



## **PORTFOLIO REPORTS - STATE COUNCIL**

### **EARLY CHILDHOOD REPORT**

**Jane Cunningham – Portfolio Support, March 2024**

#### **EARLY YEARS COMMUNITY PLAN GREAT SOUTHERN**

In May 2023, an Early Years Community Plan for children living in the Central Great Southern region was released as part of the Early Years Partnership (EYP).

The EYP is a 10-year partnership between the State Government and the Minderoo Foundation to improve child wellbeing and school readiness for children aged 0-4 years across four Western Australian communities, including the Central Great Southern region, where more than one in four children are considered developmentally vulnerable.

The 'Children Growing Strong' Central Great Southern Community Plan, launched in Katanning, has been co-designed with local communities and forms a roadmap for change for children living in the shires of Katanning, Kojonup, Gnowangerup and Broomehill-Tambellup.

The local communities identified five priority areas to support child wellbeing and school readiness:

- Child health;
- Child development;
- Financial wellbeing;
- Family safety; and
- Maternal health.

The Central Great Southern Region Community Plan will be implemented in partnership with a local working group, which is made up of representatives from Local and State Government agencies, the four local Shires, community organisations, families and community members.

The Telethon Kids Institute is involved in the partnership, providing research and evaluation support.

#### **What Closing the Gap Report Means for Early Childhood**

The Australian Government has released the Commonwealth Closing the Gap 2023 Annual Report and 2024 Implementation Plan.

The report:

- Assesses progress against Closing the Gap targets over the last year
- Outlines strategic priorities to improve Closing the Gap targets over the next year.

Closing the Gap targets 3 and 4 aim to ensure children:

- Engage in high quality, culturally appropriate early childhood education
- Thrive in their early years.

Key achievements from 2023 included:

- Strengthened engagement with SNAICC through the Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership
- Changes to the activity test for First Nations families.

Key actions that they are focusing on in 2024 include:



- Developing a formal partnership agreement between the Commonwealth and SNAICC
- Continuing the work of the Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership
- Expanding Connected Beginnings to 50 sites by 2024–25
- Finalising the Early Years Strategy in early 2024
- Developing the Preschool Outcomes Measure for trial in 2025
- Driving improved participation in preschool in the year before full-time schooling.

The report also recognises Connected Beginnings as a case study of progress against Priority Reform 4.

Read the [Commonwealth Closing the Gap 2023 annual report and 2024 implementation plan](#).

<https://www.niaa.gov.au/resource-centre/indigenous-affairs/commonwealth-closing-gap-2023-annual-report-and-2024-implementation-plan>

### **CONNECTED BEGINNINGS**

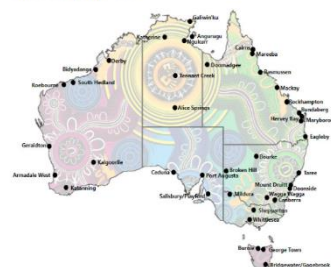
Connected Beginnings is a grants program that helps Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children get the best start in life and draws upon the strength and knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The aim is to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's and families' engagement with health and early childhood education and care.

The program supports self-determination through community level data dashboards. The dashboards give communities access to accurate, current and meaningful data about children's and families' health and early childhood services.

Grants are made available across Australia. Funding is used to improve access and integrate local support services so children and families can access culturally appropriate support services, including:

- Maternal and child health
- Early childhood education and care
- Family support
- Preschools and schools
- Local government and council support.

Current projects



so, children are safe, healthy and ready to thrive at school by the age of five.

### **CHILDCARE SUBSIDY**

Changes to Childcare Subsidy commenced on 10<sup>th</sup> July 2023, meaning childcare is now cheaper for most families. It also means some families previously not eligible for the Childcare Subsidy will now be eligible. This change provides more support for more families across Australia.

Childcare Subsidy changes include:

- The family income limit of the Childcare Subsidy has increased from \$356,756 to \$530,000 per annum.
- The maximum amount of Childcare Subsidy has increased from 85 per cent to 90 per cent.
- Families earning \$80,000 or less get a Childcare Subsidy rate of 90 per cent.
- Families earning over \$80,000 may get a Childcare Subsidy rate starting from 90 per cent. This reduces by 1 per cent for each \$5,000 of income they earn above \$80,000. This rate reaches zero per cent for families earning \$530,000.
- Families earning below \$362,408 with more than one child aged five or under in care can still get a higher rate for one or more of their children.
- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children can get at least 36 subsidised hours of early childhood education and care per fortnight, regardless of their family's activity level.



Changes to Family Assistance Law, which give effect to increases in the subsidy, came into effect on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2023.

### **LOTTERYWEST GRANT SUPPORTS NEW MINGENEW CHILDCARE FACILITY**

A LotteryWest grant of \$500,000 will go towards the construction of a new purpose-built facility for the town's only childcare service, Mingenew Education and Care.

The funding will allow the service to increase its capacity to 24 places, expand to wider age ranges and provide a full five-day-a-week early childhood education and care service, as well as before and after school care which is not currently available.

Improved childcare services were identified by the Mingenew community as a key priority during a strategic community planning process undertaken by the Shire of Mingenew.

### **GRANTS TO ATTRACT CHILDCARE EDUCATORS TO REGIONAL WA**

In January 2023, Regional Local Government Authorities (LGAs) were invited to apply for grant funding to attract and retain regional early childcare educators and carers to regional Western Australia.

The Attraction and Retention Packages for Regional Childcare Workers Program provides grants of up to \$25,000 per annum to regional LGAs to fund initiatives that support the early childhood education and care workforce.

### **GOVERNMENT EXAMINING BEST EARLY EDUCATION OPTIONS**

The Government is investing \$940,000 to examine options to enhance non-compulsory early learning in Western Australia. This new funding recognises the vital role that early childhood education plays in the social and educational development of children, as well as the workforce participation it enables.

Deloitte, who undertook significant work as part of the South Australian Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care, are contributing to this work which will examine early learning in other States and Territories and support national developments to boost outcomes in the early years of childhood education.

The Western Australian Government will continue to work collaboratively with the Australian Government as well as other State and Territory Governments to develop a shared long-term vision for early childhood education and care, designed around the principles of equity, accessibility, affordability and quality to support parents' workforce participation and children's education and development outcomes.

### **REVISED KINDERGARTEN CURRICULUM GUIDELINES**

Minister for Early Childhood Education, Hon. Sabine Winton MLA, launched Western Australia's revised Kindergarten Curriculum Guidelines in August 2023, which are now available for use in all Western Australian Kindergartens.

Quality early childhood education and care plays a critical role in supporting outcomes in children's early years development, school readiness and successes for later life.

The School Curriculum and Standards Authority has updated the Kindergarten Curriculum Guidelines, which support teachers and educators to develop curriculum and facilitate the optimal learning and development of Kindergarten children in Western Australia.

These changes will strengthen the teaching of digital literacy, cultural responsiveness, environmental and sustainable education, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, social competence and mental health and wellbeing.



## **GRANT FUNDING DELIVERED UNDER PRESCHOOL REFORM AGREEMENT**

Funding of more than \$1.3 million is being provided to Western Australia's Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector through the Preschool Reform Agreement (PRA).

Commonwealth funding will be distributed for the first time to the ECEC sector through the Supporting Children in ECEC WA grants program administered by Child Australia. Under the program grants between \$20,000 to \$100,000 will be available for ECEC organisations to deliver initiatives that develop and maintain quality preschool programs, promote enrolment and regular attendance and prepare children for school.

The program is aligned with the PRA's objectives with a focus on enhancing preschool participation and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and developmentally vulnerable children.

The Australian Government and all States and Territories are signatories to the PRA, which sets out the national reform agenda aimed at strengthening the delivery of preschool education to better prepare children for their first year of school. One of the key reforms of the PRA is for funding to flow to all settings, including the ECEC sector.

Details are available on the Child Australia website <https://childaustralia.org.au/>