services.

In addition the forthcoming National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) Antenatal Care guidelines will provide a new benchmark for assessing antenatal care in South Australia.

#### **Action**

The South Australian government will work to improve the antenatal engagement of Aboriginal women, teenagers and other vulnerable women in antenatal services by:

Promoting culturally competent resources and guidelines for healthy pregnancy and birthing for Aboriginal women.

Increasing the proportion of health professionals who are Aboriginal. This is a priority in the 2007 *South Australian Strategic Plan*

Building on successful community based approaches to engaging Aboriginal women, pregnant teenagers and other vulnerable women, especially through the establishment of Children's Centres across the state

Working with the forthcoming National Health and Medical Research Council guidelines on best practice antenatal care.

#### **The South Australian government recommends:**

Implementation of antenatal risk reduction strategies for all potentially vulnerable infants in South Australia, including providing additional support during the antenatal period,

- Expansion of existing programs and development of new initiatives for young mothers,
- Public information campaigns on the risks of smoking and alcohol use during pregnancy, and
- Increasing the accessibility of health service information in Children's Centres through a community capacity building approach that encourages early contact with pregnant women in hard-to-reach groups and builds pathways into health services.
- Development and implementation of psychosocial assessments as a part of routine antenatal visits
- Development and delivery of professional training in National Health and Medical Research Council guidelines on best practice antenatal care

## Progress Measures

South Australia will:

- Increase participation by Aboriginal and teenage mothers in antenatal support programs, attending antenatal classes and clinical appointments,
- Reduce the proportion of babies born with low birth weight [South Australian Strategic Plan 2007],
- Reduce risk taking behaviour during pregnancy (such as smoking and alcohol use),
- Reduce the proportion of pregnancies among teenagers,
- Increase the rate of healthy pregnancies and positive birth outcomes for women and babies in South Australia through innovative programs that will improve access,
- Reduce preventable adverse events that can occur during pregnancy (including domestic violence).

## POLICY DIRECTION 2: STRENGTHENING THE HEALTH, DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING OF 0-5 YEAR-OLDS

### Priority Action Area 2.1: Support Local Planning and Partnerships to Deliver Integrated Early Years Services

South Australia's early childhood reform program is bringing together State funded services for young children and families and integrating Commonwealth child care funding streams into the development of new services such as Children's Centres for Early Childhood Development and Parenting.

Inter Ministerial and interagency governance arrangements have been established to advance early childhood reform and to plan for new services. There is substantial scope to extend and deepen joint planning and investment partnerships between State and Federal governments and local communities in early childhood in South Australia.

#### Action

The South Australian government is working to:

- Extend an antenatal to age eight approach to service provision across the State, by expanding the number reach and range of services offered by the Children's Centres for Early Childhood Development and Parenting;
- Strengthen the engagement of parents of young children and local communities in the planning and governance of early childhood services, and in parent to parent volunteer and peer mentoring approaches;
- Provide local communities and service providers with the tools and resources that they need so that they can assess children's development within their communities and plan for improvement, beginning with State-wide implementation of the Australian Early Development Index and an additional million dollars for new books in preschools and child care centres.

#### The South Australian government recommends

- Development of a long term agreement between the South Australian and Australian governments that would secure and sustain the integration of early childhood services and provide a reliable platform for sustained growth and service improvement, including the expansion of Children's Centres for Early Childhood Development and Parenting,

## Progress Measures

South Australia will:

- Improve the State's performance on the Australian Early Development Index [South Australian Strategic Plan 2007] and engage parents and communities in planning based on AEDI results;
- Increase the number of Children's Centres for early childhood development and parenting and outreach sites that offer integrated maternal and child health, early child development and family support services in local communities;

- Improve outcomes for children in South Australian communities in the Physical health and wellbeing, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive skills, and communication skills and general knowledge domains measured by the AEDI;
- Improve parent satisfaction with early childhood services.

### **Priority Action Area 2.2: Support Parents' Active Participation in Their Child's Early Learning and Development**

South Australian parents with young children have access to a wide range of printed written internet and telephone-based resources about parenting and early childhood development, but evidence from parent consultations and other sources suggests that parents there is significant scope for better information and engagement with parents about early learning and development.

Every newborn baby receives a post natal home visit and assessment, which can create a powerful pathway into other early childhood services and which also offers access to the Family Home Visiting program that provides sustained home visits for families requiring additional support in the areas across South Australia where the program has been rolled out..

South Australia has population level information on early childhood health and development (which will be strengthened by implementation of the AEDI) that can be used to tailor parent information and education strategies and to promote a range of proven successful services for young children and families that do not use mainstream early childhood services.

#### **Action**

The South Australian government is working to:

- Expand the reach of proven parent support and training programs
- Link home visiting services across the health and education sectors, to deliver a broader more effective learning and development services to hard to reach families;
- Expand the reach of existing resources and information for parents with young children;
- Investigate the integration and expansion of the scope of existing developmental assessments to include assessments of family capacity, risk factors and early language and literacy development;
- Improve parents' awareness of the importance of early learning and especially early brain development, social and emotional development, and strategies for boosting language skills in young children and their dispositions to learn such as curiosity and problem solving.

#### **The South Australian government recommends:**

- Developing an Early Learning Framework to inform parents and the work of early childhood practitioners across education, care health and family support domains;
- Expanding the reach of State-wide public information for parents about the brain development and learning of children from the antenatal period to age five, so that all parents with young children understand the importance of early development and their crucial role in early learning;
- Expanding the scope of the state-wide early literacy initiatives to cover infants from birth to three, focussing on the crucial link between language acquisition and early literacy and the central role of parents in very early learning.
- Expanding proven support and training programs, such as Learning Together that focus on the role of parent/child relationships in early learning and development.

## Progress Measures

South Australia will:

- Increase parents' knowledge about the importance of early learning and development and the fundamental needs of children during the early years;
- Increase access to proven programs that build parents' confidence capacity and connections with their children, with the community and with early childhood services
- Increase attendance by parents at parenting courses
- Increase the proportion of parents using positive parenting practices as measured by the National Longitudinal Study of Australian Children

### **Priority Action Area 2.3: Provide Extra Support to Children and Families Experiencing High Levels of Disadvantage**

While South Australia has made significant progress in addressing chronic disadvantage in early childhood (for example 95% of four-year-old children are enrolled in State funded preschools, and Aboriginal preschool enrolments are now at the same level as non-Aboriginal children), outcomes for many disadvantaged children have not improved rapidly enough. An increasing number of children are in vulnerable circumstances during infancy and early childhood. This is a particular concern because evidence shows that early disadvantage persists throughout the life course and is more difficult to remediate as children grow older.

South Australia is well placed to build on the strengths of its early childhood system through a balanced combination of improvements to universal services and entitlements, better targeted responses to disadvantage and improved intensive help for high risk children and families.

The South Australian government is working to:

- Close the gaps between health development, learning and wellbeing of Aboriginal children and families and that of the non- Aboriginal children and families, as described in the 2007 release of the South Australian Strategic Plan;
- Address any further barriers to access to early childhood services by disadvantaged children including costs to families, and by creating culturally competent services
- Improve pathways and successful outcomes for disadvantaged children and families through service integration
- Expand the capacity of preventative early learning, development, health and family programs to respond to the needs of disadvantaged children through better coordinated and integrated training, and professional development.
- Recruit and train parents from disadvantaged backgrounds to support other parents with young children

### **The South Australian government recommends**

- Implementation of a Vulnerable Infants Service Plan across the State for all young children at risk of entering the child protection system, to improve the safety security and early development of very young children and reduce the prevalence of child abuse and neglect;
- Expansion of the Family Home Visiting Program across the State, to afford State-wide coverage for children and families at risk
- Expansion of the Rapid Response approach to service delivery to all vulnerable young children across South Australia
- Delivery of proven parenting programs in all Children's Centres for Early Childhood Development and Parenting and in preschools child care centres and other early childhood sites, with a particular emphasis on Aboriginal and high risk families.

- Extending the current entitlement to universal teacher-led quality preschool education to all three and four years olds, to ensure more children have access to State funded preschool at an earlier age
- Increasing the preschool entitlement from twelve to fifteen hours per week for forty weeks in the year before children attend school, beginning with disadvantaged and vulnerable children , and increase access by these children to high quality full day year round early learning and vacation care programs
- Extending the preschool entitlement of Aboriginal and additional needs children and children under Guardianship from two to three years, as an earlier response to the chronic disadvantages faced by children in these circumstances

### **Progress Measures**

South Australia will:

- Close the gap between disadvantaged children and the wider population as measured through developmental and other assessments in early childhood and schooling;
- Over time shift government investment from remediation later in life to prevention during early childhood
- Improve the wellbeing, health, learning and development of Aboriginal children to levels comparable with other South Australian children.

### **Priority Action Area 2.4: Intervene Early To Reduce Child Health and Development Problems**

South Australia has a strong existing focus on early intervention, but needs to build more effective connections between assessment services and mainstream and specialist early childhood support services for young children, and expand proven early intervention models.

#### **Action :**

The South Australian government is working to:

- Bring together separate sources of information about the development learning and wellbeing into a single information base for tracking and monitoring the development of all young children in South Australia;
- Link diagnosis and assessment more rapidly and effectively with mainstream and specialist early childhood services
- Upgrade existing developmental assessments to include early language and social risk factors

#### **The South Australian government recommends :**

- Extending support for children with learning and behaviour difficulties to children below three years of age,
- Introducing centralised child records and resource allocation for all children with identified developmental delays from birth to five,
- Expanding existing population screening approach to include early language and psychosocial assessments so as to provide better information for planning improvement
- Expanding the reach of early intervention, assessment, and support services in rural communities, to minimise dislocation and costs to rural families and improve services to children with additional needs outside the metropolitan area.

### **Progress Measures**

South Australia will:

- Increase the rate of early detection of deficits and delays in young children in South Australia

- Improve the quality and timeliness of responses from early childhood services to children with developmental risks
- Reduce the need for late remediation of developmental issues over time by delivering better prevention in early childhood
- Lift parents' confidence in the ability of early childhood services to respond to young children with additional needs, beginning with rural communities
- Increase the percentage of mothers who breastfeed their infants for at least six months

### **Priority Action Area 2.5: Improve the Early Years Workforce**

The qualification levels of early childhood professionals - and the proportion of early childhood staff that are qualified – are the best predictors of good outcomes for children using early childhood services. The proportion of qualified personnel and the qualification levels of early childhood staff vary widely across the early childhood sector in South Australia. Some areas have relatively high levels of university trained personnel, while others, such as child care centres, operate with personnel with a two year diploma qualification. Some parts of the early childhood workforce – such as early childhood teachers in preschools, schools and Children's Centres – are in stable long term jobs with relatively high wages and good working conditions. Other areas are marked by chronic difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff with basic qualifications.

Career pathways and professional development opportunities are fragmented and can be slow to respond to the needs of a high quality early childhood workforce. At the same time the integration of service delivery in early childhood - across preschools, schools, child care, maternal and child health and family support – is calling for new competencies that span professional disciplines and new forms of leadership in integrated early childhood services and new integrated forms of professional development.

#### **Action**

The South Australian government is working to:

- Improve the supply and retention rates of qualified early childhood professionals,
- Reform pre-service and in-service training to focus on core competencies on early childhood development which span the early education, medical allied health and social work professions,
- Lift the skills of all professions working with young children and strengthen their shared understanding of early development and learning.
- Create incentives for early childhood services and practitioners to upgrade their skills and qualifications
- Design and deliver an integrated early childhood professional development program as a central element of a quality improvement strategy for all early childhood services.
- Increase the proportion of qualified Aboriginal people working in early childhood services and improve the existing qualifications of Aboriginal early childhood professionals

#### **The South Australian government recommends:**

- Development and implementation of an early childhood workforce development strategy for South Australia that includes:
- Design and implementation of an integrated pre-service training structure and core curriculum for the early childhood workforce to lift the skills of all people working with young children and strengthen their shared understanding of early development, learning, and brain development, skills for working with parents and skills for working in integrated settings.
- More subsidised training places and traineeships for child care staff seeking minimum qualifications;
- Subsidised training places for early childhood professionals seeking to upgrade qualifications, with a particular focus on child care staff seeking university degrees;
- Skilling multidisciplinary early childhood teams in integrated services, such as Children's Centres for Early Childhood Development and Parenting.

- Ongoing data collection and analysis of early childhood labour force needs.
- Accreditation of early childhood services on the basis of demonstrated professional skills and specialisations and information to parents to help them to recognise quality early childhood programs.
- Development of Children's Centres as Twenty-First Century training services for other parts of the early childhood sector.

### **Progress Measures**

South Australia will:

- Increase the number of people working with young children in South Australia that have a relevant post-secondary qualification
- Increase the proportion of university trained staff working with young children
- Design and implement pre-service training pathways across child care, teaching, nursing and social work with a common focus on early childhood development, early brain development and cross-disciplinary work with parents
- Ensure that quality assurance and regulatory systems specifically accredit the skills and relevant specialisations in early childhood services

### **POLICY DIRECTION 3: ENHANCING THE PROVISION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE SERVICES**

South Australia has a significant long standing investment in its preschool and schools, in its teaching workforce, in its capital infrastructure in preschools, schools and child care centres, and in curriculum development and support for better teaching which could be reoriented to these new goals. The State has major leading roles in early childhood curriculum development and professional support for early childhood educators, in the regulation of minimum standards for early childhood services and in child-focussed quality improvement. The work of South Australia and the Commonwealth could be more strategically and efficiently aligned to promote a better quality assurance system in early childhood.

South Australian parents with young children have told government that the service system for young children is fragmented, hard to understand and difficult to access. They point to inconsistency in the rules that govern access and entitlements, and emphasise the adverse impact of a service system that is structured on the basis of conflicting policy goals and disparate professional silos rather than on the needs of young children and families.

South Australia sees early education and care as one part of a universal, integrated early childhood service system. Early education and care in South Australia is being reconfigured as part of a new commitment to develop holistic services for children from the antenatal period to eight years of age.

#### **Action**

The South Australian government is working to:

- Improve the availability of early childhood services by expanding its Children's Centres for Early Childhood Development and Parenting program and specific initiatives in small rural and remote communities
- Increase access to effective programs that promote the development of both parents and children together, such as the Learning Together and Through the Looking Glass programs
- Develop better connections between services across education and care, maternal and child health and family support,
- Improve flexibility, lower costs to families and provide hours of operation that better suit the needs of working families with young children
- Ensure better quality learning and development opportunities for children, through quality improvement measures, better training and better regulatory practices.

## The South Australian government recommends

- Finalisation of a long term agreement between the South Australian and Australian governments that would:
- Sharpen the focus on early learning and development and especially language and early literacy in all early childhood environments
- Upgrade State-owned early childhood services to Children's Centres for Early Childhood Development and Parenting within the public education system and link other early childhood services into hub and spoke support networks
- Implement a quality improvement strategy that simplifies and rationalises existing government roles, reduces administrative burdens on services and provides a sharper focus on continuous improvement.
- Increasing access to effective programs that promote the development of both parents and children together, such as the Learning Together and Through the Looking Glass programs

## Progress Measures

South Australia will:

- Deliver demonstrated improvements in the learning and development of South Australian children over time;
- Introduce more accreditation and effective quality improvement practices in early childhood services with better information to help parents choose quality programs;
- Increase utilisation of early childhood services by South Australian families, and by disadvantaged families in particular
- Deliver a broader range of linked early childhood services in early childhood sites
- Improve professional practices in early childhood services, including continuity in professional practices for children from birth to eight
- Use the AEDI and year one literacy testing and other relevant measures [South Australian Strategic Plan 2007] to assess progress and plan improvements.

## 4. Next Steps

Compelling scientific evidence indicates that effective action and investment in early childhood will reduce social inequality and build a healthier more competent and productive Australia

This Plan proposes a ten-year program of concrete action by the South Australian and Commonwealth governments on behalf of young children and their families. It combines short, medium, and long term priorities, based on the best available information about what will make a difference for South Australia's youngest citizens and their families.

The South Australian government has demonstrated its commitment to improvement in early childhood and is keen to build on this foundation through effective long term partnerships with the Federal government.