



**The Child Development Council, South Australia
Response: Productivity Commission Draft Report on
Universal Early Childhood Education and Care**

**Response from the South Australian Child Development Council to the Australian
Government Productivity Commission: *A path to universal early childhood
education and care Draft report***

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1 Child Development Council Overview

The Child Development Council (Council) is an independent statutory body, under Part 6 of the [Children and Young People \(Oversight and Advocacy Bodies\) Act 2016](#) (OAB Act).

The Minister for Education, Training and Skills appoints Council membership with collective skills, knowledge, qualifications or practical experience to fulfil the Council's legislated functions.

The Council works collaboratively with experts and communities including engaging with children and young people and their parents, carers and families; the Commissioner for Children and Young People and the Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People; Guardian for Children and Young People; state and local government agencies; community groups and other organisations.

Outcomes Framework

One of the Council's key function is to establish and maintain South Australia's [Outcomes Framework for Children and Young People](#) (framework), to promote uptake of the framework and to report how children and young people are faring with the objective of improving outcomes for children and young people in South Australia.

The purpose of the framework is to:

- help ensure that children and young children in South Australia experience a good life, now and into the future,
- facilitate a whole-of-government approach to creating strategies, setting objectives and developing/implementing policies relating to children and young people,
- report how children and young people are developing and progressing over time.

The framework guides all State authorities in South Australia, individually and collectively, to improve outcomes for all children and young people in South Australia.

Charter for Children and Young People

Embedded in the framework, is the [Charter for Children and Young People](#) (Charter) with 20 essential life conditions, that all children and young people can and should have to thrive and have opportunities. The Charter reflects a commitment to work from a foundation of state, national and international children's rights including the United

Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and other human rights instruments.

The statements in the Charter represent the voices of children and young people, and reflect what is important to them – having a good home life, having support from trusted adults, being listened to, participating in decisions that affect them, opportunity for a quality education, employment and most importantly, being respected and valued.

Charter Ambassador Program

The [Charter Ambassador Program](#) seeks to 'give life' to the Charter for Children and Young People.

The Program's key message is that kids should be safe, happy and well and that children and young people have a democratic right to be involved in decisions that impact them.

Through the program, students develop a better understanding of their place in society and the role children and young people can play in shaping the future. The program develops students' sense of connectedness with their community, their peers and themselves.

This is the first and only program of its kind in Australia: specifically dedicated to Ambassadors for the Charter for Children and Young People.

Report Card

The Council publishes a [report card](#) of population-level data outcomes for children and young people (birth to 18 years) in South Australia. This publication reports data in the five legislated dimensions of health, safety, wellbeing, education and preparation for adult life.

2 Scope of Draft Report: Areas Relevant to the Council

The scope set out by the Productivity Commissions draft findings has immediate relevance for the Council on the following points:

- developmental and educational outcomes for Australian children, including preparation for school,
- outcomes for children and families experiencing vulnerability and/or disadvantage, First Nations children and families, and children and families experiencing disability.

Context

The Council has a very broad agenda to improve the lives of all South Australian children 0-18 years. Given the specific nature of the recommendation set out in the Productivity Commissions Draft Report primarily focus on the developmental years of 0-5, it is difficult for the Council to respond to the individual recommendations. Despite this, each draft recommendation appears to represent a positive step towards improving the lives of children 0-5 years.

As the focus of the Council's work is for all South Australian children 0-18 years, the Council's response has been developed to highlight areas where children aged 0-5 in South Australia may be lagging developmentally behind children of the same age in other states. In identifying these areas for improvement, in particular for children living in socioeconomic disadvantage including Aboriginal children, the intention is to highlight the sections of the Productivity Commission draft report that could have the most significant benefit in improving the lives of South Australian children 0-5 and their families.

Note: the response of the Council has used disaggregated data presented in the attached 2023 submission to the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care.

3 Response

Response Area 1: *Developmental and educational outcomes for Australian children including preparation for school*

The majority of children in South Australia faring well in all five dimensions of; health, safety, wellbeing, education and preparation for adult life, however for children 0-5 years:

1. Slightly fewer four-year-old children are enrolled in preschool than nationally 84.1%-85.1%,
2. Fewer South Australian three-year-olds are enrolled in preschool than nationally 63.7% - 65.9%,
3. Fewer South Australian three-year-olds attend early childhood education and care than nationally 63.4% to 65.6%,
4. Fewer South Australian four-year-olds attend early childhood education and care than nationally 55.6% to 59.8%,
5. While causal factors cannot clearly be identified, participation in early years education and care appears to have a positive effect on the levels of overall vulnerability in this five-year-old age group, however the amount of time needed to attend Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is unclear.

Response Area 2: *Outcomes for children and families experiencing vulnerability and/or disadvantage, First Nations children and families, and children and families experiencing disability*

1. South Australia has the highest frequencies (SEIFA-June 2021 data) when compared with other states for Quintile 5, for children 0-5 years of living in the most disadvantaged socio-economic group 27.4%, compared with 20% nationally, and in the next most disadvantaged quintile 29.0%, compared to the national average of 20.2%,
2. Overall, in each Quintile there are more vulnerable children 0-5 years in South Australia than in other states, including an increase in vulnerability in children in the least disadvantaged circumstances,
3. South Australian children 0-5 have the highest frequencies nationally for living in out of home care 1.14%, compared with 0.67% nationally,

4. In SA 1.14% of all children 0-5 are living in out of home care, compared with 0.67% nationally (2021 data),
5. 3.4% of South Australian children 0-5 are living with a disability, compared with 3.7% nationally (2018 data).
6. The 2021 census data, indicates that 4,500 Aboriginal children under five years were estimated to be living in SA, making up 4.8% of all children under five years in SA. This is lower than the national figure of 5.9%.
7. *Developmental vulnerability*: AEDC results tested during the first year of formal schooling at 5 years of age indicate that there is an upward trend in the developmental vulnerability of South Australian children 0-5 years. The recommended checks are at birth, at two weeks, eight weeks, 12 months, two years and three years at a minimum.
8. *Developmental vulnerability*: The upward trend in AEDC results regarding the vulnerability of children assessed at 5 years is of greatest concern, especially when compared with states such as Queensland, Western Australia most clearly, but also NSW and Victoria. In the domains of physical development, social development, emotional development, language and communication vulnerability in South Australia exceeded the national average.

4 Support for Productivity Commission Findings

Whilst many of the recommendations sit outside of the Council's scope, the Council strongly supports the Productivity Commission's findings that a quality, cohesive and responsive national system for early childhood education and care be created in Australia. Such a system will assist in providing all Australian children 0-5 with an optimum learning and development environment in the early years, whilst also forming a strong foundation for later life. Furthermore, it will benefit children who are living in socio economically disadvantaged communities, children with disabilities and children who live with communities which are often marginalised linguistically, religiously, and culturally. Attention does, however, need to be given to any unintended impacts of children 0-5 years attending early childhood education and care to ensure that children develop a strong sense of identity regarding their cultural, religious and linguistic heritage.

The Federal government's acceptance and ultimate implementation of the Productivity Commission findings, pertaining to child development, with a progressive universal and targeted emphasis on children residing in disadvantaged circumstances will significantly

improve the current system. Consideration should also be given to supporting children with development delay in less disadvantaged cohorts. These changes will ensure a stronger start for Australian children, create a better foundation for their capacity to learn in the schooling years, and improve their long-term health (mental and physical) and behaviour.

The Council would also like to have noted that systematic data collection regarding the development of children and young people 0-18 years including their health, safety, wellbeing, education and preparation for adulthood is central to strategic direction, policy, and evidence-based decision making at the national and state levels. Data collection should be able to be disaggregated by state, by child age, by disability, by socioeconomic circumstances and by cultural group. Data sovereignty is a critical part of such collection, specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

5 Annexure:

1. **CDC Submission to the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care**