

World Vision Australia (WVA) Submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Childcare and Early Childhood Learning

February 2014

World Vision Australia (WVA) first worked with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Australians in 1974 and our involvement has continued to grow. As a child-focused agency, World Vision works for the best interests of children. We do this by supporting families and communities to gain the knowledge, skills and access to services they need to achieve their goals and overcome disadvantages. WVA works through strong partnerships, strong community voices and local solutions for local needs, empowering people to run the programs that they want to see, to create a brighter future for their children.

Currently WVA is implementing in partnership two early childhood care and development projects in remote Aboriginal regions namely the East Pilbara and Central Desert regions. WVA also contributes its experience and expertise from administering development programs and systems through a global network. We do this to help foster conditions that enable positive and sustainable change in the lives of children and families, not only economically, but also more broadly in terms of capability and social participation. .

This submission, made by WVA, draws from this collective knowledge, experience and expertise, and expresses the views of WVA only.

Recommendations and Terms of Reference (TOR):

Given the very broad TOR provided by the productivity commission, to guide this submission World Vision Australia has chosen to focus on a sub section of the TOR only, and provide a response relating specifically to remote Indigenous early childhood care and development based on our knowledge and experience in the sector.

World Vision's submission responds to the following aspects of the TOR:

2. The current and future need for child care in Australia, including consideration of the following:

- b) the particular needs of rural, regional and remote parents, as well as shift workers;
- d) types of child care available including but not limited to: long day care, family day care, in home care including nannies and au pairs, mobile care, occasional care, and outside school hours care;
- i) the capacity of the existing child care system to ensure children are transitioning from child care to school with a satisfactory level of school preparedness
- j) opportunities to improve connections and transitions across early childhood services (including between child care and preschool/kindergarten services).
- k) the needs of vulnerable or at risk children ("at risk" as defined in the Issues paper as including Indigenous children).

WVA Recommendations to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Childcare and Early Childhood Learning:

1. Commit to and realise the right for all Australian children, especially vulnerable and at risk children: to access quality early childhood care and development (ECCD)¹, including but not exclusive to child care, with a focused and intentional outcome of supporting families to optimise their children's development so that they are ready for lifelong learning.
2. Adopt and commit to meaningful and achievable targets for increasing Australia's percentage of the GDP allocated to early childhood care and development programs and services.
3. Finalise the review of the Australian Government Budget Based Funded Services Program to ensure equity in access, quality and funding for early childhood care and development programs for all remote Indigenous children and families.
4. Collaboratively develop, establish and commit to a long term, strategic and co-ordinated approach to Indigenous early childhood care and development that is:
 - a) driven, owned, managed and governed by Aboriginal controlled organisations.
 - b) flexible in service delivery and programs, within an integrated approach aligned to the priorities and aspirations articulated by communities for their children and families.
 - c) committed to holistic child and family development.

WVA rationale and evidence to support each recommendation

1. ***Commit to and realise the right for all Australian children, especially vulnerable and at risk children: to access quality early childhood care and development (ECCD)², including but not exclusive to child care, with a focused and intentional outcome of supporting families to optimise their children's development so that they are ready for lifelong learning.***

The outcomes in the early years need to embrace a holistic framework of child and family development if Australia really wants to make a difference and close the gap on Indigenous disadvantage. Focusing only on aspects of ECCD such as child care and school preparedness goes against compelling evidence of the critical importance of holistic, integrated interventions early in life, beginning at pregnancy, to improve later developmental outcomes, educational readiness, health, economic and life success. Evidence has noted that readiness for school is a relational concept and that the child's family, community and school must also be 'ready' if the child is to make a positive transition into the school environment.³ The notion of holistic child and family development, as opposed to school readiness provides a frame work that's highlights the importance of the many aspects of children's development including physical, cognitive, social, cultural, spiritual and emotional development.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child also provides a useful framework for focusing efforts on children's immediate wellbeing. In particular the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's

¹ WVA defines ECCD as the holistic development of children including physical, cognitive, social, cultural, spiritual and emotional development from prenatal to age five.

² WVA defines ECCD as the holistic development of children including physical, cognitive, social, cultural, spiritual and emotional development from prenatal to age five.

³ See Dockett, Sue and Bob Perry. "Readiness for School: A Relational Construct." *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood* 34, no. 1 (2009): 20—26.

General Comment No 7 'Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood'⁴ emphasises the importance of building the capacity of individuals and institutions to better advocate and protect children's interests, the need for multi-sectoral intervention programs and the professional development of practitioners charged with ensuring children have access to an appropriate standard of health care, living and social security. The General Comment also pays particular attention to the lack of provisions for children under three years of age and calls for all signatories to the Convention to ensure that infants and toddlers have access to high quality care and adopt an education policy that begins at birth. Signatories are also advised to ensure strategies for improving the well-being of very young children are developed in conjunction with their families and communities rather than imposing a standard one size fits all approach.

2. Adopt and commit to meaningful and achievable targets for increasing Australia's percentage of the GDP allocated to early childhood care and development programs and services.

Overall, Indigenous children measured in their first year of full-time school are not doing as well as their non-Indigenous counterparts⁵. The proportion of Indigenous children with development vulnerabilities increases with the community's remoteness. In 2012, 22% of Australian children were developmentally vulnerable on one or more domains of the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) and 11% of children were developmentally vulnerable on two or more domains. Vulnerability was particularly marked with Indigenous children.⁶

Australia ranks in the bottom three of OECD countries in benchmark standards relating to early childhood education and care; and is near the bottom (30/34) of OECD countries for the percentage of 3-5-year-olds in early learning or preschool.⁷ This is in contrast to New Zealand for example, which has 95% of all children being reached by early childhood education before starting primary school.⁸ International evidence suggests globally that fifteen-year-old students who attended ECCD programs tend to perform better educationally than those who did not, even after accounting for their socio-economic backgrounds. Research emphasises that the benefits from early interventions are conditional on the level of "quality" of ECCD that children experience.⁹ *The average expenditure on early childhood care and education averages in OECD countries is around 0.5% of overall GDP, while Australia expends 0.1%*¹⁰

"Investments of time and money in the early years have shown to be far more cost effective than investments made at any other time"
(Source: Heckman & Masterov 2004.2)

As children account for more than one third of the Indigenous population the long term impact of the disadvantage they experience during childhood will have an exponential impact on future adult populations. Recent breakthroughs in neurobiological research together with cost benefit analysis of the development of human capital have demonstrated the importance of investing well in the early years. At no other time in a person's life is the brain more plastic and able to grow and develop in response to warm nurturing relationships and stimulating environments.

⁴ UNICEF. "General Comments of the Committee on the Rights of the Child." Florence, Italy: Innocenti Research Centre, 2006.

<http://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/crcgencommen.pdf>

⁵ Centre for Community Child Health and Telethon Institute for Child Health Research. "A Snapshot of Early Childhood Development in Australia: Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) National Report 2009." Canberra: Australian Government, 2009.

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/research/aedisnapshot.pdf>

⁶ AMA. "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Report Card 2012-2013: The Healthy Early Years - Getting the Right Start in Life." Canberra: AMA, 2013.

⁷ ARACY. "The Nest Agenda: A National Plan for Child and Youth Wellbeing." 2013.

⁸ OECD. "Education Indicators in Focus 2013/02 (February)." OECD Publishing, Paris, 2013.

⁹ Taguma, Miho, Ineke Litjens and Kelly Makowieki. "Quality Matters in Early Childhood Education and Care: Sweden 2013." Paris: OECD Publishing, 2013.

¹⁰ OECD Education Indicators in Focus, 2013.

3. Finalise the review of the Australian Government Budget Based Funded Services Program to ensure equity in access, quality and funding for early childhood care and development programs for all remote Indigenous children and families.

Budget Based Funded Services (BBF) were established in 2003 by the then Australian Government through the consolidation of a historical range of funding arrangements.¹¹ There are approximately 342 services predominantly located in rural, remote and Indigenous communities. A review of the BBF program was undertaken in 2012 by consultancy firm PricewaterhouseCoopers and later an external Stakeholder Reference Group was established to provide advice and feedback on issues raised during the review and how these may be addressed by the program into the future. To date the review has not been made public.¹²

It is critical the BBF program, inclusive of the 38 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child and Family Centres, directed to remote Indigenous communities is redesigned to be owned, driven and managed by local communities and their chosen representatives. Future BBF services need to be adequately resourced to ensure quality integrated child and family services support families to optimise their children's development so that they are ready for lifelong learning. Evidence drawn from Australian and international studies of the impact of early childhood services on children's wellbeing clearly demonstrates that quality early childhood service delivery systems boast the following key attributes:

- High quality educational and care programs in the years before school
- Early learning programs supported by community
- Early childhood educators are qualified and well resourced
- Locally based training to ensure a local qualified workforce of early childhood practitioners.
- Evidence based process and practices
- Support to families and communities to be strong in their roles in children's lives
- Strong community partnerships
- Culturally relevant practice
- Strengths-based, two-way learning and development¹³

This will require ongoing Australian Government funding for a redesigned BBF program, including commitment and ongoing operational funding to the 38 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child and Family Centres, and new funding to ensure all vulnerable children have access to quality ECCD services. Currently the distribution across remote Indigenous communities of BBF funding is ad hoc, a product of historical policies, decisions and programs exclusive of need and equity, without a transparent logic to those communities who receive and those who don't.

4. Collaboratively develop, establish and commit to a long term, strategic and co-ordinated approach to Indigenous early childhood care and development that is:

a. driven, owned, managed and governed by Aboriginal controlled organisations.

International and local evidence shows that optimal outcomes in programs and services are achieved when they are driven by the people they are intended to benefit.¹⁴ This approach enables people to

¹¹ DEEWR, *Quality Early Childhood Education and Care for Children in Regional Remote and Indigenous communities: Review of the Budget Based Funding Program*, Canberra: Australian Government. 2012.

¹² Education.gov.au. "Budget Based Funding Program Review | Department of Education." 2014. <http://education.gov.au/budget-based-funding-program-review> (accessed 29 Jan 2014).

¹³ Harrison, Linda J, Sharon Goldfield, Eliza Metcalfe and Tim Moore. "Early learning programs that promote children's developmental and educational outcomes: Resource Sheet no 15." Produced for the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse. Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2012

¹⁴ Stanley, Fiona. "On the ground: Key to successful policy outcomes." *Griffith Review* no. 41 (2013): 200.

devise and implement their own programs, with government and others in supporting roles. The World Bank, for example, has invested more than \$10 billion into community-driven development in the last decade in response to the effectiveness of the approach.¹⁵ This approach is consistent with what Indigenous people and organisations continue to say. A range of successful initiatives and partnerships driven by Indigenous people and organisations take this approach in Australia and these strengths can be built upon and learned from.

We urge the Government to consider in this review of child care and early learning, the critical importance of having Indigenous specific services that are governed and managed by local Indigenous leaders and workers. WVA realises that the aspiration of Indigenous driven, owned, managed and governed early childhood services in all locations requires system change, strengthening of capability and transfer of responsibility and authority, that will take time, expertise and investment. The investment of time and resources in capacity strengthening will vary from place to place and in some places a phased transfer of responsibility and authority will be required.

Local governance and respect for local decision making is critical. Throughout the last five years World Vision Australia has witnessed many instances where the communities have been consulted and then policy makers have gone away and done their best to achieve the services that they believe the community has asked for. But there good intentions have often confused community members who are puzzled either by the lack of action or the result of the consultations which is often something quite different from what the community expected. It is imperative that decisions and program models are not the result of one off consultations but are co-designed in an ongoing partnership with communities through continual dialogue about what is possible and not possible and why. Communities often have their own solutions to blockages but can't enact these solutions if they are not informed about what is holding things up. This is critical both in development and then implementation phases.

b. Flexible in delivery and service modelling promoting an integrated approach to the delivery of a community visions and aspirations for their children and families.

International and local evidence also shows that effective change in early childhood care and development and other social and economic outcomes is achieved and measured not through independent programs and projects but through the sustained success of integrated programs, projects and services over time. Experiences elsewhere have shown that greater collaboration, service coordination, a shared vision and leadership can lead to an integrated service system and, over time, to improved lives for all Australian children.¹⁶

In one community the a long standing local Aboriginal teaching assistant had to give up her position because she was caring for four children under five and there was no child care available.

In several other communities Aboriginal health worker positions remain unfilled even though there are plenty of capable women who could take up these positions but they do not have access to childcare and are unwilling to leave their children with relatives

"World Vision is there to help but later on when they are gone we will be doing it ourselves because what we learn from them is giving us a good opportunity to run our own child care. They have been supporting us but we are supporting each other sharing what we want to talk about We have been all working together to make child care a strong place for our children."

Warlpiri women talking to Janet Hunt about their early childhood project ECCD project (CAEPR working paper no. 86/2012)

¹⁵ The World Bank, "Community-Driven Development Overview". 2013. Washington D.C: The World Bank Group.

<http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/communitydrivendevelopment/overview>

¹⁶ Pritchard, Paul, Suzanne Purdon and Jennifer Chaplyn. "Moving Forward Together – A guide to support the integration of service delivery for children and families." 2010.

Practically, this means programs with a goal of improving early childhood care and development outcomes are part of an integrated portfolio of programs led by community members that includes early childcare and development programs and services connected with, for example, employment programs, health programs, school participation programs and safety, land and cultural programs.

World Vision Australia calls on the government to adopt the advice provided by many leading researchers and policy analysts with regard to ‘partnering’ or ‘engaging’ Aboriginal and Torres Strait people in their own programs and services¹⁷. We have found through our work in remote communities that there is an absence of this approach in early childhood services which tend to be supply rather than demand driven. This means almost without exception that the service model utilised is decided somewhere remote from the community and based upon a theoretical understanding of community needs rather than an examination of what is really required by the community. This often results in an underutilisation of services and community frustration that their needs are not being addressed. For example, we have firsthand examples of policy that assumes that child care is not needed in remote communities and that playgroups will suffice.

In our experience child care as well as playgroup is often needed for a number of reasons, these include the fact that many young children are in the care of grandparents who are elderly, tired and often unwell, women are often prevented from taking up local employment opportunities through the lack of child care availability. In addition to this we strongly support the model of ‘Family Centres’ that are able to ensure that all the needs of children and their family are delivered with an integrated approach to health, early education, and family support.

We urge the government therefore to adopt a demand driven, flexible and integrated approach that will result better utilisation of services, community engagement and outcomes for young children.

c. Committed to holistic child and family development.

We congratulate the government on its recognition that child care and early learning plays an important role in helping Indigenous children, especially those in remote locations, develop skills that will assist them with a smooth transition to school and can set them up well for success at school. WVA acknowledges that school readiness is only part of a child’s development. Holistic child and family development acknowledges the range of areas including physical, cognitive, social, cultural, spiritual and emotional that are essential to establish the strong foundations for life including formal schooling. Working from an ecological model of human development, WVA acknowledges the interrelationship of children’s wellbeing and the systems that impact including the family, community, social and political and the need for all these levels to supplement and complement each other in closing the gap. UNICEF in its recording of child poverty in rich countries highlights the need for policies and programs that address the issues of structural poverty and institutional discrimination.

As an example of this interrelationship we urge the government, not to lose sight of the need for remote schools in particular to adapt their curriculum, pedagogy and community engagement policies and practices so that they are well positioned to receive children into formal schooling. In our own school transition programs, partner schools have been astounded at the increase in children’s attendance and in their ability to increasingly engage families in their children’s education when the schools themselves participate in early childhood activities led and managed by the families themselves. School transition programs need to have both an emphasis on the readiness of the children for school and equally the readiness of the schools to engage with the children and their families and be willing to develop mutual understandings of the families’ needs and aspirations for their children.

¹⁷ Hunt, Janet. "Engagement with Indigenous Communities in Key Sectors: Resource Sheet No. 23." Produced for the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse. Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare & Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2013.

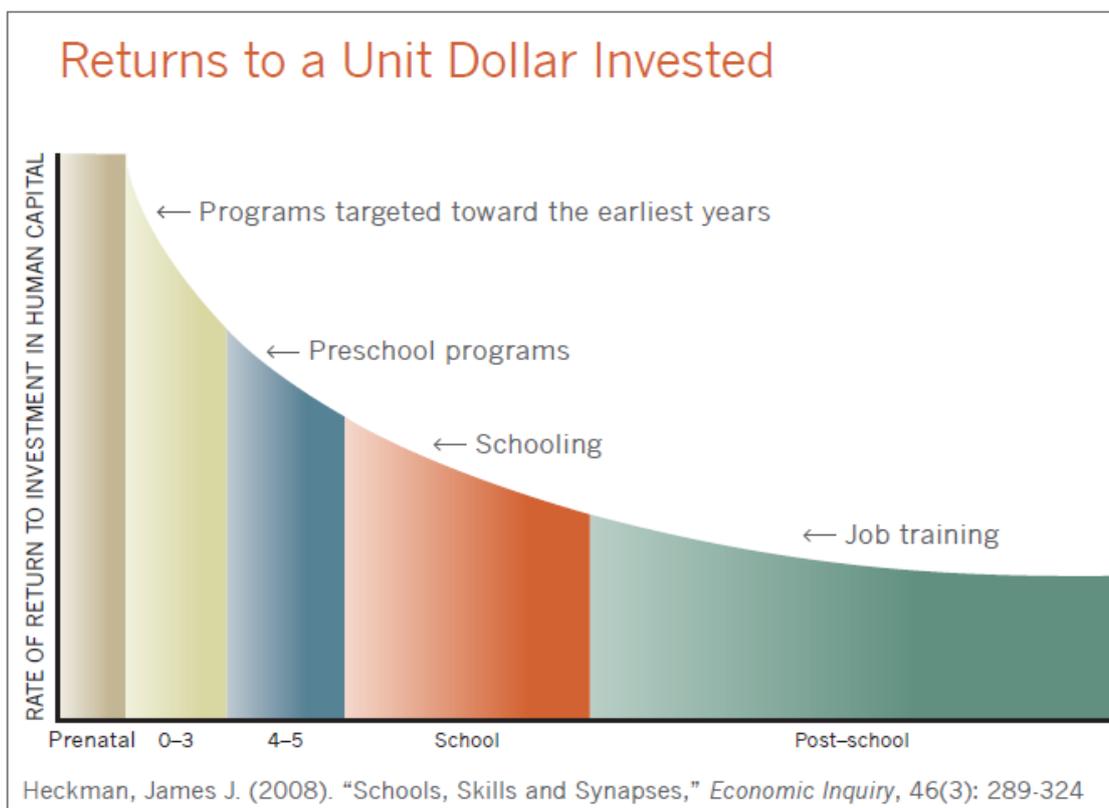
Attachment A

The Heckman Equation

The early years are universally recognised as the critical period where the foundations are laid for a child's future social emotional educational and health outcomes.¹⁸ Investment in the early years is now understood to be one of the most effective strategies available for reducing intergenerational disadvantage, building human capacity and creating a fairer society.

Investments of time and money in the early years have shown to be far more cost effective than investments made at any other time.

(Heckman & Masterov 2004; Keatsdale Pty Ltd 2003)²



Early childhood education is an efficient and effective investment for economic and workforce development. The earlier the investment, the greater the return on investment.

(Source: www.heckmanequation.org)

¹⁸ Harrison, Goldfield, Metcalfe & Moore. "Early learning programs that promote children's developmental and educational outcomes: Resource Sheet no 15" 2012