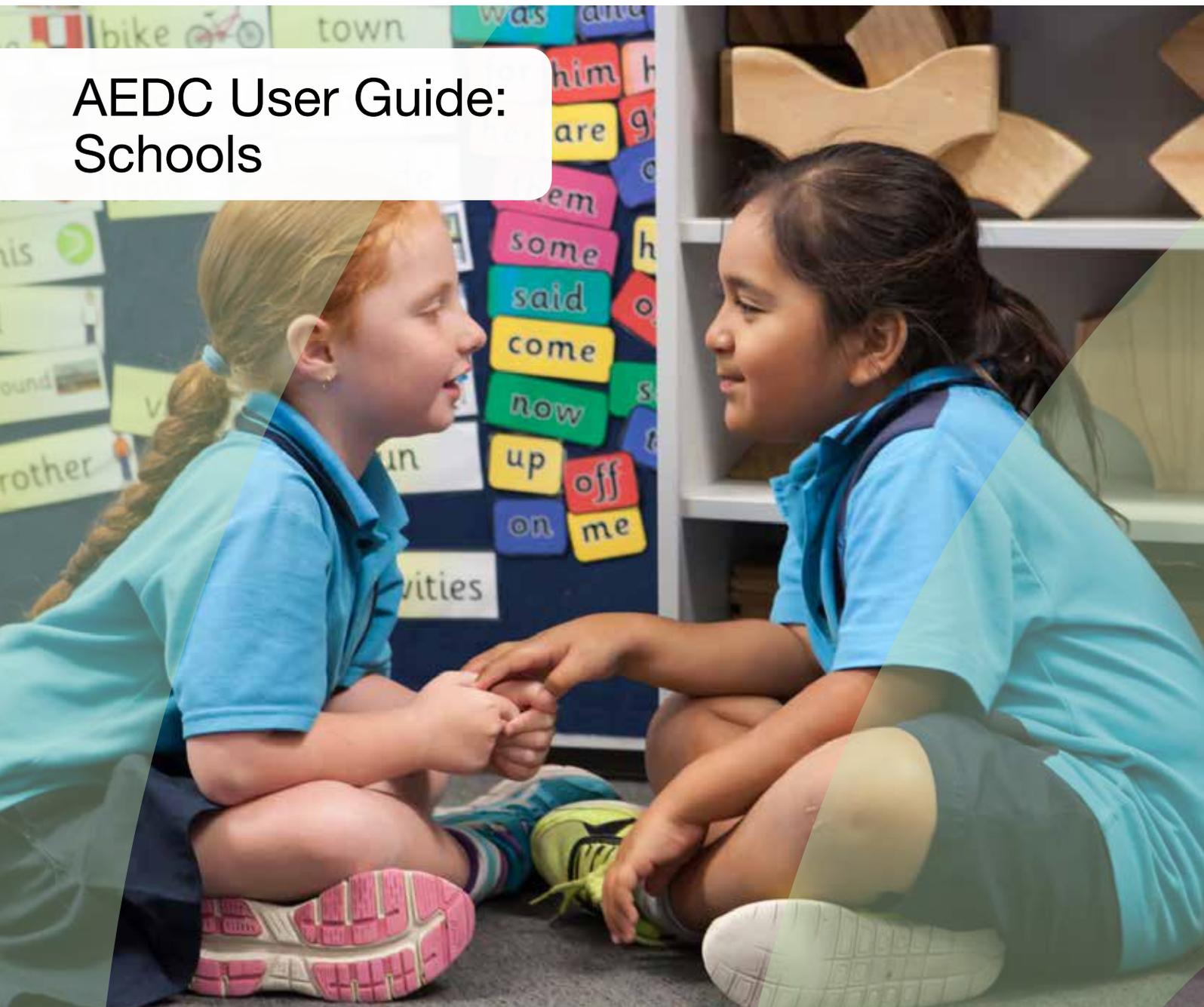


AEDC User Guide: Schools



This AEDC user guide leads schools through the steps they might take when thinking about how to respond to AEDC data for their community. It provides an example of a school response in order to illustrate how the concepts can be applied to real-world situations. Before reading this guide, readers should be familiar with the AEDC and what it measures. For more information about what the AEDC measures visit www.aedc.gov.au/about-the-aedc/about-the-aedc-domains

A large school in Community X had a change of leadership. To learn more about the school and the community, the new leadership was interested in looking at the school's AEDC results to identify the needs of children entering school.

The principal first looked at the AEDC school profile and then compared these results to the broader community results to gain a better understanding of the community as a whole. The school results and the community results were reasonably similar and students attending the school came from all the suburbs in the community. The school decided to use the AEDC community results to increase engagement with the community. It was thought that this would improve the status of the school with the broader community and also help improve the development of children in the community who attended the school in the future. It was also considered, that by increasing the role of the school within the community might help to lift the school's enrolments.

At first glance the AEDC data showed that children in the community were generally on track. Across the whole community, 19% of children were developmentally vulnerable on one or more domains of the AEDC (lower than the 24% who were vulnerable in the whole state). However the levels of vulnerability across the community were variable, with some suburbs having 25-39% of children vulnerable on one or more domains of the AEDC.

Closer examination of the data showed that in some suburbs children had average to low levels of developmental vulnerability for three of the five domains. However for two of the domains, social competence and physical health and wellbeing, children had higher than average levels of vulnerability. Between 20-25% of children were vulnerable on the social competence domain and between 18-20% of children were vulnerable on the physical health and wellbeing domain.

The school contemplated how this might be impacting children's ability to manage in the classroom, get along with others and engage in learning. The school considered how they could not only identify and support children who may be challenged in the school environment but also what role the school could play in supporting the community to increase the number of children starting school who are ready to engage and have the social and physical skills required to be part of the school community.

The school considered the numbers of children who were included in the 2012 AEDC data collection and how many of these children were identified as vulnerable.

The AEDC data showed that around 660 five year olds in the community were included in the 2012 data collection and around 125 of those were considered to be vulnerable on one or more domains of the AEDC.

The school felt it needed more information about the children and families in the community in order to plan ways to better support families. They began by examining the demographic data about the community that could help them identify potential difficulties that families might be facing.

Community X is a large local government area that is made up of nine suburbs (AEDC local communities) and is located approximately 5km from the CBD in a capital city. The community can be described as a reasonably affluent residential area with a mix of household types (singles,

couples, young families, families with older children, and empty nesters).

The ABS data for this area showed that there were around 3900 children aged 0 to 5 who lived in the community. Labour force participation in the community was high and there were high levels of people employed in the community in professional/high skill industries.

Tips for identifying the need

Think about what factors may be contributing to the proportion and number of children who are developmentally vulnerable in the community. These could include:

- limited services or supports available to families in the community
- many families face barriers to accessing any available services or supports
- parents are isolated and not well connected to family and friends locally
- a general lack of awareness around the importance of early childhood
- the community faces a large number of additional challenges that are preventing them from providing optimal environments for children
- service shortages – not all families are able to access services, there may be long waiting lists
- the mix of services and supports available may not be well suited to the needs of children and families
- some families in the community may face barriers to accessing services and supports
- any combination of the above.

It is important to note that these are not exhaustive possibilities. This list is intended as a starting point for thinking about the needs of a community.

The school thought about how parents across the community were being supported to help children develop foundational skills and what services and supports were currently available to families in the community. The school decided it would be helpful to speak to other schools in the community to find out how they were responding to the needs of students.

The school conducted a review of the range of services and supports available in the area and who was accessing them. They started by mapping services available for children and families, including:

- Child health nurse clinics
- General Practitioners
- Allied health services (Speech pathology, occupational therapy, psychology)
- Child care
- Preschools
- Playgroups
- Community groups
- Local businesses offering activities for children.

Tips for examining support needs

Information can be gathered by:

- listing and plotting community assets on a map (e.g., parks, recreation centres, libraries, early childhood services, schools)
- asking local council for a listing of services they provide for children and families
- making contact with the jurisdictional playgroup association
- internet search of early childhood services in the area.

There are a number of ways to identify factors that may be impacting on the ability of children and families to access and engage with services and supports. A good starting point is to speak with service provider networks about who is accessing services and who is underrepresented. As a guide, consider the following examples of barriers to accessing services:

- not knowing what services are available (lack of easily available information, no internet, inability to find information, new to the community)
- poor access to transport (no vehicle and lack of convenient public transport)
- inconvenient opening times or parent time pressures
- cost of the service is prohibitive
- language barriers (low literacy or English as a second language)
- chronic health conditions of parents
- chronic health conditions of children
- poor parental mental health (postnatal depression, anxiety disorders, etc.)
- disability of parents (physical or intellectual)
- disability of children
- stigma associated with accessing help (e.g., young mums, generational cycles of disadvantage, etc.)
- domestic violence
- homelessness
- substance abuse
- service alienates a subgroup of parents or carers (dads, single parents, foster parents, grandparents, unemployed parents, unconventional families)

The school discovered an early years group operating in the community through the local council. The early years initiative ran playgroups across the community, using church halls, libraries, and community halls. The school contacted the local council and realised that they had

previously been invited to participate in the early years initiative group, however, at that time the school leadership did not believe that the school had the capacity to be involved.

When the early years initiative group was first established, they had sought to run playgroups at the school. The school had also been asked to provide information to parents about how to support their children's development and what children needed to do well at school and in life.

The group had attempted to establish a schedule for the existing local playgroups to visit the school's library and for them to be facilitated by the school's librarian, with a focus on encouraging reading with children.

The school's new leadership felt that the school now had the capacity to become involved and embarked on discussions with the group about what role the school might play.

A staff and school council meeting was called to discuss the benefits of the school being involved, the ways in which the school could contribute and the potential roles their staff could take in the initiative.

Tips for identifying stakeholders to respond to the AEDC

Consider how the school can connect with the community and service providers.

The school may want to:

- be informed about what is happening for children in the community
- be consulted about what could be done for children and then kept informed as the programmes are implemented
- collaborate in the development and implementation of a plan for children and families.

The school principal approached other schools in Community X to invite them to participate in the initiative as a joint approach would reach more families and better support all children in the community. When speaking with other schools the principal outlined the AEDC data for the community, discussed the early years initiative and how schools might become involved.

Schools in the area felt that their role was to develop a community of learners. Although schools generally work with children once they reach school age, schools in the community felt there were significant advantages to engaging with children and families before children commenced school. The benefits for schools and the children, included:

- parents being better informed about what skills children need to thrive in the social and learning environment of the school
- children feeling more familiar with the school environment and in turn settling into school more quickly when first attending

- parents having greater opportunities to connect with their community at convenient times.

Tips for bringing together stakeholders

People in the community, who can play a role in improving outcomes for children, come from a range of different professional backgrounds, have different approaches to working with children, may use different jargon/discipline specific language, and have different service directives.

When the AEDC is used as a tool for highlighting factors that are important for children's health and development, it provides a common language to describe the foundational skills children need for later health, wellbeing and life success. Through this common language stakeholders can identify shared goals for children, irrespective of a stakeholder's particular role or field of responsibility.

To best cater for the needs of families, the school, with the support of the early years initiative group conducted a survey of families and service providers in the region.

They asked families about:

- the services they use or do not use
- the supports they feel they need
- barriers that prevent them from using available services.

They asked service providers about:

- the numbers of children and families using services
- the demographic characteristics of families using services
- any reasons they are aware of about why some families may not be using their services.

Families said they did not have much time to look into the services and supports available for children and that they would like to be able to spend more time doing things with their children that were easy and low stress. Families also said they wanted their children to be ready for school, so they tried to do structured activities on weekends with their children. Families also noted that they did not know many people in their community and thought it would benefit their children if they could get to know other children that they would eventually go to kindy/preschool and school with.

Service providers reported that those families who were attending either had only one parent working out of the home or one parent working full-time and the other parent working part-time. A number of service providers reported that single parent families were not participating in their service and didn't think that many lived in the area. However, community child health reported seeing a mix of dual and single parent families.

The survey identified that perhaps opening hours/hours of operation of the early years initiative conflicted with families' work schedules and that there may be additional challenges to accessing services by single parent families in the area.

Based on the types of services families were using, it was identified that children in the community have low opportunities for free play, exploration and peer interaction. This fit with parent reports that children were mostly engaged in structured activities during free time.

Given the numbers of children in the community and the scarcity of play opportunities for them, the schools decided to focus on helping to make the early years initiative more accessible across the entire community rather than only to sections of the community. Schools felt that opening up their facilities to families outside of school hours was a way they could contribute to the early years initiative.

In addition, playgroups were considered to be a great place to provide parents with information about children's development and the importance of their early experiences. Early years teachers from each school agreed to support the establishment of playgroups in their schools.

Additionally, teachers across the schools decided to come together to review their early years curriculum and examine how this fit with the identified needs of children in their community.

Tips for planning a coordinated approach to service delivery

Think about who might miss out at every step of the way. Is the service or support you are planning something that should be available to whole community or is it a specialised support for a subgroup within your community? If it is available to whole community, will your plan reach those people in the community who can really benefit and if so will they be willing to take part? If the service is targeted at only some people, how will you reach those people, are they likely to engage, what might be a barrier to engaging them?

The schools in conjunction with the local council documented who would undertake each activity and where extra funds or support might be needed.

Tips for documenting the service plan

You can use Programme Logic to document what resources you have available, what you will do with those resources, who will be involved and what you expect to change for children and families.

Once all the resources were identified an action plan was developed. The action plan documented what would be done, when, by whom and at what cost.

A list of stakeholders was developed that detailed who needed to be kept informed and what information they needed so that the play initiative would have the best chance of reaching as many families as possible.

The schools agreed on ways they would measure how well the play initiative was working. They agreed to keep track of how many families were participating in the play initiative, the ages of the children, the suburbs of residence of the families and the demographic characteristics of families. An enrolment form was designed to help collect this information across the community and the group agreed to each enter the information into an excel database and then report the data back to the group.

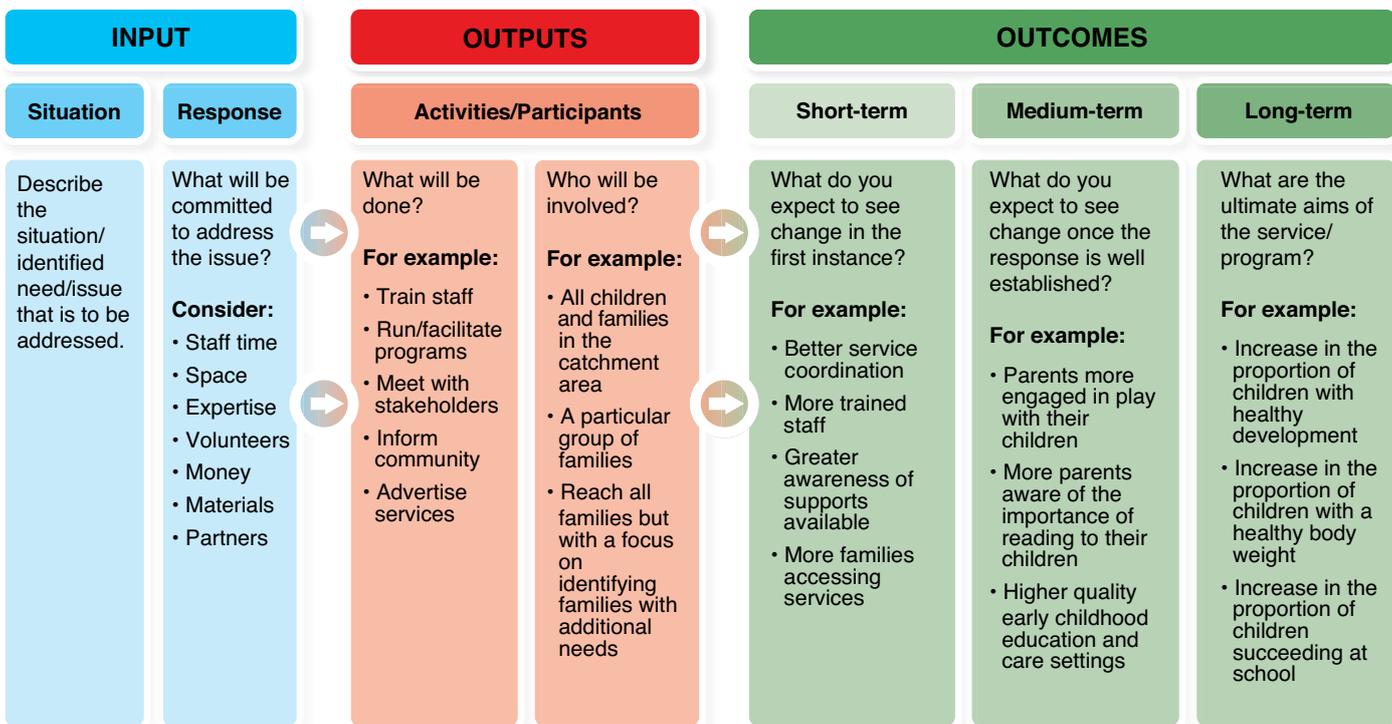
Parents were surveyed before the play initiative was rolled out through schools and afterwards to measure whether attitudes to play had changed in the community and whether the way in which children’s time was utilised had changed.

The group looked forward to exploring the next round of AEDC data for their community to help monitor their progress.

Tips for monitoring programme efficacy

Success can be measured in many ways, but at a minimum your evaluation should ask ‘has this intervention made a positive difference in our community?’

Figure 1: Programme logic example.





About the Australian Early Development Census

The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) provides a national snapshot of child development for children in their first year of full time school. The AEDC is held every three years and measures five key areas or domains of development. The AEDC measures how well children are doing across five key areas of development referred to as domains. The domains are: physical health and wellbeing; social competence; emotional maturity; language and cognitive skills; communication skills and general knowledge. Taken together, these domains provide a holistic picture of children's development and are important predictors of later health, wellbeing, and academic achievement. In 2012, 78% of children were assessed as being developmentally on track and one in five children across Australia were developmentally vulnerable on one or more domains of the AEDC.

Every three years all teachers of children in their first year of full-time school, record information for each child in their class, based on their observations, in order to provide a complete picture for each and every community in Australia. The AEDC provides important information to communities, governments and schools to support their planning and service provision. The environments and experiences children are exposed to from pregnancy through to school age shape their development. Recognising the influences on children's development can provide communities, governments and schools with the opportunity to consider what is working well and what needs to be improved or developed to better support children and their families.

Investing time, effort and resources in children's early years - when their brains are developing rapidly - brings lifelong benefits to them and to the whole community. Children who are thriving when they start school are likely to continue to do well. Once children fall behind in their learning, they are more likely to remain behind. As children get older, it becomes more difficult to improve outcomes. Investing in the early years can reduce social inequalities in children's outcomes, have long lasting impacts on communities, and can increase national productivity by improving the skills of the workforce, reducing disadvantage and strengthening the global competitiveness of the economy.

By providing a common ground on which people can work together, the AEDC can enable schools and communities to form partnerships to plan and implement activities, programmes and services to help shape the future and wellbeing of children in Australia.

Best practice

Identify need

AEDC school profiles and community data can be explored at www.aedc.gov.au

When starting to explore AEDC results, people often begin by looking at the proportion of children who are developmentally vulnerable and compare this to surrounding areas, their state, other demographically similar communities, or an earlier data collection. People also tend to look for higher levels of developmental vulnerability on particular domains. These are all good steps to take when first exploring the data.

To get an indication of the scale of any issue, it is also important to consider the number of children who live in the community along with the number of children who are vulnerable.

It's always good to look at other community level data alongside the AEDC data. Demographic data can tell you more about who lives in a community. Creating a profile of the community can be a useful way to add context to the AEDC results. Demographic data is freely available online from a number of sources. For example, the Social Health Atlas presents extensive data for every community in Australia via: www.adelaide.edu.au/phidu/maps-data/maps/

Examine support needs

To identify the support needs of children and families and any potential response it is important to gather information on:

- supports and services currently available
- broader factors impacting upon children and families ability to access available services and supports.

To better understand who is and isn't accessing services, look back over the demographic data for your community. To enable a better understanding of who may not be attending services, this demographic data can be compared to the data on who is accessing services.

Identify stakeholders to respond to the AEDC

Before establishing a new programme or service, it is worthwhile considering what is already happening in the community and how the school can become involved.

Agencies who work directly with children may include:

- early childhood education and child care providers
- public health units
- child health nurses
- schools
- not-for profits
- local businesses.

Agencies who do not work directly with children but who nonetheless support families include:

- transport providers
- housing services
- training and employment agencies
- local police.

Consider the role each of these agencies plays. In some communities these agencies will be working in coordinated ways, will know what each offers for families, and will have well established referral pathways for connecting families to services and supports they need. In other communities, service providers are not well connected to each other and it is often up to families to find information and supports.

Consider how well the school is connected to the network of agencies in the community. Is the school well informed about what is available in the community? Does the school have well established referral pathways for connecting families to services and supports?

Bring together stakeholders

More children and families can be supported when schools and service providers across a region are connected to each other, pool their resources and take a unified approach to connecting with the community. Additionally, by working collaboratively, schools and service providers can learn from each other.

This approach will lead to a comprehensive identification of what services and supports might be missing and the barriers that families may face.

Plan a coordinated approach to service delivery

A good plan starts with a clear and actionable set of objectives that are based on sound information about a situation.

Document the service plan

A plan that is likely to succeed takes into account the resources available and the activities that will be conducted to achieve the objectives.

Action planning

An action plan can support funding applications, it also clearly documents the steps agreed for implementation and is a useful tool to ensure that all collaborating stakeholders are working to the same information.

Best practice for monitoring programme efficacy

A well thought out evaluation should form part of any implementation process. How to evaluate the intervention should be factored into each stage of the process.

What to include as measures of success should be a reflection of what you set about to change.

Many communities have used the AEDC data to inform what they do for children and families in the early years. To explore these school stories, visit <https://www.aedc.gov.au/resources/school-stories>

The Australian Government is working with State and Territory Governments to implement the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC). Since 2002, the Australian Government has worked in partnership with eminent child health research institutes: the Centre for Community Child Health; Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne; and the Telethon Kids Institute, Perth, to deliver the AEDC to communities nationwide.