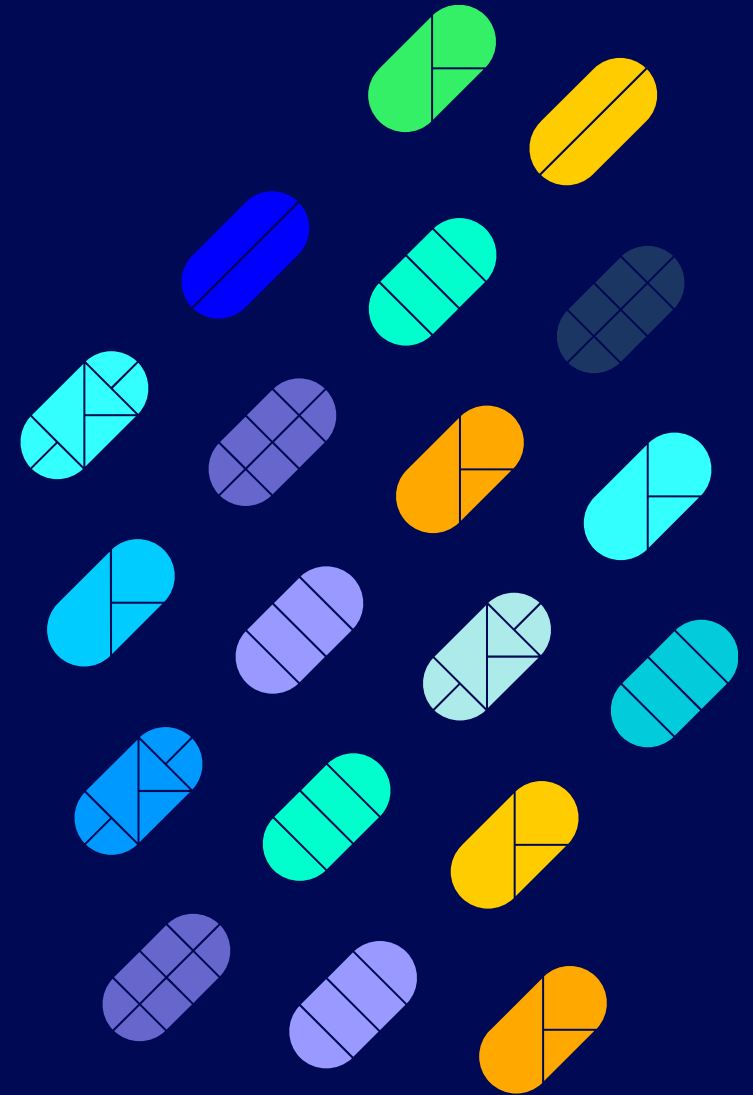


Final Report

August 2023



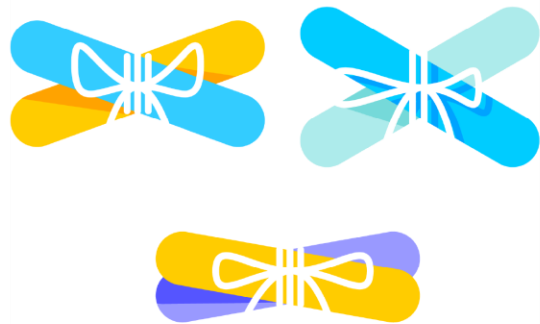
Royal Commission *into*
**Early Childhood
Education & Care**





The Final Report provides a roadmap for:

- A universal but not uniform system that means help gets where it is needed, from birth through to the school years
- Higher quality early childhood and OSHC services, irrespective of postcode or who is providing the service
- A long-term vision for South Australia to be a nation leader in early childhood development, bringing together best practice, research and data



Building an early child development system

There is no universal inter-connected system connecting families to the right opportunities at the right time to support healthy child development

An ambitious **twenty-year goal** of reducing the proportion of South Australian children who are developmentally vulnerable from 23.8 per cent to 15 per cent by 2043 (Recommendation 1)

A **newly empowered Office for the Early Years** (Recommendation 2)

- With a legislative mandate to provide strategic direction across the State Government in health, human services, and education and care in the early years
- With levers to connect and align the work of a vast array of not-for-profit and for-profit providers of services to children and families, particularly those offering child care
- With a new, locally embedded workforce to mobilise government and non-government providers in every community to deliver high-quality three-year-old preschool, and support translation of cutting-edge insights about supporting healthy child development into everyday practice. (Recommendation 16)

A **new universal child development data system** and an **ambitious world-class research agenda** focused on translating what works into the settings where children are now (Recommendations 4 and 6); leveraging a new preschool outcomes measure (Recommendation 29)

Investment in the regulator, the Education Standards Board, to ensure quality (Recommendation 7)



Leading the national conversation

There is **significant appetite** for reform – from the Commonwealth, from states, from the sector

The Commission recommends (Recommendation 3) that

State should assume primary responsibility for:

- **quality** in the early childhood education and care sector, including for child care, preschool and OSHC
- **‘the glue’** - connecting these services to other early years services such as health and family supports, given states often provide or fund these and, importantly, have the local knowledge and footprint to make these connections.

The Commonwealth should take primary responsibility for:

- supporting **accessibility** and **affordability**, including in relation to preschool, which is currently fragmented from the broader early childhood education and care system
- providing **inclusion** support

cf. States and Commonwealth have shared responsibility for accessibility in OSHC, noting the role of states as public school provider

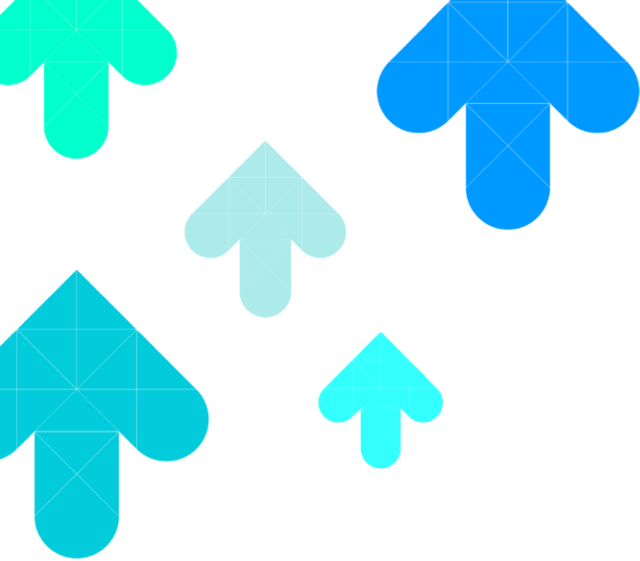
Fixing child care deserts

Economic opportunity is being left on the table because of a lack of child care, especially in regional areas

The Commission recommends that the State should take a proactive role in fixing access to child care (Recommendation 9), including:

- funding business cases for communities with no access
- regular provision of supply and demand information by Infrastructure SA
- a benchmark performance indicator of two years from identification of the need for a new facility in an area meeting a specified threshold of demand, to its successful establishment
- sharing existing government facilities (for example, school sites)
- governance and administrative support for volunteer committees setting up local, community-managed not-for-profit services
- support for innovative service models, such as ‘in-venue care’ or shared corporate services support for community-managed not-for-profits
- targeted strategies to support localised workforce development

While negotiations with Commonwealth are ongoing, consider direct provision or procurement of services with a clearly articulated and transparent policy for when the State Government will provide services directly (Recommendation 10)



Supporting families in the first 1000 days

Families are at the heart of healthy child development – but families find it hard to know what to do and where to find help

The Commission recommends that Government:

- Ensure families get consistent, easy-to-understand information about how to support their child wherever they go, by expanding Words Grow Minds (Recommendation 12)
- Ensure successful delivery of universal child development checks, and consider making CaFHS parenting groups ‘opt out’ rather than ‘opt in’ (Recommendation 11)
- Connect services to each other in the early years, making it easier for families to get what they need wherever they go (Recommendation 8) by:
 - Making ‘hubs’ or ‘integrated services’ like Children’s Centres the default
 - Using the locally based teams of the Office for the Early Years to create opportunities for different services to connect, on the ground
 - Supporting a community of practice, and build better evidence about how to make these services successful
- Supporting improved inclusion practices at long day care, through professional development, access to specialist expertise and so on (Recommendation 13)
 - Noting the Commission’s view that funding to support inclusion is primarily a Commonwealth responsibility (Recommendation 3)
- Connect families with children at child protection risk to early childhood education and care in the first 1000 days (Recommendation 28)



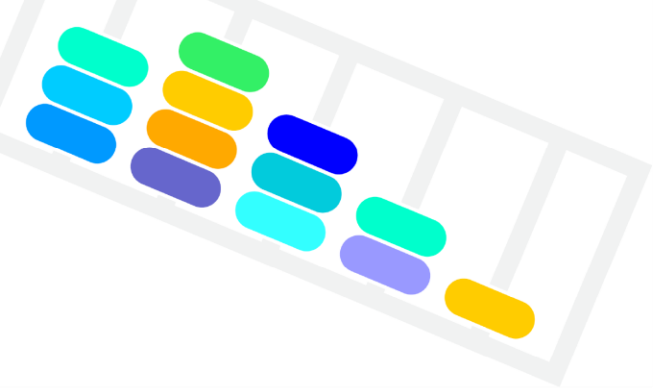
Aboriginal-led policy for Aboriginal children

There is an opportunity to:

- leverage the investment arising from the Royal Commission to invest in Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, and
- have an early, tangible area for co-design with South Australia's Voice to Parliament.

The Commission recommends :

- South Australia's First Nations Voice to Parliament and other Aboriginal representative organisations be engaged in designing an approach to ensure that Aboriginal children retain the benefits from their already operating three year-old preschool model, as well as have the opportunity to improve it.
 - This should be supported by an ongoing funding commitment of around \$10.8 million per annum, on top of the cost of delivery of preschool (equivalent to current funding commitment for Aboriginal three-year-old preschool) (Recommendation 32)
- The State strengthen Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, and the role of Aboriginal communities in ECEC (Recommendation 14). Opportunities include:
 - prioritising ACCOs in commissioning new integrated service hubs in areas of high developmental vulnerability, and
 - quarantining a portion of new preschool funding for layered supports for ACCOs to partner with services on improving cultural safety.



3-year-old preschool - more for those who need it

Developmentally vulnerable children are found in families in all walks of life

All children benefit from two years of high quality preschool, but vulnerable children benefit more – and are likely to benefit from more hours

One size does not fit all – we need a flexible system that is able to layer supports in response to need

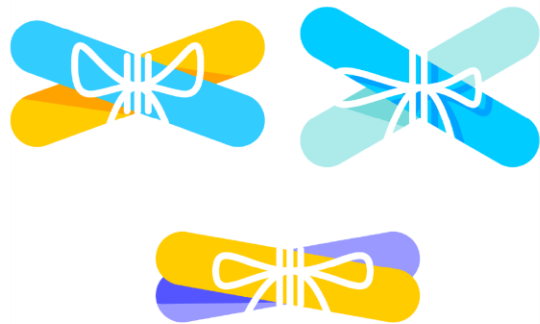
The definition of preschool needs to expand beyond a program of teacher-led learning, to include:

- A teacher operating with support from allied health and other professionals
- Early identification of a child’s developmental needs on site, and organised pathways to interventions
- Organised pathways to parental and community supports (Recommendation 19).

South Australia should be the first jurisdiction to offer more hours of three-year-old preschool to those who need it (Recommendations 25 and 26)

- Targeting additional hours should leverage the nation-leading research and early childhood data infrastructure recommended earlier

There needs to be active outreach to ensure full participation (Recommendation 20), including alternative models for children in communities with very low rates of access (Recommendation 27)



Delivery of 3-year-old preschool

State Government investment will **improve quality for all children accessing long day care** (58,000 children – about half of children under five) – not just three-year-olds

The Commonwealth is considering a **universal 90 per cent Child Care Subsidy rate** (via the Productivity Commission, due to report in June 2024) that **would change the game** in terms of cost comparison

The Report sets preconditions for a universal government preschool offering at age three (Recommendation 15)

- At the moment, the State Government should not offer places in government preschool to children already attending a non-government setting at age three
- However, this can be reviewed once the workforce pipeline is developed, Commonwealth funding arrangements are clearer, and preschool out of school hours care is widely available at government preschools

South Australia has a proud history of low fee, high quality preschool (though it has not traditionally been free)

- The Commission recommends targeted fee relief should be available for disadvantaged families or families facing a sudden change in financial circumstances in all preschool settings (Recommendation 18)
- Comparing the cost of preschool in long day care to government preschool is challenging, and depends on what families need before and after short preschool days.
- Prior to 2026, when Commonwealth settings are known, the Commission recommends State Government should take the opportunity to review whether fee relief is offered to families in long day care (Recommendation 18)

The Commission recommends that the State Government use three-year-old preschool to promote quality in the sector overall, by

- only investing in capacity in particular providers (Recommendation 21), and
- targeting support to services that are ‘working towards’ the national quality standard (Recommendation 30).



Building the early childhood workforce

There is a **national shortage** of early childhood educators and teachers

In South Australia, the **shortage in long day care is particularly acute**, with early childhood teachers tending to flow to the government preschool sector

28% of long day care providers do not have a fully qualified teacher in a designated role

Fixing the workforce pipeline involves attraction, training and development (including upskilling), transition to work and early career support and ongoing professional development

The Commission recommends establishment of an Early Childhood Workforce Fund, worth \$56 million in the first four years, modelled on NSW and Victorian expenditures (Recommendation 22).

- A newly appointed Early Childhood Workforce Coordinator General should undertake the urgent task of building the early childhood workforce pipeline, in partnership with universities, vocational education and training (VET) providers and the sector (Recommendation 23).

The State Government should move **quickly** to allow registration of early childhood teachers holding a three-year degree for teaching children aged birth to 5, on a separate register:

- bringing existing qualified teachers into the sector and providing a faster pathway for building the workforce (Recommendation 24)
- allowing specialisation in early childhood, as current four-year birth-to-eight teaching degrees are dominated by primary school teaching.
- State Government may wish to commission an independent review comparing AITSL and ACECQA standards for early education.

The Commission's three-year-old preschool model includes significant investments in quality for teachers (Recommendation 17)

- It also allows for alternative programs led by diploma qualified, intensively supported educators, *only where a teacher is not available*, while workforce is being developed (Recommendation 31).



More – and better – OSHC

Families want better access to OSHC, and higher quality services

New South Wales provides a template for rapid expansion of OSHC access

The **single biggest lever** for the State Government in this area is improving provision of OSHC on Department for Education school sites

Currently, making **Governing Councils** responsible for OSHC, leaves management of **significant operational risk** to volunteer management committees, and **makes it harder to build quality and coverage quickly**

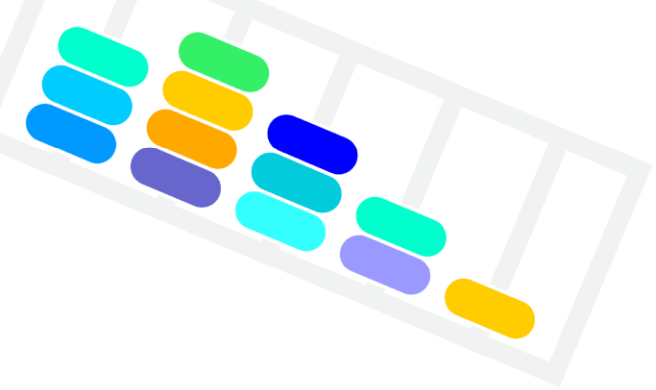
The Department for Education should:

- Survey parents, and immediately tender provision of OSHC on any site with a level of unmet demand that is considered financially viable (Recommendation 33)
- Make it easier for OSHC services to operate on school sites (Recommendation 34), and better support principals (Recommendation 36)
- Become the default provider or contract manager of OSHC, rather than leaving this with volunteer Governing Councils (Recommendation 38)
 - This includes supporting Governing Council-led to transition away from direct provision
- Take a system-wide monitoring and quality support role for OSHC on government school sites (Recommendation 39)

The Commission recommends modernising workforce qualifications to provide a more stable, sustainable OSHC workforce (Recommendation 35)

- Currently, every second OSHC worker needs to be diploma qualified. This is the highest standard in the nation.
- The Commission recommends a two-tier system similar to other states. The first qualified worker in a service should hold a diploma or certificate IV OSHC qualification with experience. Subsequent qualified workers should hold a relevant certificate III or higher.

The State should work with jurisdictions to ensure fit-for-purpose regulatory approach to OSHC (Recommendation 37)



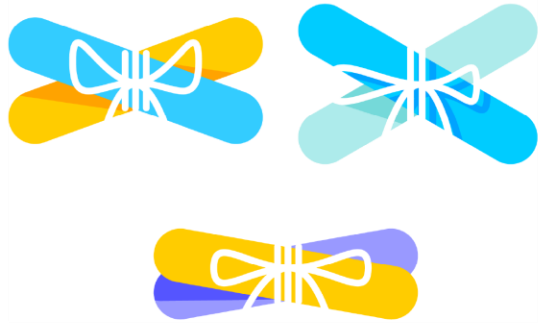
Inclusion in OSHC

Some families of children with disability find it very challenging to participate in the workforce because they can't access OSHC

The Commonwealth should do more to provide children who need it 1:1 support in long day care and OSHC

The Commission recommends:

- ensuring the specialist support and planning for children with disability at government schools includes consideration of OSHC (Recommendation 40)
- improving access to OSHC at special schools within three years (Recommendation 41)
- partnering with the Commonwealth to trial different models of making government OSHC more inclusive, as well as National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) service provision compatible (Recommendation 42).



Preschool OSHC

Expansion of preschool to three-year-olds increases the **urgency of family friendly provision of government preschool**

The Commission recommends trialling a number of models, with a view to rolling out wrap around care (or preschool OSHC) on government preschool sites from 2025 (Recommendation 43). Models include:

- running a preschool-specific OSHC service from the preschool site (either directly operated by the Department for Education or a third party provider)
- supporting family day care ‘in-venue’ provision (where the educator operates from the government preschool site)

The Commission finds that the must amend the Child Care Subsidy Minister’s Rules 2017 to allow these services to be eligible for Child Care Subsidy and ensure South Australian families are not unfairly disadvantaged (Recommendation 5)



Some recommendations for the Commonwealth

In addition to expressing views about a national settlement (Recommendation 3), the Commission makes a number of specific recommendations to the Commonwealth (Recommendation 5), including:

- allowing State Government access to Child Care Subsidy data
- extending changes to the Child Care Subsidy to enable all families to access up to three days a week of care without the need to meet any activity test
- considering a needs-based funding model for early childhood education and care
- considering differential pricing for younger children with higher educator-to-child ratios in the Child Care Subsidy
- ensuring families of children attending special schools are not unfairly financially disadvantaged in accessing OSHC
- supporting an increase in pay for the early childhood education and care workforce
- amending the Child Care Subsidy Minister Rules 2017 to facilitate in situ care on government preschool sites out of school hours.

Building an early child development system

